



RESEARCH PAPER

Psychological Distress and its Impact on Academic Inefficiency in University Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the influence of depression on undergraduates' academic performance and the possible interventions. Depression is a common mental disorder that impairs daily functioning, particularly in job-related activities. Academic success and professional performance exhibit a notable resemblance; students represent a unique cohort whose workability can be assessed using both objective and subjective criteria. The relationship discussed above has been extensively examined using thematic analysis of qualitative data to study the prevalence of depression and the critical necessity of preparing for workforce entry for the individual students. The primary outcomes of interest were students' self-reported academic progress and their grade point average (GPA), an objective measure of academic performance determined by observers. It is also proposed that a mentor-mentee programme should be there to help university students having certified trainers and motivational speakers should be frequent to help teachers and students on various topics related to psychological difficulties and coping techniques.

KEYWORDS Psychological Distress, Academic Inefficiency, University Students

Introduction

A typical human existence is replete with stress, as it is an integral characteristic of mankind. Stress is described as the pressures and challenges humans encounter daily (Lazarus & Folkman, 2017). The term "stress" originated in physics and engineering and was introduced by Hans Selye (1956), a pioneering scientist who studied stress. It was described as "mutual actions of forces that take place across any section of the body, physical or psychological."

The body prepares to respond to environmental demands or pressures through an internal alarm system, which signifies its reaction to adverse events. Consequently, the body can achieve "focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness" when confronted with challenges (Szabo *et al.*, 2013).

Any emotion or condition can serve as a source of stress. Alongside adverse events, positive occurrences can likewise induce tension as they necessitate adjustments in folks. When circumstances deteriorate, it is termed distress; conversely, it is referred to as eustress when circumstances improve. Regardless of your perspective on stress, it is essential for your health to experience some degree of it. Selye characterized the responses to stress as the stress syndrome or universal adaptation (Schwabe *et al.*, 2011).

However, both acute and chronic stress can create a "vicious cycle" that diminishes performance and induces various mental, behavioral, and physical problems. Research indicates that elevated stress levels during adolescence and young adulthood might

adversely influence physical and mental health in subsequent years (Chrousos, 2009), with the effects particularly pronounced among college students.

Multiple researches have evidenced the prevalence of mental health disorders in college students. The circumstances were deteriorating in certain nations while improving in others. Data indicates that university students face an elevated risk of mental health challenges. Due to the distinctive obstacles faced in the classroom, they were classified as at risk. College students experience a disproportionately elevated incidence of mental health disorders, leading certain countries to establish on-campus mental health services (Cuijpers et al., 2021).

Certain educational institutions' health centers allegedly provide mental health services (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2007). Others proposed actions to enhance mental health or to mitigate mental health difficulties. Developed nations were the predominant locations for their presence. Although mental health concerns are equally prevalent, if not more so, in poor countries such as Indonesia, no research has been conducted to assess their prevalence among college students to date.

No age group faces greater stress than today's youth. Indeed, young adulthood is characterized by an increased awareness of one's surroundings and a strong desire for achievement. They labor incessantly to fulfill their own or others' expectations. This pressure to succeed may drain youth energy and lead to heightened stress levels (Settersten *et al.*, 2010).

Seaward (2017) asserts that young adults must cultivate skills to manage various forms of stress and sustain adequate stimulation. Coping techniques for stress can be categorized as either behavioral or cognitive. Its objective is to enhance and maintain psychological and physiological well-being. Emotion-focused coping strategies aim to address the emotional consequences of an issue, while problem-focused coping mechanisms strive to alter or eliminate the sources of stress.

A particular perspective posits that individuals' responses to stressors are contingent upon the setting (Carver & Scheier, 2014). A problem-centered approach is optimal when an individual can take measures to mitigate stress or identify a solution. Conversely, when an individual is powerless against excessive stress, an emotion-focused strategy is more suitable.

Psychological distress among university students has become a pervasive issue, manifesting in various forms such as anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, and loss of confidence. These challenges directly hinder students' academic performance, resulting in inefficiency. Despite growing awareness, there is a lack of comprehensive research that explores the multidimensional impact of psychological distress on academic outcomes.

This study addresses this gap by examining how different dimensions of psychological distress contribute to academic inefficiency, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to improve student well-being and academic success.

Literature Review

The academic performance of students significantly impacts their confidence, motivation, and perseverance in pursuing higher education. Unacceptable attrition rates, diminished graduation rates, and increased educational costs may stem from inadequate academic performance or elevated failure rates. Scholars have always focused on the academic achievements of youngsters.

The pressures of college life are an intrinsic and inescapable aspect of every college

student's daily experience. The transition to college is difficult due to the necessity of adapting to an entirely new set of social standards and academic expectations. For numerous students, the autonomy to make decisions devoid of parental guidance represents a crucial aspect of university life (Nakalema and Ssenyonga, 2013).

Psychological Distress and Its Dimensions

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression are the most prevalent mental health issues among university students. Studies have shown that heightened anxiety levels correlate with poor concentration, procrastination, and test anxiety, which negatively affect academic outcomes (Smith & Brown, 2020). Similarly, depression impairs motivation and cognitive functioning, further contributing to academic inefficiency (Jones et al., 2019).

Linking Psychological Distress to SDGs

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

Mental health is a crucial component of overall well-being. Addressing psychological distress can improve students' mental health, contributing to SDG 3's goal of ensuring mental health and well-being for all.

Hypothesis

H1: Anxiety and depression are significantly associated with academic inefficiency among university students.

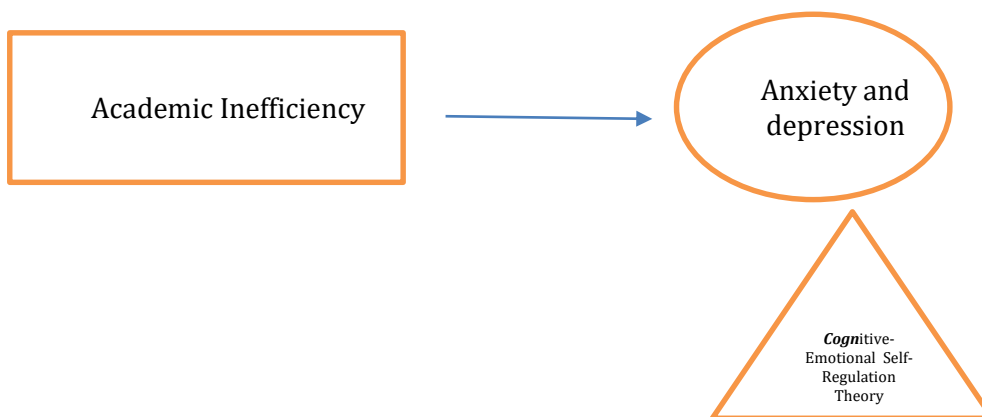


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

Social Theory of Learning

Bandura's social perspectives on education suggest that social interaction and teamwork contribute to academic performance. Cognitive development is encouraged, especially through active. Engaging with the academic community through group involvement and interactions.

Material and Methods

Using a qualitative method, we identified the factors that enabled us to conduct a thorough analysis. The participants were chosen based on the following inclusion criteria. Being enrolled in university, educated, falling in the age range of young adults. There were

interview questions asked to inquire both variables.

Interviews

Interviews were audiotaped with the patients' permission and extensively transcribed. Patients were told that all stated opinions would remain anonymous and that their involvement would be kept private from the office.

Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis with its content analysis is given below.

Q:- How do you perceive the relationship between anxiety, depression, and academic inefficiency?

Based on the given responses and the research question, the following broad themes are identified:

1. Relationship among Anxiety, Depression, and Academic Inefficiency
2. Academic Performance & Cognitive Function.
3. Emotional Dimensions
4. Support system and Coping Strategies
5. Subjectivity

Table I
Thematic Analysis

| Response | Themes/Categories Identified | Related Theories |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Anxiety, depression, and academic inefficiency are interconnected... | 4. Support system | Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): Emphasizes the role of systems (educators, mental health professionals) in addressing interconnected issues. |
| 2. Anxiety and depression can impair focus ... | 2. Academic Performance, 4. Support system | Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988): Working Memory and cognitive efficiency is effected due to stress. |
| 3. Positive | 5. Subjectivity | Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2000): Seligman argued the importance of role of resilience and positive emotional states in well-being. |
| 4. It's all in our mind... depression, anxiety are self-inflicted... | 5. Subjectivity, 3. Emotional Dimensions | Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995): suggests that high emotional intelligence can alleviate the consequences of anxiety and despair. Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) (Beck, 1967): Challenges maladaptive assumptions about depression and anxiety. |
| 5. Anxiety + depression | 1. Relationship | Biopsychosocial Model (Engel, 1977): Describes how biological, psychological, and social variables influence mental health. |
| 6. Connected... parental expectations cause anxiety and depression... | 1. Relationship, 3. Emotional Dimensions | Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978): Emphasizes the significance of family expectations in mental wellness. |

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|---|--|--|
| 7. Anxiety is someone working continuously but not rewarded... | 1. Relationship, 3. Emotional Dimensions | Effort-Reward Imbalance Model (Siegrist, 1996): Explains how imbalance between effort and reward leads to stress. Stress-Vulnerability Model: Describes how prolonged stress can evolve into more severe mental health issues. |
| 8. Anxiety and depression impair cognitive function and emotional regulation... | 2. Academic Performance, 1. Interconnection | Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1984): Explains how people assess pressures and their effects on emotions. Executive Dysfunction Theory: Explains how anxiety and depression diminish cognitive control. |
| 9. Anxiety and depression impair cognitive function... | 2. Academic Performance, 3. Emotional Dimensions | Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908): Explains how excessive stress impairs performance. Dual-Process Theory: Highlights the conflict between emotional regulation and cognitive processing. |
| 10. Anxiety troubles focus, depression reduces motivation... | 2. Academic Performance | Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985): Describes the role of inner and extrinsic motivation. Cognitive Control Theory: Discusses how anxiety impairs concentration and decision-making. |
| 11. A calm mind increases dedication... | 4. Support system, 3. Emotional Dimensions | Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004): Describes how pleasant emotions increase resilience and productivity. |
| 12. Anxiety and depression make studying harder... | 2. Academic Performance, 1. Relationship | Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): Explains the cyclical relationship between stress and coping. |

The study's findings provide light on how psychological discomfort, such as anxiety, melancholy, social dysfunction, and lack of confidence, influences academic inefficiency among university students. These data provide strong support for the expected correlations, with implications for both academic and psychological therapies.

As per our hypothesis Anxiety and depression significantly contribute to academic inefficiency. Our findings revealed consistency with previous study where it was found to have a link between anxiety, depression, and academic performance. We are aware that academic accomplishments are dependent on cognitive functions. However it has been consistently found that anxiety and depression have poor impact on cognition (Sadeghi, 2013; Rassool, 2014). The Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) describes how the cognitive resources required to handle anxiety and depression reduce the capacity for academic work, resulting in inefficiency. Similarly, the Diathesis-Stress Model (Zubin & Spring, 1977) proposes that these mental health disorders are exacerbated by external stressors, which further affect academic functioning.

Other researches have revealed that children with high levels of anxiety and depression had more trouble concentrating, resulting in worse marks and less academic interest (Pekrun, 2014).

Conclusion

These findings emphasize the need for additional research into students' perspectives and experiences with academic adequacy. All participants agreed that academic inefficiency and distress are major factors affecting students' well-being. Individual interviewees discuss their inner struggles in dealing with the psychological distress they are experiencing. This mindset not only exacerbates their problem, but also serves as a 'barrier' to obtaining help. It causes difficulties coping with daily activities, the endurance of symptoms, and a sense of failure in being self-sufficient. While actively seeking assistance, interviewees found it difficult to muster the bravery to reveal their anguish since they consider themselves a bother in comparison to persons with physical problems.

Recommendations

Emphasizing how counseling may help students with emotional problems, as well as suggesting preventive steps that colleges should take, such as establishing student counseling centers, raises awareness among college students about the importance of getting help from counseling centers. It is also proposed that all colleges implement a mentor-mentee programme. Each college should establish a student health committee that includes mental health practitioners. There should be frequent seminars and workshops for teachers and college students on various topics related to psychological difficulties and coping techniques.

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