



Mental Health Challenges Faced by College Students in India

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0425.1310>

ABSTRACT

The mental health difficulties experienced by college students in India represent a growing issue in today's swiftly changing social, cultural, and educational context. The study examines the incidence of stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders, including barriers to mental health help-seeking and service utilization stigma among students in order to examine the impact of demographic factors on mental health help-seeking and service utilization. This study included 60 college students from a variety of backgrounds with undergraduate degrees. In order to contribute to addressing these student mental health issues, findings of this study suggest the need for educators and educational institutions to install mental health initiatives, open and safe conversations around mental health topics, and provide examples of support for students. Further, the study proposes potential and direct solutions and delineates approaches for addressing issues related to the well-being of students academically and personally.

Keywords: Mental health, College students, Counselling services, Emotional resilience, Mental health education, Holistic well-being, Institutional support, psychological challenges, Student well-being

Introduction

The mental health of college students in India is a pressing and neglected issue. College represents a transitional experience with new academic, social, and personal challenges in ways that can make young adults especially susceptible to mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety, depression and sleep disorders. Though global awareness about mental health continues to rise, in India, mental health remains stigmatized and under-conversed about reducing discussions and interventions. This study aims to provide insightful perspectives about all these issues while providing pragmatic recommendations for intervening well. Mental health issues cannot be treated in a vacuum, and often mental health is affected by socio-economic position, cultural values, familial relationships, and academic pressures. By making these aspects visible, the research intends to create conversations that can foster action and change in Indian educational institutions.

Review of Literature

Kumar and Nayar (2021) explored the effects of prolonged distance learning, social isolation, and career uncertainties on college students in India during the COVID-19 lockdown. Their study found that 60% of students experienced moderate to severe anxiety, while 45% reported symptoms of depression. To address these concerns, they recommended implementing hybrid mental health programs, including online counselling and tele-therapy, to provide accessible support.

Gautam et al. (2020) studied 800 undergraduate medical students and found that 70% experienced high levels of anxiety, while 50% suffered from clinical depression, largely due to intense academic pressure. Their research suggested that peer support groups and stress management workshops could be effective in helping students cope with these challenges.

Sharma and Kaur (2021) analysed data from 2,000 university students and found that those from lower-income backgrounds were more likely to experience chronic stress and depression. They emphasized the importance of social support in reducing anxiety and recommended mentorship programs to provide guidance and emotional support to struggling students.

Moitra and Kumar (2020) focused on the stigma associated with mental health problems among young adults in India. Their study revealed that 65% of students hesitated to seek mental health support due to academic and social stigma. They proposed institutional initiatives to normalize mental health discussions and ensure confidential support services for students in need.

Objectives

Recognize common mental health challenges experienced by college students in India. Investigate the level of awareness and open dialogue around potential mental health issues, both by students and their families. Analyse the availability and utilization of mental health resources in educational settings; both in relation to student health, and the overall institutional culture of support for mental health. Examine demographic factors that play a role in mental health such as age, socio-economic status, and family structure. Make recommendations for colleges to improve mental health support systems.

Methodology

Sample & Sampling: A structured survey was administered to a total of 60 college students from a variety of years and socioeconomic conditions. **Survey Design:** Survey methods utilized both quantitative and qualitative questions regarding personal experiences, family background, and expressed awareness of mental health issues and problems. **Data Analysis:** Responses were analysed to find themes and patterns, creating a vista of understanding of the deficits in mental health systems and supports.

Findings

More than half of the students (51.7%) reported facing mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. This highlights the urgent need for better mental health support in educational institutions.

When it comes to discussing mental health at home, only 36.7% of students said their families openly talk about it. This means a significant number of students might not have the space to share their struggles with loved ones, making awareness programs involving families even more important.

Colleges also seem to be lacking in mental health workshops, as 53.3% of students mentioned they haven't attended any. This suggests that either these sessions aren't available or students aren't aware of them, showing the need for more structured awareness initiatives.

A strong 81.7% of students believe mental health education should be a part of the college curriculum. Integrating it into academics could help normalize mental health conversations, reduce stigma, and equip students with tools to manage their well-being.

Support systems within colleges are also a major concern, as 73.3% of students feel institutions should provide more mental health resources. This shows a growing awareness of the importance of accessible support and the need for colleges to step up in making these services more visible and available.

Most survey participants fall between 18-23 years old, with the largest group being 21-year-olds (25%). Knowing this helps in designing mental health programs that cater to the specific needs of young adults navigating academic and personal pressures.

Family dynamics also play a role, as 65% of students come from nuclear families and 26.7% from joint families. This suggests that cultural and social backgrounds should be considered when designing mental health interventions, ensuring they are relevant and effective.

Socio-economic factors matter too, with 70% of respondents identifying as middle class and 25% as upper-middle class. This means mental health programs should be inclusive, ensuring accessibility for students from different financial backgrounds.

Among those who experience mental health challenges, the most common issues are stress (80.6%), anxiety (54.8%), sleep disorders (48.4%), and depression (45.2%). The high prevalence of stress suggests that many students are struggling to balance academic and personal responsibilities, calling for a more holistic approach to mental health support.

When asked about their overall mental well-being, most students rated themselves between 3 and 5 on a scale of 1-10. This suggests that many students are dealing with moderate mental health struggles and would benefit from personalized mental health care.

Talking about mental health is still not easy for everyone—only 38.3% feel comfortable discussing their challenges with a professor or counsellor, while 36.7% are somewhat comfortable. This shows that while some students are open to seeking help, more efforts are needed to create a supportive and non-judgmental environment where everyone feels safe talking about their mental health.

Recommendations

Incorporate Mental Health Education into the academic curricula to enhance mental health awareness and resilience. Enhance Access to mental health resources—physical and digital—both mental health professionals and interventions supported by mental health professionals. Facilitate workshops & seminars regularly on the topic of mental health for students and faculty. Cultivate a Supportive Campus Culture, which reduces stigma, and prepares everyone to engage in conversations related to mental health. Improve Faculty & Staff training to support students in their experience of mental health challenges. Encourage Family Involvement in mental health education and support for students. Establish Peer Support Programs as a means to support community-based mental health care. Establish partnerships with health organizations to provide professional support and mental health resources. Regularly Assess & Review, or Improve, services, in order to remain responsive to emerging student needs.

Conclusion

Mental health issues among tertiary students in India need urgent attention and institutional-level intervention. This study highlights the problem of stress, anxiety, and depression, and indicates stigma and lack of accessibility as key negative factors. By incorporating mental health education, better access to resources, and improving access to mental health resources, educational settings can foster an environment where students feel empowered to engage in mental health initiatives. This is everyone's responsibility, families, educators, and anyone making policy all also have a role. Overall, this research is a starting point for further discussion of mental health for students in the Indian education system, so that hopefully one day all students can thrive, without sacrificing their well-being.

References

Kapur (1995) explored the mental health challenges faced by Indian children, highlighting key psychological and social factors influencing their well-being.

Shrivastava and Kimbrell (2012) examined depression among Indian adolescents, shedding light on its causes, symptoms, and the need for early intervention strategies.

Malhotra and Chakrabarti (2015) provided a comprehensive overview of child and adolescent mental health in India, discussing common psychological issues and potential treatment approaches.

Mayer (2017) analysed suicide in India from a psychosocial perspective, delving into its underlying causes and societal implications.

Sharma (2018) offered theoretical and practical insights into counselling adolescents, focusing on effective intervention techniques for addressing mental health concerns.

Oommen (2019) explored the aspirations, attitudes, and anxieties of Indian youth, providing a deeper understanding of their psychological and emotional struggles.

Tripathi and Alva (2020) discussed young mental health in India, emphasizing the challenges faced by adolescents and young adults in managing their psychological well-being.

Wadkar (2021) examined emerging trends in psycho-social health issues among Indian youth and proposed various intervention strategies to address their concerns.

Kumar (2023) provided an Indian psychology perspective on mental health and well-being, highlighting culturally relevant approaches to mental health care.

Nandi (2024) focused on adolescent mental health problems and the role of school-based mental health programs in addressing these issues effectively.