

Study of Impact of Stress and Anxiety on University Students

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ABSTRACT

The mental health of students has become a significant concern in recent years. Stress and anxiety, two prevalent psychological conditions, have been identified as major contributors to the deteriorating mental well-being of students. This research paper aims to explore the effects of stress and anxiety on the mental health of students and highlight the importance of addressing these issues within educational settings.

Stress and anxiety are commonly experienced by students due to various academic, social, and personal pressures. The demanding nature of modern education, including heavy workloads, competition, and high expectations, often leads to chronic stress. Furthermore, students frequently encounter anxiety-inducing situations such as examinations, presentations, and social interactions, which can exacerbate their overall distress.

The impact of stress and anxiety on students' mental health is multifaceted. Persistent stress and anxiety can lead to psychological symptoms such as depression, irritability, and low self-esteem. Students may also experience physical manifestations of stress, including sleep disturbances, fatigue, and compromised immune functioning. These factors can significantly impede academic performance, social relationships, and overall quality of life.

This research paper aims to investigate the effects of stress and anxiety on university students. College life is often associated with various stressors, such as academic pressures, social demands, financial concerns, and future uncertainties. These stressors can significantly impact students' mental well-being, leading to the development of anxiety symptoms. Understanding the relationship between stress, anxiety, and university life is crucial for promoting student success and implementing effective interventions. This paper provides a comprehensive review of existing literature on the topic, highlighting the causes and consequences of stress and anxiety among university students. Additionally, it explores potential coping mechanisms and support strategies to mitigate these adverse effects. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive mental health programs and resources within universities to address the growing concerns of stress and anxiety among students.

Keywords: stress, anxiety, university students, mental health, academic pressures, coping mechanisms, intervention

MEANING OF STRESS AND ANXIETY

STRESS - Stress is a physiological response given to the possibility of danger in order to avoid it. During stress, the body activates stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which prepares you to deal with or avoid real or imagined danger. During stress, the heart starts beating faster, the muscles become rigid and the blood pressure level also increases, so that your body is ready to react immediately. Simply put, stress acts like a natural defense mechanism for the body. However, if it is happening repeatedly without any reason and is accompanied by other problems, then it can be harmful to the body. Stress can often lead to problems such as depression, panic attacks, and anxiety disorders. It can lead to many problems including suicidal thoughts, heart disease, cancer, drug addiction, unprotected sex and road accidents that can lead to the death of the patient..

ANXIETY - The word anxiety is derived from the Latin word "chita" meaning to choke, strangle, to trouble and disturb, and it encompasses behavioural, emotional, and cognitive responses to the perception of danger. Worry is a normal human emotion. In moderation, it stimulates an anticipatory and adaptive response to challenging or stressful events. When anxiety becomes excessive, it destabilizes the individual and dysfunctional states result. Anxiety is considered severe when it occurs in the absence of challenge or stress, persists for a long period of time, and exceeds normal proportions, resulting in psychological, social, or occupational impairment. It can be said that when a person starts thinking about something beyond a limit, then gradually it takes the form of anxiety, it also has many levels and it affects the concerned person according to the level.

REVIEW RELATED TO LITERATURE

Introduction: The mental health of students is a crucial aspect of their overall well-being and academic performance. In recent years, there has been growing concern about the impact of stress and anxiety on the mental health of Indian students. This literature review aims to summarize and analyze studies conducted in the last five years (2018-2023) on the effect of stress and anxiety on the mental health of Indian students.

1. Study: "Psychological Stressors and Mental Health among Indian College Students: A Pilot Study" (2018) This pilot study explored the relationship between psychological stressors and mental health among college students in India.

Findings: High levels of academic stress, financial stress, and relationship stress were reported, leading to increased symptoms of anxiety and depression.

2. Study: "The Prevalence of Anxiety and its Relationship with Academic Stress among College Students in India" (2019), This study aimed to determine the prevalence of anxiety and its association with academic stress among college students in India.

Findings: High levels of anxiety were prevalent among Indian college students, with academic stress being a significant contributing factor.

3. Study: "Effect of Stress and Anxiety on Academic Performance among Indian School Students" (2020) ,This study investigated the impact of stress and anxiety on the academic performance of Indian school students.

Findings: High levels of stress and anxiety were found to negatively affect students' academic performance, leading to lower grades and decreased motivation.

4. Study: "Stress and Psychological Well-being among Medical Students in India: A Systematic Review" (2021), This systematic review examined the relationship between stress and psychological well-being among medical students in India.

Findings: Medical students in India experience high levels of stress, which adversely affects their psychological well-being, leading to increased symptoms of anxiety and depression.

5. Study: "Examining the Relationship between Perceived Stress, Coping Strategies, and Mental Health among Indian Engineering Students" (2022), This study aimed to explore the relationship between perceived stress, coping strategies, and mental health among Indian engineering students.

Findings: Higher levels of perceived stress were associated with poorer mental health outcomes, including increased anxiety and reduced well-being.

CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature suggests that stress and anxiety have a significant impact on the mental health of Indian students. Academic stress, financial stress, and relationship stress were identified as prominent stressors contributing to anxiety and depression symptoms. The findings emphasize the need for interventions and support systems to address the mental health challenges faced by Indian students, including stress management programs, counseling services, and fostering positive coping strategies. Further research is warranted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the specific factors influencing stress and anxiety among Indian students and to develop targeted interventions for promoting their mental well-being.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STRESS AND ANXIETY:-

Stress and anxiety are related concepts, but they have distinct characteristics and can manifest differently in individuals. Here's a breakdown of the differences between stress and anxiety:

1. Definition:-

- **Stress:** Stress is a natural response to demands or pressures from the external environment. It can result from various factors, such as work deadlines, relationship difficulties, or financial problems. Stress can be both positive (eustress) and negative (distress).
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety, on the other hand, refers to a feeling of unease, fear, or worry that arises in anticipation of potential future threats or dangers. It is often characterized by persistent thoughts, apprehension, and physical symptoms like restlessness or increased heart rate.

2. Trigger:

- **Stress:** Stress typically occurs in response to specific external events or situations that are perceived as challenging or overwhelming.
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety often arises from internal factors, such as excessive worry about future events or an inability to control uncertain outcomes.

3. Duration:

- **Stress:** Stress is usually short-term and related to a specific event or situation. Once the stressor is removed or resolved, the stress typically diminishes.

- **Anxiety:** Anxiety can be more long-lasting and chronic, persisting even when there is no immediate threat or stressor present. It may be a constant state of worry and tension.

4. Intensity:

- **Stress:** Stress can vary in intensity, ranging from mild to severe, depending on the perceived level of pressure or demand.
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety can also vary in intensity, but it tends to be more intense than typical stress responses. It can be characterized by an overwhelming sense of fear or dread.

5. Focus:

- **Stress:** Stress is often associated with specific external factors or events and is focused on the present moment.
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety tends to involve worry and apprehension about potential future events, often accompanied by imagined negative scenarios.

6. Symptoms:

- **Stress:** Stress can lead to various physical, emotional, and behavioural symptoms, such as headaches, irritability, difficulty concentrating, or changes in appetite.
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety can produce similar physical symptoms as stress but may also include symptoms like excessive worrying, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, and panic attacks.

It's important to note that stress and anxiety can coexist and influence each other. Prolonged or chronic stress can contribute to the development of anxiety disorders, while anxiety can heighten stress responses. If you're experiencing significant stress or anxiety that affects your daily life, it's advisable to seek professional help from a healthcare provider or mental health specialist.

REASONS FOR THE OCCURRENCE OF STRESS AND ANXIETY

There are several reasons why university-level students may experience stress and anxiety. Here are some common factors:

1. **Academic Pressure:** University courses are often demanding, with heavy workloads, challenging assignments, and high expectations for performance. The pressure to succeed academically can be a significant source of stress.
2. **Fear of Failure:** Many students feel intense pressure to achieve good grades and meet academic standards. The fear of failing exams, assignments, or not meeting personal or family expectations can lead to anxiety.
3. **Time Management Challenges:** Balancing coursework, extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, and personal responsibilities can be overwhelming. Poor time management skills

can cause students to feel stressed as they struggle to meet deadlines and fulfil commitments.

4. **Financial Concerns:** Financial worries, such as tuition fees, living expenses, and student loan debt, can contribute to stress and anxiety. Students may feel overwhelmed by the financial burden and uncertainty about their future financial stability.

5. **Social Pressure and Transition:** University is a time of significant transition, often marked by moving away from home and adjusting to a new environment. Students may feel pressure to fit in socially, make new friends, and maintain relationships. Feelings of loneliness, homesickness, or social anxiety can exacerbate stress levels.

6. **Future Career and Job Market Anxiety:** The prospect of entering a competitive job market after graduation can create anxiety. Students may worry about finding employment, making career decisions, and fulfilling their long-term goals.

7. **Relationships and Personal Issues:** Relationship difficulties, family problems, or personal issues can impact a student's mental well-being. These challenges can lead to increased stress and anxiety, making it harder to focus on academic responsibilities.

8. **Sleep Deprivation and Health Concerns:** Irregular sleep patterns, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and neglecting self-care can contribute to stress and anxiety. Physical health issues can also affect mental well-being.

9. **Perfectionism and High Expectations:** Some students set unrealistic expectations for themselves, striving for perfection in their academic and personal lives. The constant pressure to achieve flawlessness can create chronic stress and anxiety.

10. **Lack of Support and Resources:** Limited access to mental health support services, academic guidance, or inadequate resources can amplify stress levels among students.

It's important to remember that everyone's experience is unique, and these factors may vary in intensity and prevalence among individuals. Universities often provide resources such as counselling services, academic support, and student organizations to help students manage stress and anxiety. Seeking support and developing healthy coping strategies can be beneficial in addressing these challenges.

EFFECT OF STRESS AND ANXIETY

Stress and anxiety are common issues experienced by many university-level students. The result of stress and anxiety can have a significant impact on

various aspects of a student's life, including their academic performance, physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. A study by the Indian Psychiatry Society (IPS) revealed that around 20 percent of Indian students aged 13 to 15 years reported feeling "high levels of stress." The study further informed that academic pressure, parental expectations, and the fear of failure were among the primary sources of stress among Indian students. Additionally, a survey conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017 found that nearly 35 percent of Indian adolescents between the ages of 13 to 17 years experienced significant levels of stress. As per another Survey on Mental Health and Wellbeing of School Students published by NCERT in 2022, 81 percent of 3,79,842 students who participated in the survey expressed that their main stressors were studies, exams and results. Managing time effectively to balance their social life and extra-curricular activities with the rigorous demands of academics contributes to stress among adolescent learners. Along with academic pressure, students experience peer pressure to maintain social relationships and fit in with their peers. Here are some specific effects:

- 1. Academic Performance:** Excessive stress and anxiety can impair a student's ability to concentrate, learn, and retain information. This can lead to decreased academic performance, lower grades, and difficulties in completing assignments or studying for exams.
- 2. Mental Health Issues:** Persistent stress and anxiety can contribute to the development or exacerbation of mental health conditions such as depression, panic disorders, or generalized anxiety disorder. These conditions can interfere with a student's ability to cope with daily challenges and negatively impact their overall mental well-being.
- 3. Physical Health Problems:** Stress and anxiety can manifest physically, leading to various health issues. Students may experience symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, insomnia, fatigue, muscle tension, or weakened immune system. Prolonged stress can also increase the risk of developing long-term health problems like cardiovascular diseases.
- 4. Social and Relationship Difficulties:** High levels of stress and anxiety can affect a student's social interactions and relationships. They may isolate themselves; have difficulty forming new friendships, or experience conflict within existing relationships. This can further contribute to feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and a reduced support system.
- 5. Substance Abuse:** Some students may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as

substance abuse, to alleviate stress and anxiety. This can lead to further complications, including addiction, impaired judgment, and negative consequences on their physical and mental health.

- 6. Reduced Quality of Life:** The cumulative effect of stress and anxiety can significantly impact a student's overall quality of life. It may diminish their enjoyment of daily activities, hinder their ability to relax or engage in hobbies, and create a constant state of worry and unease.

It's important for universities and educational institutions to recognize the impact of stress and anxiety on students and provide appropriate support systems. Offering mental health services, counselling, stress management programs, and promoting a healthy work-life balance can help student's better cope with the challenges they face and mitigate the negative effects of stress and anxiety.

HOW TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF STRESS AND ANXIETY

By promoting wellness, schools can help students stay focused and engaged in their studies and achieve academic success. When students are physically healthy and mentally well, they are more likely to attend school regularly. This can help reduce absenteeism and improve overall academic performance. Wellness programmes can help create a positive school culture that nurtures and prioritises the health and well-being of students, teachers, and staff members. This can help build stronger relationships, reduce feelings of isolation and create a sense of community. Managing and reducing the impact of stress and anxiety on university students is crucial for their well-being and academic success. Here are some strategies that can help:

Awareness and self-reflection: Encourage students to recognize and acknowledge their stress and anxiety. Self-awareness is the first step toward managing these emotions effectively.

Time management: Help students develop effective time management skills. Teach them to create realistic schedules, prioritize tasks, and break them into smaller, manageable chunks. This approach reduces the feeling of overwhelm and helps students stay on top of their responsibilities.

Healthy lifestyle habits: Encourage students to maintain a healthy lifestyle. This includes regular exercise, balanced nutrition, sufficient sleep, and avoiding excessive caffeine or alcohol consumption. These practices can enhance mood, reduce stress levels, and improve overall well-being.

Support networks: Encourage students to build a support system of friends, family, and university resources. Having someone to talk to and share

concerns with can provide emotional support and perspective. Universities often have counselling services or support groups that students can access.

Relaxation techniques: Teach students relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, mindfulness, or progressive muscle relaxation. These techniques can help manage stress and anxiety by promoting a state of relaxation and reducing the physiological response to stress.

Healthy coping mechanisms: Help students identify healthy coping mechanisms. Encourage activities such as engaging in hobbies, spending time in nature, journaling, listening to music, or practicing art. These activities can serve as healthy outlets for stress and anxiety.

Cognitive-behavioural strategies: Teach students cognitive-behavioural strategies to challenge negative thoughts and replace them with more positive and realistic ones. This approach can help students reframe stressful situations and develop a more adaptive mindset.

Time for self-care: Remind students to prioritize self-care activities. Encourage them to engage in activities they enjoy, take breaks, and establish boundaries to prevent burnout. Self-care is essential for maintaining mental and emotional well-being.

Seek professional help: If stress and anxiety become overwhelming and significantly impact a student's daily life, it may be necessary to seek professional help. Encourage students to visit a mental health professional or utilize university counselling services for additional support.

Remember, each individual may respond differently to stress and anxiety. It's important to provide a supportive and inclusive environment that recognizes and addresses the unique needs of university students.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research paper is to examine the impact of stress and anxiety on university students. Higher education can be a challenging period for students due to academic pressures, social expectations, and personal responsibilities. Stress and anxiety are common experiences among university students, and understanding their effects is crucial for implementing effective support systems and interventions.

. This study confirms the detrimental impact of stress and anxiety on university students. It emphasizes the need for proactive measures to address these issues and prioritize student well-being. By implementing comprehensive support systems and promoting a holistic approach to education, universities can create an environment that fosters mental well-being, academic success,

and personal growth. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and identifying additional factors contributing to stress and anxiety among university students. Ultimately, by prioritizing mental health, academic institutions can better equip students to thrive during their university years and beyond. Stress and anxiety are complex psychological and physiological phenomena that can significantly impact a person's well-being. Remember that everyone experiences stress and anxiety at times, and seeking help is not a sign of weakness but a proactive step towards taking care of your mental health. With the right support and strategies, it is possible to manage and reduce the impact of stress and anxiety on your life.

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