

Impact of Mental Health among Postgraduate Students of Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur

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Abstract: The study aims to assess the mental health of postgraduate students at Dhanamanjuri University using a descriptive survey method and a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from 60 randomly selected students aged 21 to 26 who are pursuing M.A., M.Sc., and M.Com. programs, using a self-administered questionnaire and interviews conducted through a simple random sampling technique. The findings reveal that the overall mental health status of the respondents falls between average and poor, indicating that a significant proportion of students are experiencing stress or anxiety with limited coping resources. Students in the arts stream reported higher stress levels, likely due to academic demands and career uncertainty. Science stream students experienced stress primarily related to research pressure, examinations, and project submissions. Meanwhile, commerce stream students faced stress mainly associated with competitive job markets, financial concerns, and workload management.

Keywords: Mental Health, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Postgraduate.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a comprehensive term that encompasses physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. It includes one's resourcefulness and coping abilities, as well as the capacity to be a productive and contributing member of society. Any disturbance or deviation in these areas is often recognized as a mental health issue, as health and illness are inherently linked. Consequently, mental health and mental illness are viewed as two ends of the same continuum (Downie et al. 1990; Trent, 1992). Over the years, various multidimensional models have emerged to articulate the concept of 'being healthy.' Health can be segmented into five dimensions: physiological (such as maintaining good energy levels), psychological (such as feeling happy and energetic), behavioural (such as proper eating and sleeping habits), future prospects (such as longevity), and the absence of symptoms (Lau, 1995). Lau argues that being healthy is an individual's baseline state, often shaped by their beliefs about illness. Many psychologists endorse a multidisciplinary approach, suggesting that health is the result of the intricate interplay between the mind and body. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution." Furthermore, WHO (2004) stated that "Neither mental nor physical health can exist in isolation. Mental, physical, and social functioning are interdependent." This recognition of health as a state of balance involving the self, others, and the environment is crucial for communities and individuals striving to improve their well-being. Mental health and well-being are fundamental to our collective and individual capacity to think, express emotions, engage in social interactions, earn a living, and enjoy life (Bute et al. 2016). Mental health challenges have emerged as one of the most urgent global issues of the 21st century, particularly among the youth. One in seven adolescents and young adults experiences a mental health disorder, with depression, anxiety, and behavioural issues being the most prevalent. Alarming, suicide has become the fourth leading cause of death among individuals aged 15-29, highlighting the dire consequences of untreated psychological distress. Increasing academic pressures, career uncertainties, socio-economic changes, and digital influences have further exacerbated vulnerabilities among young populations worldwide (WHO,

2021). In higher education, students experience significant stressors, including heavy academic workloads, the challenge of adjusting to new environments, financial constraints, and pressure to perform at high levels, all of which contribute to declining mental well-being. Against this global backdrop, the present study aims to examine the mental health status of postgraduate students at Dhanamanjuri University (DMU), to understand their psychological challenges, and identify potential strategies for support and intervention.

Types of Mental Disorders

a) Depression

Depression is one of the common mental health issues prevailing among people of different age groups worldwide. It also causes various emotional and physiological disturbances. Any traumatic experience, physical or psychological loss, may cause depression. It may be loss of a job, death of a loved one, loss of possession, or any serious injury. Depression leads to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and loss of interest in activities of day-to-day life.

b) Anxiety

Anxiety is experienced by every individual at some point or the other in his/her life. Anxiety can be defined as a general feeling of apprehension about possible danger. It involves negative mood, worry about a possible future threat or danger.

c) Stress

Stress is a natural human response to any situation or event that challenges a person's ability to cope. It can arise from both positive and negative experiences, and it affects individuals in different ways. At its core, stress is the body's way of responding to demands or threats, whether real or perceived. However, when stress becomes constant or overwhelming, it can lead to serious mental, emotional, and physical health problems.

Mental Health in Academic Settings

Postgraduate students often face a range of challenges that can significantly affect their academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall mental health. These challenges include:

a) Increased Academic Pressure

The transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies involves a marked increase in workload, intellectual expectations, and independent research demands. Postgraduate studies require deeper critical thinking, advanced analytical skills, and original contributions through dissertations or theses. The constant pressure to meet deadlines and maintain high academic standards can lead to stress and anxiety.

b) Isolation and Loneliness

Many postgraduate students experience a sense of social and emotional isolation. Long hours of independent research, fewer structured classes, and limited peer interaction often reduce opportunities for social bonding. Prolonged isolation can contribute to mental health difficulties such as depression and lack of motivation.

c) Financial Stress

The cost of postgraduate education, including tuition fees, accommodation, research expenses, and living costs, can be overwhelming. Balancing work commitments with academic responsibilities often creates additional strain. Financial insecurity can lead to constant worry, reduced focus on studies, and, in severe cases, dropping out of programs.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was brought about due to the increasing mental health challenges faced by students in higher education, especially at the postgraduate level of Dhanamanjuri University. Postgraduate students often deal with a combination of academic workload, research pressure, financial concerns, job uncertainties, and personal responsibilities. These stressors can lead to anxiety, depression, and burnout. This study shed light on the mental well-being of this specific student population, bringing attention to their challenges and promoting a more supportive academic environment. The findings can be used by university authorities to design or improve student mental health services, promote mental

wellness programs, and provide accessible counselling support. Additionally, the study would empower students by validating their experiences and encouraging them to seek help without fear or shame.

3. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The statement of the problem has been titled “**Impact of Mental Health Among the Postgraduate Students of Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur**”.

4. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE KEYWORDS USED

Mental Health: Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Good mental health is essential for academic success and overall quality of life.

Postgraduate: Postgraduate education typically involves a higher level of academic engagement and independent research in the age group of 21-26 years

Depression: Depression is a mental health disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities.

Anxiety: Anxiety is a state of worry or nervous tension about uncertain outcomes, marked by excessive concern and stress. It involves both psychological distress and physical symptoms such as restlessness, sweating, and rapid heartbeat.

Stress: Stress is a normal emotional response to a perceived threat or pressure. It can be triggered by various factors, such as work, relationships, finances, or significant life changes. Stress can be acute or chronic.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the overall mental health status of postgraduate students pursuing Master's degree programs from three academic streams: Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Science (M.Sc.), and Master of Commerce (M.Com.).
2. To find out the level of mental health, such as depression and stress, among postgraduate students.
3. To find out gender-wise and course-wise differences in mental health among postgraduate students.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the current mental health status of postgraduate students at DMU?
2. What are the common mental health issues experienced by postgraduate students at Dhanamanjuri University?
3. What recommendations can be made to improve mental health support and awareness among postgraduate students?

7. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is delimited to postgraduate students of Dhanamanjuri University (DMU) who are within the age group of 21 to 26 years. It specifically focuses on students enrolled in Master's degree programs from three academic streams: Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Science (M.Sc.) and Master of Commerce (M.Com.). The research was conducted on a sample of 60 students.

8. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Laishram et al. (2018) in their research “*The Role of University Infrastructure in Enhancing Student Well-Being: A Case Study of Manipur University*” found that dilapidated infrastructure, irregular academic calendars, and frequent disruptions in academic activities created a sense of uncertainty among students. Students with access to well-maintained libraries, study spaces, and sports facilities reported significantly better mental well-being compared to those deprived of such environments.

Kaur et al. (2019) examined the “*Impact of University Environment on Mental Health and Academic Achievement of College Students*”. The study concluded that factors such as faculty support, infrastructural facilities, peer interaction, and availability of counselling services significantly contributed to better mental health and academic performance. It also emphasized that a university environment that actively addresses student concerns and encourages positive engagement leads to healthier academic outcomes.

Misra et al. (2019) conducted an important study titled “*University Students’ Mental Health: The Influence of Campus Facilities and Social Life*”. The findings suggested that universities offering dynamic and inclusive social ecosystems witnessed students with better stress-coping mechanisms, higher engagement levels, and reduced loneliness.

Arslan et al. (2021) conducted a study titled “*School Belongingness and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Investigation among University Students in Turkey*”. The findings emphasized the need for universities to promote inclusivity and psychological safety in order to foster a healthier campus atmosphere that supports both academic and emotional well-being.

9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Descriptive Survey Method was used by the researchers for the present study. The study was based on a mixed-method approach.

10. SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The sample of the study consisted of 60 (sixty) postgraduate students who are in the age group of 21-26 years pursuing M.A., M. Sc and M.Com at DMU. A Simple Random Sampling technique was employed to select participants who met the inclusion criteria of being within the specified age group, enrolled in one of the streams, and willing to participate voluntarily.

11. STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE USED

For the analysis of data, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were employed. In the case of quantitative data, the percentage method was used to describe demographic characteristics and to determine the prevalence and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among the students. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed.

12. MAIN FINDINGS

1. The overall mental health status of students ranged between average and poor for most respondents. Only a small fraction (8.3%) rated their mental health as excellent, while nearly half reported being in the average category. This indicates that a significant proportion of students are functioning under stress or anxiety, with limited coping resources.
2. Arts stream students reported higher levels of stress, possibly due to career uncertainty and academic demands. Science stream students displayed stress levels linked to research pressure, examinations, and project submissions. Commerce stream students faced stress largely associated with competitive job markets, financial concerns, and workload management.
3. Academic workload was consistently identified as the primary stressor across all streams. Secondary stressors included financial problems, peer competition, family expectations, and social pressures. Stress peaked during examinations and deadlines, leading to sleep disturbances and irregular eating habits.
4. Students mostly relied on informal coping mechanisms such as speaking to friends, engaging in hobbies, and using relaxation techniques. Only a minority practiced regular exercise, meditation, or professional counselling as systematic strategies. This suggests a gap between awareness of healthy coping methods and their practical application.
5. Many students reported limited engagement in recreational or extracurricular activities. The lack of structured platforms for creative and physical expression within the university contributed to this situation.
6. Peer support was the most common avenue of help for students, while professional counselling was rarely sought. The stigma associated with mental health issues discouraged students from accessing formal services.
7. Stress and anxiety had a direct impact on lifestyle, including sleep patterns, dietary habits, concentration levels, and productivity. Students often reported staying awake late at night before exams, leading to physical exhaustion.
8. A majority of students were unaware of institutional-level support mechanisms. This highlights the absence of visible, structured, and accessible mental health services at DMU.
9. Students suggested initiatives like counselling services, stress management workshops, awareness programs, and peer-mentoring systems. They emphasized the importance of financial aid, flexible academic scheduling, and faculty

understanding. Students also expressed a need for non-judgmental spaces where they could openly discuss personal struggles.

10. Lifestyle factors, such as poor sleep, lack of physical activity, and excessive screen time, negatively impact mental health. Chronic stress without intervention may lead to long-term psychological and physical health issues.

11. Academic performance is directly affected by students' mental health status. Awareness programs and mental health literacy campaigns help reduce stigma and encourage early help-seeking behaviour.

13. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study on the mental health of postgraduate students hold significant implications for the field of education. Higher education institutions are not only responsible for imparting academic knowledge but also for fostering the holistic development of students. Mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression directly affect students' academic performance, motivation, and overall learning outcomes. Therefore, understanding the psychological needs of learners becomes crucial in designing effective educational policies and practices. One major implication is the need to integrate mental health education into the curriculum. This will help to create a balanced approach to education where mental health is considered as important as academic success. Furthermore, life skills education and mindfulness training can be introduced as part of the curriculum to strengthen students' psychological well-being. Another implication is the importance of providing counselling and psychological support services within educational institutions with well-equipped counselling centres staffed with trained professionals to ensure timely guidance and intervention. Institutional policies must also reflect concern for the mental health of students. Universities should adopt student-friendly approaches such as flexible schedules, examination reforms, and manageable workloads to prevent undue stress. Additionally, awareness and sensitization programs can be conducted regularly to destigmatize mental health issues and encourage students to seek professional help without fear of judgment. Such initiatives not only support individual students but also contribute to a healthier academic community.

14. SUGGESTIONS

1. Establish a dedicated Mental Health and Wellness Centre in DMU.
2. Conduct regular awareness campaigns to reduce stigma surrounding mental health.
3. Incorporate stress management techniques such as yoga, mindfulness, and relaxation exercises into campus activities.
4. Formulate a comprehensive mental health policy that integrates prevention, support, and intervention.
5. Modify exam and evaluation systems to reduce pressure and introduce flexible timelines where possible.
6. Partner with mental health organizations, hospitals, and NGOs for workshops and professional guidance.
7. Establish mental health clubs and leadership groups to normalize mental health discussions.
8. Implement continuous well-being assessment mechanisms across semesters.
9. Encourage integration of sports, arts, cultural expression, and community service into the educational framework.

15. CONCLUSION

Mental health concerns are widespread among postgraduate students of DMU and are influenced by a combination of academic, social, and personal factors. Academic workload, financial stress, family expectations, and lack of institutional support were found to be the most significant contributors to stress and anxiety. While students showed resilience through informal coping strategies, the absence of structured support systems limited their effectiveness. The findings strongly indicate that mental health must be treated as a priority in higher education. Universities must adopt a proactive and multidimensional approach to create an environment that promotes both academic success and psychological well-being. By addressing the recommendations outlined in this study, DMU can take significant strides towards nurturing a healthier, more resilient, and empowered student community.

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