

COMMON PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES IN CHENNAI

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Abstract. *Mental health is just as important as physical health. Majority of the college students meet the at least one mental health problem or other. The present paper aims at studying the common psychological problems faced by college students and the mental health crisis in higher educational institutions. In order to solve the problem descriptive method was used and survey was employed as the technique of data collection. The population for the present study was the students of Arts and Science colleges and professional colleges in Chennai city limit. A sample of 1047 students was drawn employing stratified random technique. The Psychological Problem Scale and the Mental Health Status Scale were used as research measures to collect the data. The collected data was analyzed using mean, SD, 't' test, F ratio and Scheffe test (Post ANOVA test) Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Regression analysis. The findings revealed that the female students experience more Anxiety and Adjustment problems than the male students and the students of Arts and Science face more psychological problems than students of Profession courses. The students from rural areas face intensive problems than the students from urban areas. There is no significant difference in Mental Health and its sub constructs with regard to gender and course of study. It is concluded that the Students' Mental Health is determined to an extent of 3.4 percent by Anxiety, Adjustment Problems and Stress. The other 96.6 percent influence may be from other variables which are not under study, but needs to investigate in future*

Keywords *Psychological Problems, Mental Health, College Students*

INTRODUCTION

An individual's psychological, emotional, and social well-being covers mental health. Mental health refers to the cognitive, and or emotional wellbeing - it profoundly influences how one thinks, feels, behave and interacts with others. Mental health is the ability to face and balance the reality of life (Bhatia, 1982). It is as important as is the physical health of a person. When the body and mind is good there maintains good mental health. The harmonious functioning of the personality is considered as mental health (Hadfield, 1952). Mental health challenges pose a major problem for many undergraduate and post graduate college students, and both their health and academic performance are affected negatively (Sara Oswalt, 2013). The prevalence and severity of mental health challenges are increasing in the college student population (Gallagher, 2011). In 1998, 93% of college students seeking treatment through campus counseling services were diagnosed with one mental disorder. This percentage increased to 96% in 2009. During this time period, most students were diagnosed with mood disorders, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorders, or problems related to impaired daily functioning (Kevin Murphy, 2022). As per the latest statistics from National Crime Record Bureau's Accident Death and Suicide in India report 2021, over 13,000 students passed away in India in 2021, averaging more than 35 per day. In 2020 the rate of death increased to 4.5% from

the 12,526 student deaths in 2020, the very sad picture is 864 out of the 10,732 suicides in 2021 attributed to "failure in examination" (<https://varthana.com/>). A poll by TimelyMD revealed that 50% of college students in 2023 identified mental health challenges as their most significant source of stress. Due to heightened awareness and diminishing stigma there is an increased number of reported cases. This underscores the need to further destigmatize mental health and foster a nurturing environment for students.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Part of this article tries to analyze the reasons for the rapid increase of mental health problems among the students of higher education in recent days. The first among is the academic pressure they endure. To achieve academically, in an intensely unhealthy competitive educational landscape the students face pressure that adversely impacts students' mental health. The fear of failure, unrealistic workload, puffed up expectations can culminate all sorts of stress, anxiety and burnout. The predominant cause for the mental health issue is social media and technological advancement which have changed the pattern of interaction of the students lead to a plethora of challenges. Relentless use of social media let to the feeling of losing self worth, dearth and adverse social comparisons. Overuse of digital interface hampers healthy sleep routine leads to mental health issues.

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Next to add, the soaring costs of education intensify students' stress. Sometimes students have to take up part time jobs or take up loans can create the strain of financial uncertainty precipitating anxiety and depression. Transition and adjustment hurdles are another major issue in creating mental health issues. There is a problem of relocation for majority of the students in seeking admissions in higher educational institutions. Adjusting with unfamiliar situations, completely different academic set up, for some students the language used in the colleges and social hurdles can act as catalysts for mental health problems. An absence of robust support during such shifts can intensify these issues (varthana.com). In the digital era, so called ultra-connected era many students struggle with social isolation and loneliness. Loneliness, a profound risk factor, can pave the way for depression, anxiety, and other emotional disturbances. To add to fuel scarce counseling access, prolonged wait times, and insufficient resources deter students from reaching out. This dearth of essential support heightens their mental health concerns and hampers prompt intervention. Family problems such as raising rate of divorce, single parent homes and frantic schedules of working parents' shrinks the emotional support for students at home. Such conditions aggravate the feelings of desolation, detachment, and heightened anxiety. Lifestyle disorders such as unbalanced diets, inactive habits and unswerving sleep intensify mental health impediments. Persistent connectivity and passive demeanor causes both physical and mental weariness. Cultural prejudices related to caste, gender, religion also negatively affect mental health landscapes of students. Some of these factors may inhibit the students to in getting help at right time worsen their conditions. Lastly the unpredictable socio-economic rift amalgamates the anxiety of the students. Indeterminate future and limited career opportunities and the burden of making life decisions at the inexperienced age disturb students' mental equilibrium.

COMMON PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTER BY COLLEGE STUDENTS

Depression and anxiety are common mental health conditions among students. Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent psychiatric problems among college students, approximately 11.9 % of college students suffering from an anxiety disorder. Another common mental health problem among college students is depression, with prevalence rates in college students of 7 to 9 %, (Paola Pedrelli, et al., 2015). Eating disorders such as bulimia, anorexia, and binge eating are common 9.5% of students screened positive for an eating disorder with a greater proportion of females relative to males. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, 2 and 8 % of college students suffer from social difficulties and an increased risk

for alcohol and drug use that further exacerbate difficulties in college (Khosla et al., 2008). Approximately one in five college students meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder (AUD) in the previous year (12.5% alcohol dependence and 7.8 % alcohol abuse). Among college students, mental health problems not only are common, but they often persist for several years (Pedrelli et al., 2015). The most prevalent problem among college students is the presence of substance use disorders (Jaisoorya et al., 2017, Pedrelli et al., 2015). Psychological problems like procrastination, perfectionism, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, test anxiety sleep deprivation and stress are common among college students.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Preliminary research or pre-research is gathering information, usually used to get an idea about a particular topic that needs to be verified and its results are not conclusive. In the present study the investigator conducted a preliminary study to select the appropriate psychological problems of college students, which was often encountered by them for in-depth study. A Problem checklist was used to collect data from the college students. The problem check list consists of a list of psychological problems, which are selected from various sources like journals, books, research articles, web resources and informal discussions with students and teachers. There are 13 psychological problems were categorized by the investigator. The data was collected from a sample of 186 college students of arts, science and professional colleges. The investigator analysed the data and the problems which are have high mean value are selected for study. The selected problems were:

Table 1: Mean Value of the Psychological Problems

Psychological Problems	Count	Mean
Physical stress	186	0.82*
Emotional stress	186	0.73*
Cognitive stress	186	0.72*
Environmental stress	186	0.71*
Academic stress	186	0.78*
Depression	186	0.33
Anxiety *	186	0.90*
Inferiority complex	186	0.27
Emotional imbalance	186	0.10
Frustration	186	0.9
Conflicts	186	0.12
Adjustment problems*	186	0.88*
Anxiety about making new friends	186	0.55

(The items bearing asterisk marks (*) were the selected psychological problems).

METHODOLOGY

The research design employed for this study is descriptive method using survey as a technique of data collection. Descriptive research design is a powerful tool used by scientists and researchers to gather information about a particular group or phenomenon (<https://www.enago.com/>). This type of research provides a detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behaviors of a particular population or subject (<https://www.enago.com/>, Shrutika Sirisilla, 2023). This study is on the line of descriptive research method to investigate the common psychological problems faced by college students in relation to their mental health. The study area is Chennai City. The primary data was collected from the sample using Psychological Problems Scale and Mental Health Status Scale developed and validated by B. Lenin Selvanayagam and S. Francisca (2023). The research measure consisted of three sections; first section was to collect the demographic variables; next two sections deal with Psychological Problems Scale and Mental Health Status Scale. The Psychological Problem Scale consisted of three parts measuring Anxiety, Adjustment and Stress. There were 33 items to measure anxiety, 35 to measure adjustment problems and 42 items to measure stress. The Mental Health Status Scale consists of sub constructs namely Attitude towards Self, Perception of Reality, Social

Competence, Regularity of Habits, Emotional Stability and Autonomy, each has 8 items with five alternative responses such as, strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were used to measure the internal consistency of each measure, Adam Khatar (2016). Nunnally (1978) suggested that Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients equal to 0.7 or greater show adequate reliability (<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/214253/1/4363.pdf>). Data was collected on qualitative and five-point Likert's scale with a range of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Data for the survey was collected from the sample respondents from December to February, 2024. Secondary data was collected from the records of the colleges and digital sources. The population for the present study was the students of Arts and Science colleges and professional colleges in Chennai city limit. The sample was drawn employing stratified random optimum allocation sampling technique. The strata were gender, locale of the respondents and the course of study. The size of the sample was 1047. Responses were collected from 1200 individuals and among these, 1047 responses were full and complete, and were deemed suitable for analysis. The data was collected with reference to the objectives of the study and analysed using mean, SD, 't' test, F ratio and Scheffe test (Post ANOVA test) Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Regression analysis.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 2: Difference between College Students in Psychological Problems with Regard to Gender

Psychological Problems	Gender	Count	Mean	S.D	T-Value	Sig (p)
Anxiety	Male	483	72.21	18.781	5.279	.031
	Female	564	77.92	15.895		
Adjustment Problems	Male	483	86.18	20.296	2.440	.045
	Female	564	89.19	19.565		
Stress	Male	483	121.03	32.640	1.353	.264
	Female	564	123.73	32.106		

It is inferred that the calculated *p* values of Anxiety and Adjustment problems are lesser than 0.05. Therefore, students significantly differ in Anxiety and Adjustment

problems with regard to gender. Comparing the mean scores female students experience more Anxiety and Adjustment problems than the male students.

Table 3: Difference Among the College Students in Psychological Problems with regard to Course of Study

Psychological Problems	Discipline	Count	Mean	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig (p)	Scheffe
Anxiety	Arts	408	77.54	16879.385 306343.307	2 1045	28.982	.000	1&3 2&3
	Science	368	77.76					
	Professional	271	68.52					
Adjustment Problems	Arts	408	89.68	8678.371 410927.625	2 1045	11.109	.001	1&3 2&3
	Science	368	89.28					
	Professional	271	82.95					

Psychological Problems	Discipline	Count	Mean	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig (p)	Scheffe
Stress	Arts	408	125.07	5230.162 1098917.33	2 1045	2.250	.065	-
	Science	368	121.75					
	Professional	271	119.59					

From the above table it is clear that the calculated p values for Anxiety and Adjustment problems are lesser than 0.05. It is understood that the college students significantly differ in Anxiety and Adjustment problems with regard to course

of study. The Scheffe test results confirm that the students of Arts and Science face more problems than students of Profession courses.

Table 4: Difference between the College Students in Psychological Problems with regard to Locale

Psychological Problems	Location of Residence	Count	Mean	S. D	t-Value	Sig.(P)
Anxiety	Rural	380	80.01	16.829	6.818	.021
	Urban	667	72.58	17.333		
Adjustment Problems	Rural	380	91.87	21.292	4.902	.043
	Urban	667	85.47	18.767		
Stress	Rural	380	128.05	32.854	4.221	.032
	Urban	667	119.30	31.670		

The calculated p values for Anxiety, Adjustment Problems and Stress are lesser than 0.05. Therefore, students significantly differ in experiencing psychological problems

with regard to their locality. Comparing the mean scores the students from rural areas face intensive problems than the students from urban areas.

Table 5: Difference in Mental Health of College Students with regard to Gender

Sub-Constructs	Gender	Count	Mean	S.D	t-Value	Sig. (p)
Attitude towards self	Male	483	29.92	7.331	0.538	.281
	Female	564	30.17	7.654		
Perception of reality	Male	483	31.02	7.068	0.519	.294
	Female	564	31.04	7.347		
Social competence	Male	483	31.02	7.987	0.034	.643
	Female	564	31.04	7.492		
Regularity of habits	Male	483	29.14	7.351	0.131	.554
	Female	564	29.20	7.316		
Emotional stability	Male	483	29.41	7.033	0.602	.332
	Female	564	29.67	6.886		
Autonomy	Male	483	29.43	8.098	0.946	.237
	Female	564	28.96	7.980		

It is clear from the above table that the calculate p values are greater than .05. Therefore, there is no significant difference

between male and female students in Mental Health and its sub constructs.

Table 6: Difference in Mental Health of College Students with regard to Course of Study

Sub-Constructs	Category	Count	Mean	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig. (p)
Attitude towards self	Arts	408	30.59	230.018 59120.115	2 1045	2.047	.246
	Science	368	29.92				
	Professional	271	30.99				

Sub-Constructs	Category	Count	Mean	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig. (p)
Perception of reality	Arts	408	31.54	86.898 54808.884	2 1045	0.834	.521
	Science	368	30.92				
	Professional	271	30.99				
Social competence	Arts	408	31.21	71.374 62760.715	2 1045	0.598	.325
	Science	368	30.68				
	Professional	271	31.24				
Regularity of habits	Arts	408	29.50	101.986 56507.979	2 1045	0.949	.643
	Science	368	28.78				
	Professional	271	29.20				
Emotional stability	Arts	408	29.48	6.174 50936.964	2 1045	0.064	.982
	Science	368	29.65				
	Professional	271	29.51				
Autonomy	Arts	408	29.14	52.549 67981.360	2 1045	0.407	.435
	Science	368	28.95				
	Professional	271	29.51				

It is clear from the above table that the calculated p values are greater than 0.05. So, it is concluded that the college students do not significantly differ in mental health and its sub-constructs with regard to course they study.

Table 7: Difference in Mental Health of College Students with regard to Locale

Dimensions	Location of Residence	Count	Mean	S. D	t-Value	Sig.(p)
Attitude towards self	Rural	380	29.58	7.812	2.262	.043
	Urban	667	30.62	7.209		
Perception of reality	Rural	380	30.72	7.513	2.262	.043
	Urban	667	31.73	6.933		
Social competence	Rural	380	31.51	7.760	1.867	.521
	Urban	667	30.62	7.671		
Regularity of habits	Rural	380	28.66	7.336	2.483	.041
	Urban	667	30.78	7.289		
Emotional stability	Rural	380	29.91	6.962	1.523	.643
	Urban	667	29.25	6.936		
Autonomy	Rural	380	29.47	8.079	1.095	.827
	Urban	667	28.93	7.996		

From the above table it is inferred that the calculated p values for Attitude towards self, Perception of reality and Regularity of habits are lesser than 0.05. Therefore, the college students significantly differ in Attitude towards self, Perception of reality and Regularity of habits. Comparing the mean score the students from urban areas enjoy better mental health than their counterparts. But for other sub-constructs both rural and urban students enjoy the same status.

Table 8: Correlation between Psychological Problems and Mental Health of College Students

Mental Health, Its Sub-Constructs	Count	Psychological Problems		
		Anxiety	Adjustment Problems	Stress
		'r' Value	'r' Value	'r' Value
Attitude towards self	1047	0.018	0.023	0.050
Perception of reality	1047	0.001	-0.013	0.019
Social competence	1047	0.046	0.068	0.084
Regularity of habits	1047	-0.037	-0.013	0.002
Emotional stability	1047	0.009	0.047	0.027
Autonomy	1047	-0.010	0.044	0.050

The table clearly depict that there is positive negligent correlation between adjustment problems, stress and social competence of college students. There is negative correlation

between perception of reality and adjustment problems, regularity of habits and anxiety and regularity of habits and adjustment problems and autonomy and anxiety.

Table 9: Significant Influence of Psychological Problems on Mental Health of College Students

Dependent Variable	Predictors	R	R ²	β	ΔF	R
Mental Health	Anxiety	0.184	0.034	-0.075	6.141	S
	Adjustment problems			-0.046		
	Stress			-0.114		

R the correlation value is 0.184 and R square is degree of determination, its value is 0.034. The degree of determination shows the extent to which Anxiety, Adjustment Problems and Stress influences the College Students' Mental Health. Here the Students' Mental Health is determined to an extent of 3.4 percent by Anxiety, Adjustment Problems and Stress. The other 96.6 percent influence may be from other variables which are not under study, but needs to investigate in future.

DISCUSSION

The study finding bring to the lime light that the female students experience more Anxiety and Adjustment problems than the male students. Jaisoorya et al. (2017) confirm the present finding that the prevalence of psychological distress was predominantly high with female students. The scheffe test results confirm that the students of Arts and Science face more problems than students of Profession courses. The study by Rath, Kar and Kar (2021), came out with similar result that 60.7% of students reported stress which was broadly course-related. The students from rural areas face intensive problems than the students from urban areas. The study draws support from Xiao-Li Mao, Hong-Mei Chen (2023) conclude that students from rural areas was more likely to be abnormal than that of urban students. There is no significant difference in Mental Health and its sub constructs with regard to gender and course of study. The students from urban areas enjoy better mental health and its sub-constructs Attitude towards self, Perception of reality and Regularity of habits than their counterparts supported by Xiao-Li Mao, Hong-Mei Chen (2023).

CONCLUSION

The researcher admits that the psychological problems studied in this research affect mental health only 3.4%. It is essential to consider other personal and psychological problems like substance use, academic anxiety, and depression, eating disorder, sleep disorder and addiction to media which greatly affect the mental health of college students. The colleges must ready physically and manpower wise to provide services to cater to the mental health

issues. Future research will be necessary to probe in to the accessibility, effectiveness and feasibility of promotion of mental health strategies of college students.

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