



A Study on Depression, Anxiety, Stress & Burnout among Psychology Students

Inayat Kaur

Bachelor of Arts, Dept. Of Psychology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India.

Abstract

Beginning college brings with it a wave of excitement. We can occasionally forget that college also brings with it new challenges because of all new friendships, experiences, or freedoms. Many students looking to learn and develop in a new environment may find that attending college is a rewarding experience as opportunities seem limitless in comparison to high school. College burnout is unpleasant and almost always has an impact on college experience. A total sample of 43 undergraduate psychology students in the age 18-23 was collected. Standardized scales were used. The results found out that there is a significant positive relationship among depression, stress, anxiety & burnout among psychology students. Even though graduate psychology training is filled with rewarding experiences, it can also be stressful due to challenges in finding one's personal and professional development. It is important that college delivers highest quality of training, withing a supportive framework that fosters adaptive coping, satisfaction with life and career development.

Students should seek counselling & therapy without any stigma and surround themselves with emotionally supportive peers.

Keywords: Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Burnout, Psychology Students

Introduction

Stress affects almost everyone to some degree, and college students are by no means an exception. For a variety of reasons, many college students report experiencing varying degrees of stress during their time in college. College students frequently feel stressed out because of their growing list of responsibilities, poor time management, altered eating & sleeping patterns & lack of self-care breaks. Exam preparation, applying for admissions & finding an internship are a few situations that are sure to cause stress. Chronic stress can have a variety of harmful effects, including impending learning or college attendance, impairing cognitive functions like concentration & attention, or causing serious health problems.

Study load & deadline pressure are major sources of stress for college students. In addition to the financial challenges, stress among students is also brought on by parental worry & unrealistic hopes. Students' stress levels rise may rise because of educational system as well. Congested lecture halls, the semester grading system, a massive syllabus and long hours. Parents & institutions ruthlessly instill in children a fear of failure that undermines their sense of self-worth & independence.

It can be challenging to balance exams with the pressure to maintain an active social life while navigating many new life experiences.

A survey by Boston University (2021) found that more than half of the 33,000 surveyed college students experienced anxiety or depression & 83% reported that their mental health hurt their academic performance.

Depression is a type of mood disorder in which the individual experiences feelings of hopelessness, helplessness & worthlessness. At any given time 25% of the student population is found to report symptoms of depression (Beck & Young, 1978).

Chang (2014) asserts burnout can lead to the poor quality of life as it is associated with a variety of mental and physical health problems including headaches, muscular pain & depression. Few of the warning signs of burnout can include mental & physical exhaustion, less enthusiasm, decline in academic abilities, increased irritability or anger, incapability to meet important deadlines, high frequency of illness due to stress & exhaustion.

Psychological discomfort like somatization, anxiety, and depression are common in university students (Hakami, 2018; Dyrbye, 2006; Puthram, 2016) and further, they can also be a predictor for poor academic performance (Sobowale et al., 2018). There are stereotypical beliefs about psychology majors, including that it is an easy but dead-end major with poor employment prospects and it attracts students who have suffered from mental disorders (Brinhaupt et al., 2012). Thus, the negative stereotype can demoralize students from considering psychology as a major even if they are fascinated by the subject.

Depression

According to Marcus et al., (2012) depression is defined as “a common mental disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite and poor concentration.”

According to Field et al., (2012) students with depression have significant impairments in areas such as social, academic & occupational. Depressed students can have effect on decision making & problems of time management (Chen et al., 2013); poor academic achievement & low level of exam performance (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005); decreased attention & drug abuse, negative effects on everyday work & achievements (Sobocki et al., 2007), over consumption of alcohol & increased levels of smoking in adults & university students (Yusoff et al. 2013).

Bezinovic et al., (1998) in a study found that university students suffering from depression are more likely to report health issues involving chronic pain, sinus infection & smoking related health problems. Another study done on 310 university students at University of Zadar found that 17% have symptoms of depression such as feelings of worthlessness, lack of motivation, loss of interest which affect the quality of life (Vulic-Prtoric & Marinovic, 2010).

Jurlin (2005) asserts that the bigger the gap between one's set & achieved goals, the more depressed the person feels. The research also states that students who have a pessimistic view of themselves, the world & the future are more prone to giving up & becoming depressed in a state of increased pressure over difficult academic assignments.

Anxiety

Anxiety is characterized as a state of being that arises from general and nonspecific stimuli that are perceived as being potentially threatening in the future. This perception often results in an apprehensive mood accompanied by increased arousal & vigilance, which when taken to an extreme, persists for extended periods of time (Krueger, 1999).

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) defined anxiety as “the anticipated anticipation of a future danger or negative event, accompanied by feelings of dysphoria or physical symptoms of tension.”

Shah & Pol (2020) studied the prevalence of anxiety among 400 Navi Mumbai college students aged 18 to 25. It was observed that 81.91% of them had low anxiety levels, 11.95% had moderate anxiety levels, and 6.14% had potentially concerning levels of anxiety. Similarly, it was seen in a study conducted on college students at Punjab University that 86.5% had an overall prevalence of anxiety (Singh et al., 2017).

Naceanceno et al., (2021) conducted a comparative study among college students of various classifications, gender, major, and semester to assess anxiety levels. The findings indicated a significant difference in anxiety levels amongst male and female college students, as well as students with various majors.

According to study by Mohamad et al., (2021) academic year is the main predictor of anxiety among college students. Additional factors that were significantly linked to an increased risk of anxiety included financial support for the study, alcohol use, poor sleep habits, body mass index (BMI), having a close friend at the university, having doubts about the future, being actively involved in society, and having issues with fellow students and the lecturer(s).

Stress

Selye (1936) defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand.” According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress is a process whereby an individual perceives and responds to events that he appraises as intimidating and threatening to his well-being.

In a research done on psychology graduate students conducted by Hudson & O'Regan (1994), it was found that the group with the highest stress level is women who work full-time and are not in a committed relationship, possibly due to job stressors and a lack of support from a significant other.

Yikealo, Tareke, & Karvinen (2018) discovered that college students had a moderate degree of stress. Furthermore, academic, and environmental stressors were discovered to be the most significant contributors to students' stress levels. Similarly, life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy, and psychological discomfort were found to be the strongest determinants of stress in a study done among French college students (Saleh, Camart & Romo, 2017).

A study by Devi & Mohan (2015) found academic factors, social factors, family factors, emotional factors, and financial factors as the major contributors of stress among college students of Mannarkkad city.

Burnout

Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout as “to fail, wear out or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength or resources.” ICD-11 (2019) defined burnout as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions, feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job and reduced professional efficacy.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job & a sense of ineffectiveness & lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). According to Stalker & Harvey (2002), Depersonalization refers to a cynical, negative, or detached response to care recipients, Emotional Exhaustion occurs as result of one's emotional demands and reduced Personal Accomplishment refers to a belief that one can no longer work effectively with healthcare recipients.

Burnout not only depends on individual predisposing factors, such as emotional expression or inadequate coping strategies (de la Fuente, 2020) but also interlinked to external factors such as the educational system (Duran et al, 2006). A systematic review done by Rosales-Richardo et al., (2021) found that university students showed 55.4% for emotional exhaustion, 31.6% for cynicism & 30.9% for academic efficacy.

Burnout is correlated with general distress, poor educational performance, college dropout, suicidal ideation (Maroco et al., 2020) and substance abuse (Assuncao & Maroco, 2020).

A recent study by March-Amengual et al., (2022) done on 506 students on college students belonging to health science & non health sciences, found prevalence of psychological distress was 27.1 % and burnout was 7.3%. Further, health sciences students (medicine, nursing, physiotherapy & psychology) reported more clinical somatizations ($p=0.004$) and clinical anxiety ($p=0.001$) than non- health science students (biology, biotechnology, business management, social education, journalism, automatic engineering and mechatronics engineering). No significant differences were observed in relation to depression.

In a study by Palos, Maricutoiu & Costea (2019) done on 142 psychology students, to study academic performance, student engagement & burnout. The study was conducted in two waves, during a semester. The path analysis model suggests that academic grades are considered antecedents of student engagement and student burnout.

In a study done on 203 Psychology Doctoral students, found that psychology doctoral trainees experience burnout (74.9%) and vigor (76.8) at a certain time during their doctoral training. Five predictors were identified that included, pressure, threat, financial strain, relationship conflict, supervisory working alliance explained the 22% of the variance in multivariate construct of burnout & vigor (Swords & Ellis, 2017).

Purpose

The purpose is to study Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Burnout among Psychology Students

Hypothesis

There will be a positive significant relation between depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout.

Method

Sample

A total sample of 43 undergraduate psychology students in the age 18-23 was collected from Chandigarh.

Measures

Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale (DASS- 21): as developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) is a 21 item scale measuring three dimensions i.e. depression, anxiety & stress on a rating scale of 0 (did not apply to me at all) 1(applied to me to some degree or some of the time), 2 (applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time) and 3(applied to me very much or most of the time). The rating scale must be chosen based on the statement that applies to the individual over the past week.

Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS): as developed by Maslach, Jackson & Leiter (1997) is a 16 item scale consisting of three dimensions, exhaustion (5 items), cynicism(5 items) & efficacy(6 items). All items were scored on a 7-point ranging scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always)

Procedures

The participants were informed about the purpose of research & the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Each participant was thanked for cooperation & their kind help. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: Shows N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy
N	43	43	43	43	43	43
Mean	13.4	13.3	16.8	13.2	8.74	24.0
Standard deviation	11.0	9.95	10.5	7.33	6.49	6.28

Table 2: Correlation of all variables

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy
Depression	—					
Anxiety	0.787 ***	—				
Stress	0.793 ***	0.739 ***	—			
Exhaustion	0.321 *	0.382 *	0.211	—		
Cynicism	0.277	0.187	0.191	0.610 ***	—	
Professional Efficacy	0.055	0.089	0.267	-0.209	-0.328 *	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion of Results

The results found that there is a significant positive correlation between anxiety & depression ($r=0.787$, $p < .001$), further stress was found to be significantly positively related to depression ($r=0.793$, $p < .001$) and anxiety ($r=0.739$, $p < .001$). The results also found a significant positive correlation between exhaustion & depression ($r=0.321$, $p < .05$), and between exhaustion and anxiety ($r=0.382$, $p < .05$). The results found out significant negative correlation between professional efficacy and cynicism ($r=-0.328$, $p < .05$), which proves our working hypothesis that there will be a significant positive relationship between depression, anxiety, stress and burnout.

Our findings align with the previous research done in this area such as, Alharbi et al. (2019) in their study on students, found that depression, anxiety, and stress were strongly, positively and significantly correlated. In another similar study done on students Bhardwaj et al. (2020) found a correlation between anxiety and depression ($p < .001$), stress & anxiety ($p < .001$), and stress and depression ($p < .001$). Through meta-analysis, Koutsimani et al. (2019) found a significant relationship between burnout and depression and burnout and anxiety.

Conclusion

The focus of the current research was to study depression, anxiety, stress & burnout among undergraduate psychology students. A total sample of 43 psychology undergraduate students were collected in the age 18-23 years. Standardized scales were used to measure depression, anxiety, stress & burnout. The results found out that anxiety is significantly positively correlated with depression and stress is significantly positively correlated with depression & anxiety. Exhaustion is significantly positively correlated with depression and anxiety and cynicism is positively correlated with exhaustion while professional efficacy is negatively correlated with cynicism

To deal with personal issues & difficulties & to help oneself adjust to various stressful situations, seeking professional assistance is a mature & adaptable course of action. Despite the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of counseling and treatment, many people are still hesitant to ask for assistance when they are struggling.

References

Alharbi, R., Alsuhaibani, K., Almarshad, A., & Alyahya, A. (2019). Depression and anxiety among high school student at Qassim Region. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 8(2), 504-510. https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc_383_18

- Assunção, H., & Marôco, J. (2020). Use of medication in university students with burnout. *Psicol Saúde Doença* [Internet]. 2020 Mar;21(1):15–21. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.15309/20psd210104>
- Chen, L., Wang, L., Qiu, X. H., Yang, X. X., Qiao, Z. X., Yang, Y. J., & Liang, Y. (2013). Depression among Chinese university students: Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates. *PloS one*, 8(3), e58379.
- de la Fuente, J., Lahortiga-Ramos, F., Laspra-Solís, C., Maestro-Martín, C., Alustiza, I., Aubá, E., & Martín-Lanas, R. (2020). A Structural Equation Model of Achievement Emotions, Coping Strategies and Engagement-Burnout in Undergraduate Students: A Possible Underlying Mechanism in Facets of Perfectionism. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(6), 2106. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062106>
- Devi, R. S., Mohan, S., & Narayana, S. C. (2015). A study on stress and its effects on college students. *International Journal of Scientific Engineering and Applied Science*, 1(7), 449-456.
- Durán, A., Extremera, N., Rey, L., Fernández-Berrocal, P., Montalbán, F. M. (2006). Predicting Academic Burnout and Engagement in Educational Settings: Assessing the Incremental Validity of Perceived Emotional Intelligence beyond Perceived Stress and General Self-Efficacy. *Psicothema*. 2006;18:158–164. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]
- Dyrbye, L. N., Thomas, M. R., Shanafelt, T. D. (2006). Systematic Review of Depression, Anxiety, and Other Indicators of Psychological Distress among U.S. and Canadian Medical Students. *Acad. Med.* 2006;81:354–373. doi: 10.1097/00001888-200604000-00009. [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- Hakami, R. (2018) Prevalence of Psychological Distress among Undergraduate Students at Jazan University: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Saudi J. Med. Med. Sci.* 2018;6:82. doi: 10.4103/sjms.sjms_73_17. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- Hudson, S. A., & O'Regan, J. (1994). Stress and the graduate psychology student. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 50(6), 973-977.
- Hysenbegasi, A., Hass, S. L., & Rowland, C. R. (2005). The impact of depression on the academic productivity of university students. *Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics*, 8(3), 145
- Koutsimani, P., Montgomery, A., & Georganta, K. (2019). The Relationship Between Burnout, Depression, and Anxiety: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00284>
- March-Amengual, J. M., Cambra Badii, I., Casas-Baroy, J. C., Altarriba, C., Comella Company, A., Pujol-Farriols, R., & Comella Cayuela, A. (2022). Psychological distress, burnout, and academic performance in first year college students. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(6), 3356.
- Marôco, J., Assunção, H., Harju-luukkainen, H., Lin, S., Sit, P., & Cheung, K. (2020). Predictors of academic efficacy and dropout intention in university students: Can engagement suppress burnout? *PLoS One*. 2020;15(10):1–26.
- Mohamad, N. E., Sidik, S. M., Akhtari-Zavare, M., & Gani, N. A. (2021). The prevalence risk of anxiety and its associated factors among university students in Malaysia: a national cross-sectional study. *BMC public health*, 21(1), 1-12.
- Naceanceno, K. D., Capps, S. K., Whittenburg, R., & Ortiz, A. (2021). A Comparison of Anxiety Levels Among College Students. *Journal of Graduate Education Research*, 2(1), 8.
- Paloş, R., Maricuţoiu, L. P., & Costea, I. (2019). Relations between academic performance, student engagement and student burnout: A cross-lagged analysis of a two-wave study. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 60, 199-204.
- Puthran, R., Zhang, M. W. B., Tam, W. W., Ho, R. C. (2016) Prevalence of Depression amongst Medical Students: A Meta-Analysis. *Med. Educ.* 2016;50:456–468. doi: 10.1111/medu.12962. [PubMed] [CrossRef] [Google Scholar]
- Rosales-Ricardo Y., Rizzo-Chunga, F., Mocha-Bonilla, J., & Ferreira, J. P. (2021). Prevalence of burnout syndrome in university students: A systematic review. *Salud Ment* [Internet]. Apr 9;44(2):91–102. Available from: http://revistasaludmental.mx/index.php/salud_mental/article/view/SM.0185-3325.2021.013
- Saleh, D., Camart, N., & Romo, L. (2017). Predictors of stress in college students. *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 19.
- Shah, T. D., & Pol, T. (2020). Prevalence of depression and anxiety in college students. *Journal of Mental Health and Human Behaviour*, 25(1), 10.
- Singh, M., Goel, N. K., Sharma, M. K., & Bakshi, R. K. (2017). Prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress among students of Punjab University, Chandigarh. *National Journal of Community Medicine*, 8(11), 666-671.
- Sobocki, P., Lekander, I., Borgström, F., Ström, O., & Runeson, B. (2007). The economic burden of depression in Sweden from 1997 to 2005. *European Psychiatry*, 22(3), 146-152
- Sobowale, K., Ham, S. A., Curlin, F. A., & Yoon, J. D. (2017). Personality Traits Are Associated with Academic Achievement in Medical School: A Nationally Representative Study. *Academic Psychiatry*, 42(3), 338–345. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-017-0766-5>
- Swords, B. A., & Ellis, M. V. (2017). Burnout and vigor among health service psychology doctoral students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 45(8), 1141-1161.

Yikealo, D., Tareke, W., & Karvinen, I. (2018). The level of stress among college students: A case in the college of education, Eritrea Institute of Technology. *Open Science Journal*, 3(4).

Yusoff, M. S. B., Abdul Rahim, A. F., Baba, A. A., Ismail, S. B., Mat Pa, M. N., & Esa, A. R. (2013). Prevalence and associated factors of stress, anxiety and depression among prospective medical students. *Asian journal of psychiatry*, 6(2), 128-133.