

Depression, anxiety and stress as negative predictors of life satisfaction in university students

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Objective: To study the role of depression, anxiety and stress in prediction of life satisfaction in male and female university students.

Methodology: The study involved 200 students, 100 males and 100 females selected by using purposive sampling technique from different universities of Islamabad. Age range of participants was 19-30 years (mean 21.79 ± 2.970). Depression anxiety stress scale-21 (DASS-21 and Life Satisfaction scale were administered. Data were analyzed on SPSS

version 19.

Results: The result of present study indicated that depression anxiety and stress significantly predict life satisfaction among male and female university students.

Conclusion: University students who are facing depression, anxiety and stress are more vulnerable to low levels of life satisfaction. (Rawal Med J 201;42:255-257)

Keywords: Depression, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction, university students.

INTRODUCTION

Adjusting to university life proves to be demanding for many adolescent and adult students. University students are the cream of the society and they are actually a special group of people who are passing through a period of transition from adolescence to adulthood. This is the most frustrating and stressful period in one's life in the sense that he/she has to achieve good grades and get over academic hurdles, keep up-to-date, find an appropriate job, need to make new friends, make good adjustment with strangers as living away from home and plan for future. Thus, they are susceptible to several stressors as a result of the challenges they face during their academics.¹ Some students also have to deal with financial issues for first time in their life.²

Life satisfaction, as seen by positive and negative affects in life, is an important element of subjective well being. Depression, anxiety, and stress have a negative effect on well being of and are highly related to satisfaction with life in university students. Life satisfaction is one of the signs of obvious quality of life.³ According to cognitive behavioral theory, people who are disturbed and those who are not disturbed behave in a different way; it is only the difference in cognition that is

causing depression. Due to their negative mind set, they are inclined to misinterpret the reality in a downbeat way, and they hold themselves responsible for any hardship that takes place. This style of negatively judging and thinking inclined them towards negative predisposition so they feel themselves depressed.⁴

A study from Iran showed that university students were more prone to depression because they go through an important time period of transition.⁵ Another study from Australia showed that university students had to experience a wide array of stressors that are psychological and social in nature and these increase their risk of depression and anxiety disorder.⁶ A Malaysian study reported that anxiety, stress and depression had a very harmful and damaging effect on student's life and could lead to drop outs from college, increase in suicide rates, issues in interpersonal relationships and impairment in working efficiently.⁷ A study from Oman showed that more than half of the participants had depression and recommended that depression should be tackled and primary health care facilities should be provided.⁸ The aim of our study was to assess the role of depression, anxiety and stress in prediction of life satisfaction in male and female university students of Islamabad.

METHODOLOGY

In this cross sectional study, sample was collected through purposive sampling technique from different universities of Islamabad, Pakistan. Data collected included basic information like age, gender, education, family structure and socio-economic status. Sample consisted of 200 students; 100 male and 100 female. Participant's written consent was taken. All were asked to fill research instruments Depression Anxiety Stress scale (DASS) 21 (Lovibond, & Lovibond, 1995) and Life Satisfaction Scale (Dinner et al 1985). Responses were scored and results were statistically analyzed using SPSS version 19.

Depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21) is divided into three scales: depression (D), Anxiety (A) and Stress (S) each scale has 7 items. All items are rated on 3 point Likert scale 0= did not apply to me at all, to 3=applied to me most of time. Total score is multiplied by 2 to obtain to replicate the original 42 item scale. Higher score on DASS indicate high level of depression anxiety and stress while low score on DASS indicates low level of depression anxiety and stress. The internal consistencies of the three subscales were 0.71 for depression, 0.79 for anxiety and 0.81 for stress.

Life satisfaction scale items are rated on 7 point scale 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Slightly disagree 4 = Neither agree nor disagree 5 = Slightly agree 6 = Agree 7 = Strongly agree. Add up all responses to a sum score.

RESULTS

Out of 200 students, 100 were male and 100 female. Mean age was 21.79 ± 2.97 years. Demographic characteristics of study population are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of sample.

| Variable | Category | Number | % |
|----------------------|----------|--------|------|
| Gender | Male | 100 | 50 |
| | Female | 100 | 50 |
| Family status | Joint | 073 | 36.5 |
| | Nuclear | 127 | 63.5 |
| Socioeconomic Status | Upper | 034 | 17 |
| | Middle | 158 | 79 |
| | Lower | 008 | 04 |

Table 2. Comparison of the level of Life Satisfaction.

| Group | Number | Mean \pm SD | T | Df | Sig |
|--------|--------|-------------------|--------|-----|--------|
| Male | 100 | 17.97 \pm 7.269 | -2.110 | 198 | .036** |
| Female | 100 | 20.18 \pm 7.540 | | | |

Table 3. Comparison in the level of Life Satisfaction with reference to SES.

| Group | Number | Mean \pm SD | F | Df | Sig |
|--------|--------|-------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| Upper | 009 | 13.11 \pm 6.918 | 5.393 | 1,199 | .005** |
| Middle | 157 | 19.88 \pm 7.303 | | | |
| Lower | 34 | 16.08 \pm 7.442 | | | |

Table 4. Comparison in the level of Life Satisfaction with reference to Family Structure.

| Group | Number | Mean \pm SD | T | Df | Sig |
|---------|--------|-------------------|------|-----|------|
| Joint | 73 | 19.77 \pm 6.863 | .971 | 198 | .333 |
| Nuclear | 126 | 18.70 \pm 7.823 | | | |

It was observed that depression anxiety and stress were negative predictors for life satisfaction in university students. Result showed that there is 6% depression 5% anxiety and 4% stress in our sample. It is also found that female students had greater life satisfaction as compared to males (Table 2). The mean for socioeconomic status for upper socioeconomic status was $M = 13.11$, for middle socioeconomic status was $M = 19.88$ and for lower socioeconomic status was $M = 16.08$ which shows that students belonging to middle socioeconomic status had greater life satisfaction as compared to lower and upper classes (Table 3). There was no difference in satisfaction of students living in joint family or nuclear (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

Results of our study indicate that depression anxiety and stress was a negative predictor for life satisfaction in university students. There was 6% depression 5% anxiety and 4% stress in our sample. This means that students who experience depression, anxiety and stress in their life have low levels of life satisfaction whereas students who face less distress have higher levels of life satisfaction. Female students had greater life satisfaction as compared to males. A study from India showed that young girls had higher levels of self esteem but as the age increases life satisfaction lowers.⁹

Mean differences were calculated for demographic characteristics. The mean for socioeconomic status for upper socioeconomic status was $M=13.11$, for middle socioeconomic status was $M=19.88$ and for lower socioeconomic status was $M=16.08$. Statistical analysis indicated that there is a significant difference in life satisfaction of students belonging to different socioeconomic classes.

Result also shows that students living in nuclear family setup have low levels of satisfaction in life in a comparison with students living in joint families. In Iran, a study was conducted which assessed that university students experience a lot of depression, anxiety and stress because of the fact that they are passing from a changing time in their life which is very distressing.⁶ In Oman, a cross-sectional research was conducted on university students and results showed that more than half of the participants had depression.⁸ It was seen that depression was a frequent health issue that should be tackled and primary health care facilities should be provided.⁸

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that depression, anxiety and stress significantly predict life satisfaction in university students. They are negatively related to life satisfaction. University students significantly experiences higher level of psychological distress because there is a lot of burden on the part of students. This research finding helps us in the development of proper psychotherapeutic intervention, counseling services at university campus for the treatment of university students' mental health issues.

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