

# Psychosomatic Disorders in College Going Students: A Risk Factor

**Bhavna Ramaiya**

Assistant Professor (Home Science), Sarojini Naidu Govt Girls PG (Autonomous) College

## ABSTRACT

Psychosomatic disorders among college students have emerged as a significant concern in the realm of mental health, given their potential impact on overall well-being and academic success. This review paper delves into the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of psychosomatic disorders in college-going individuals. Through an extensive analysis of existing literature, the paper elucidates the multifaceted nature of these disorders, encompassing both physical and psychological dimensions. Furthermore, the review examines the unique stressors inherent in the college experience that contribute to the development and exacerbation of psychosomatic symptoms. By exploring coping strategies, interventions, and preventive measures, the paper aims to provide insights into mitigating the adverse effects of psychosomatic disorders among college students. Ultimately, the findings underscore the importance of addressing psychosomatic disorders as a risk factor in college settings to promote student well-being and academic success.

**Keywords:** Psychosomatic disorders, College students, Mental health, Risk factors, Well-being, Stress, Academic performance.

## INTRODUCTION

Psychosomatic disorders among college students represent a significant risk factor due to their multifaceted impact on physical, mental, academic, and social aspects of their lives. These disorders, characterized by physical symptoms stemming from underlying psychological distress, encompass a wide range of manifestations, including headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, fatigue, and chronic pain, among others. The demanding nature of college life, marked by academic pressures, social adjustments, financial worries, and transitions to independence, can exacerbate the onset and severity of psychosomatic symptoms among students [1]. The accumulation of stressors and challenges inherent in the college experience creates fertile ground for the development and perpetuation of psychosomatic disorders. [2] Furthermore, the reluctance or inability of college students to seek timely and appropriate help for their psychological distress can exacerbate the cycle of psychosomatic illness. Without intervention, these disorders can progress to chronic health issues, significantly impairing quality of life and increasing healthcare utilization among college students. Recognizing the critical need for early detection, prevention, and intervention strategies, colleges and universities must prioritize mental health support services and resources on campus [3]. By addressing psychosomatic disorders as a risk factor and implementing comprehensive mental health initiatives, institutions can promote the overall well-being and academic success of their student population. Proactive measures, such as promoting stress management

techniques, providing counseling services, and fostering a supportive campus environment, are essential components of a holistic approach to addressing psychosomatic disorders among college students. [4]

### **1.1. Understanding Psychosomatic Disorders**

Psychosomatic disorders, also known as psychophysiological or somatoform disorders, refer to physical symptoms or illnesses that are believed to be caused or exacerbated by psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, or emotional distress. Unlike purely physical conditions, psychosomatic disorders have no apparent organic cause, yet they manifest as real physical symptoms. Common examples include headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, and muscle pain, among others. These symptoms can vary widely in severity and duration and may significantly impair an individual's daily functioning and quality of life. [5] Understanding psychosomatic disorders involves recognizing the complex interplay between psychological and physiological factors. Stress, trauma, unresolved emotional conflicts, and maladaptive coping mechanisms are often implicated in the development of these disorders. Additionally, genetic predispositions, personality traits, and environmental factors may contribute to their onset and persistence [6]. Diagnosis and treatment typically involve a multidisciplinary approach that addresses both the psychological and physical aspects of the disorder. Psychotherapy, stress management techniques, medication, and lifestyle modifications are among the strategies used to manage psychosomatic symptoms and improve overall well-being. By acknowledging the mind-body connection and addressing underlying psychological stressors, individuals can better manage and alleviate the symptoms of psychosomatic disorders. [7]

### **1.2. Prevalence of Psychosomatic Disorders among College Students**

The prevalence of psychosomatic disorders among college students is increasingly recognized as a pressing issue within the realm of mental health. Research indicates that a significant portion of college students grapple with symptoms characteristic of psychosomatic disorders, encompassing a spectrum of manifestations such as headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, sleep irregularities, persistent fatigue, and muscle tension, among other somatic complaints. These symptoms often arise in response to the myriad stressors inherent in the college experience, including but not limited to the rigors of academic demands, financial concerns, interpersonal conflicts, and the challenges associated with transitioning to newfound independence [8]. Moreover, factors such as social isolation, the pursuit of perfectionism, and the adoption of unhealthy lifestyle behaviors can further predispose college students to the development or exacerbation of psychosomatic symptoms. [9]

Recognizing the pervasive nature of psychosomatic disorders among college students is paramount for the implementation of proactive prevention and intervention strategies [10]. These efforts may encompass a multifaceted approach that includes promoting comprehensive stress management techniques, enhancing access to mental health resources and support services within campus communities, and cultivating a culture of empathy and inclusivity that prioritizes the holistic well-being of students. By acknowledging and addressing the prevalence of psychosomatic disorders among college students, educational institutions can foster environments that facilitate optimal academic performance, personal growth, and overall flourishing among their student populations.

### **1.3. Risk Factors for Psychosomatic Disorders in College Students**

Several risk factors contribute to the development of psychosomatic disorders among college students.

These include: [11]

**Academic Pressure:** High academic expectations and the pressure to perform well in exams and assignments can lead to stress and anxiety, exacerbating psychosomatic symptoms.

**Social and Peer Pressure:** College students often face social pressures to fit in, maintain friendships, and engage in social activities, which can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and psychosomatic symptoms.

**Financial Stress:** Financial constraints, including tuition fees, living expenses, and student loan debts, can cause significant stress and contribute to the onset of psychosomatic disorders.

**Relationship Issues:** Relationship problems, including conflicts with romantic partners, friends, or family members, can cause emotional distress and manifest as physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches.

**Lifestyle Factors:** Unhealthy lifestyle habits such as poor diet, lack of exercise, substance abuse, and irregular sleep patterns can weaken the body's immune system and exacerbate psychosomatic symptoms.

**Lack of Coping Strategies:** Students who lack effective coping mechanisms for managing stress may resort to unhealthy behaviors or avoidance strategies, further exacerbating their psychosomatic symptoms.

**Perfectionism:** Students who set excessively high standards for themselves and fear failure may experience heightened levels of stress and anxiety, increasing their susceptibility to psychosomatic disorders.

**Traumatic Experiences:** Previous traumatic experiences such as abuse, neglect, or loss can contribute to the development of psychosomatic symptoms, especially during times of heightened stress such as the college years.

Identifying and addressing these risk factors through targeted interventions and support services can help mitigate the impact of psychosomatic disorders on college students' well-being and academic success.

#### 1.4. Coping Strategies and Interventions

Coping strategies and interventions for psychosomatic disorders in college students play a crucial role in managing symptoms, improving overall well-being, and promoting academic success. Some effective strategies and interventions include: [12]

- 1. Psychoeducation:** Providing students with information about psychosomatic disorders, their causes, symptoms, and available treatments can help increase awareness and reduce stigma. Psychoeducational workshops or seminars can also teach coping skills and stress management techniques.
- 2. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT is a well-established therapeutic approach that focuses on identifying and challenging negative thought patterns and behaviors contributing to psychosomatic symptoms. Through CBT, students learn coping strategies such as relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, and problem-solving skills.
- 3. Mindfulness-Based Interventions:** Mindfulness practices, such as mindfulness meditation and yoga, can help college students cultivate present-moment awareness, reduce stress, and improve emotional regulation. These interventions have been shown to alleviate psychosomatic symptoms and enhance overall well-being.
- 4. Stress Management Techniques:** Teaching students stress management techniques, such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and time management skills, can help them better cope with academic pressure, social stressors, and other triggers for psychosomatic symptoms.

5. **Supportive Counseling:** Providing students with access to counseling services, support groups, or peer support networks can offer them a safe space to express their feelings, share experiences, and receive emotional support from others facing similar challenges.
6. **Lifestyle Modifications:** Encouraging students to adopt healthy lifestyle habits, such as regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and avoidance of substance abuse, can help improve their physical and mental well-being, reducing the severity of psychosomatic symptoms.
7. **Collaboration with Healthcare Providers:** Collaborating with healthcare providers, including physicians, psychologists, and other specialists, can ensure comprehensive assessment and management of psychosomatic disorders in college students. This interdisciplinary approach may involve medication management, referrals for specialized treatments, and coordination of care.

Overall, a multifaceted approach that combines psychoeducation, therapy, mindfulness practices, stress management techniques, social support, lifestyle modifications, and collaboration with healthcare providers is essential for effectively addressing psychosomatic disorders in college students and promoting their overall health and academic success.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

The study investigates depression prevalence among college students and explores various demographic factors' influence on depression levels. Utilizing the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), researchers assessed depression among 160 students from arts and science streams. Results indicated varying degrees of depression: 16.88% minimal, 35.62% mild, 41.25% moderate, and 6.25% high. Significantly, differences were observed between rural and urban students, indicating higher depression levels among urban students. However, no significant differences were found based on gender, religion, or academic stream. Additionally, social class, academic year, and job satisfaction showed no significant correlation with depression levels. This study underscores the importance of understanding depression prevalence and associated factors among college students for effective intervention and support strategies. [13]

This study investigated the correlation between psychological problems and common mental disorders among college students. Using Poisson regression models, researchers analyzed data from 2,449 students across two Dutch universities, measuring psychological problems with single items and mental disorders with Composite International Diagnostic Interview Screening Scales. The findings revealed strong associations between generalized anxiety disorder and psychological issues, particularly stress and low self-esteem, and moderate associations with test anxiety. Students experiencing three or more psychological problems exhibited significantly increased risks for generalized anxiety, major depression, panic disorder, and bipolar disorder. Population attributable fractions (PAFs) indicated that addressing psychological problems could substantially reduce the prevalence of mental disorders, with considerable impacts on generalized anxiety, panic disorder, bipolar disorder, and major depression. These results highlight the potential of targeting psychological problems for indirect prevention and intervention strategies in college students with mental disorders. [14]

The thesis aimed to explore the correlation between social stressors and psychosomatic problems among adolescents, considering family, school, and individual factors. Utilizing a cross-sectional study design, data were gathered via questionnaires completed by 3,764 adolescents aged 13 to 15 from public schools in Karlstad Municipality, Sweden. Multinomial logistic regression was employed to analyze associations between social stressors and self-reported psychosomatic problems. The results revealed several significant associations: school-related stressors such as schoolwork pressure, perceptions of school staff's

bullying interventions, and bullying victimization were linked to psychosomatic problems. Similarly, family-related stressors like family residency, parental unemployment, and parents' academic achievement expectations showed significant associations. Additionally, individual factors such as having a disability or long-term illness, lower self-efficacy, and adolescents' academic achievement expectations were associated with psychosomatic problems. These findings underscore the importance of addressing social stressors across various domains to promote adolescent well-being and prevent psychosomatic issues. [15]

In this cross-sectional study, the relationship between internet use, mental well-being, and psychosomatic symptoms among university students in Slovenia was investigated. Utilizing correlation matrix plots and multivariate logistic regression, researchers analyzed data from 464 students, predominantly healthcare (64.7%) and computer science (35.3%) students. The findings revealed significant associations between internet use and psychosomatic symptoms: headaches were correlated with increased computer use, particularly prevalent among computer science students, while spare time internet activities were linked to lower levels of nervousness. Interestingly, computer science students reported more psychological symptoms compared to their counterparts in health science. These results underscore the complex interplay between internet use, mental well-being, and somatic symptoms among university students, highlighting the need for further research and targeted interventions to mitigate potential negative outcomes associated with excessive internet use. [16]

This cross-sectional study aimed to investigate psychosocial problems among university students, particularly examining gender differences. With a sample of 25 boys and 25 girls selected through convenience sampling, the General Health Questionnaire was employed to assess psychosomatic, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression domains. Results indicated no significant gender differences in psychosomatic, anxiety/insomnia, and social dysfunction domains. However, university boys exhibited higher levels of depression compared to university girls. These findings underscore the importance of addressing gender-specific mental health needs and developing tailored intervention strategies to mitigate psychosocial problems among university students. Further research is warranted to explore contributing factors and refine intervention approaches. [17]

This study investigated the correlation between school-related stress, gender, and psychosomatic symptoms among 531 adolescents aged 13–16 from two compulsory schools in Norway. Results revealed that 18.1% reported being 'very much' affected by at least one psychosomatic symptom, with girls reporting significantly more symptoms than boys. The study identified four main categories of school-related stress: difficulties with peers, worries about school achievement, schoolwork pressure, and conflicts with parents/teachers. Multiple regression analyses indicated that scores for these stressors were significantly associated with psychosomatic symptoms, suggesting a link between symptom frequency and school adaptation. Additionally, gender differences were observed in stress sources, with girls experiencing more stress related to academic concerns, while boys reported more stress from conflicts with authority figures. Notably, stress from peer difficulties was more strongly correlated with psychosomatic symptoms in boys compared to girls, highlighting the nuanced interplay between gender, school stressors, and psychosomatic health among adolescents. [18]

For many students, college is a period of great stress. Not only do students have academic pressure, but others also face the difficult chores of separating and individuating from their original families, and some have to juggle several jobs and family obligations. Many college students either develop or worsen their mental health and drug use issues in this setting. Because college students are an exceptional demographic, it is important to identify key considerations when interacting with this group. This post begins by

outlining the importance of determining the age of beginning of present psychopathology and the frequency of mental and drug use disorders among college students. Afterwards, the ramifications of the worrying persistence of mental health issues among university students are summed up. Lastly, the article highlights several crucial elements of therapy for mental health issues among college students, such as including parents, collaborating with other healthcare professionals, and using technology to enhance treatment adherence. The authors suggest that practitioners may better assist college students if they educate themselves on the specific challenges faced by this demographic at this point in their lives. [19]

Adolescents often have psychosomatic diseases. The purpose of the research was to determine how common psychosomatic diseases are among Osijek's secondary school students and to compare two groups of students—one with a diagnosable condition and another without—based on demographic, familial, relational, and genetic elements. The survey comprised 508 secondary school students from Osijek, with 170 male and 338 female students, ranging in age from 15 to 19. There was a total of 372 students who participated in the study; 195 had psychosomatic responses, or 37.30% of the total; and 46 had psychosomatic diseases, or 9.06% of the total. The first group consisted of healthy students, who made up 53.54% of the total. As a result, psychosomatic responses affected 37.40 percent of the student population, whereas psychosomatic disorders affected 9.06 percent. Among psychosomatic responses, allergies accounted for 22.04%, dysmenorrhea for 21.01%, and acne for 21.01%. (16.00 percent). Asthma (4.33% of cases) and hypertension were the most frequent psychiatric illnesses (1.96 percent). The frequency of psychosomatic responses was higher in female students compared to male pupils. In comparison to the healthy student group, the group with psychosomatic illnesses had a much greater percentage of parents who had divorced (52.20%). (15.10 percent). When comparing parents of students with psychosomatic responses (47.90%) and those with psychosomatic disorders (28.70%), the incidence of psychosomatic disorders was much lower among parents of healthy students (67.40 percent). The findings of the study suggested that psychosomatic illnesses are more likely to develop in those who have a family history of the condition as well as in those who had traumatic events during childhood or adolescence, such as parental divorce. [20]

Students in their last year of high school had their psychosomatic symptoms evaluated in this research. Data was gathered from two upper secondary schools' student bodies on the most common psychosomatic illnesses using Dr. Hemalatha Natesan's Case Study Schedule (one Government and one Private). Two or three psychosomatic symptoms were reported by the participants in this research. It was also noted that private school pupils had three to four symptoms on average, compared to only two among children enrolled in public schools. Headache was the second most common symptom, followed by Confusion (42%). (38 percent). Chest pain was the most inferred symptom, followed by loss of appetite (3%). (7 percent). [21]

This study investigated psychosomatic disorders among 385 medical students from two teaching hospitals using the Enugu Somatization Scale (ESS). The prevalence of psychosomatic disorder was 14.3%, with similar proportions among males and females (14.2% and 14.4%, respectively). Analysis based on features revealed that 11.4% exhibited head features, while 7.8% had body features of psychosomatic disorder. There were no statistically significant differences in prevalence based on gender, age ( $\leq 24$  years vs.  $> 24$  years), or socioeconomic status. Male students had similar odds of psychosomatic disorder as females, and those from middle and lower socioeconomic classes were marginally more likely to experience psychosomatic disorders than those from upper socioeconomic classes. The findings highlight

psychosomatic disorders as an emerging mental health concern among medical students in Nigerian universities, emphasizing the need for timely intervention and support to prevent further escalation. [22] To the best of our knowledge, this is the first research to examine a large random sample of college students' social support system in connection to their mental health. The results of this research are based on a Web-based survey that was sent to 1,378 students at a big public institution, with a response rate of 57%. Our findings provide credence to the idea that students who identify with marginalized groups are more likely to experience social isolation. This includes students from racial or ethnic minorities, those with foreign status, and those from low-income backgrounds. Furthermore, the authors discovered that compared to students with high quality social support, those with poorer quality support were six times more likely to suffer from mental health issues, such as depressive symptoms. These findings have the potential to aid school officials and medical professionals in their efforts to better identify at-risk youth for mental illness and provide effective treatments to combat this urgent and expanding public health crisis. [23]

## CONCLUSION

This review paper sheds light on the pressing issue of psychosomatic disorders among college students, highlighting their prevalence, risk factors, and consequences. By examining the intricate interplay between physical symptoms and underlying psychological causes, the paper emphasizes the need for comprehensive approaches to address these disorders. The exploration of coping strategies, interventions, and preventive measures underscores the importance of proactive measures in mitigating the impact of psychosomatic disorders on college students' well-being and academic performance. Overall, this review underscores the urgency of recognizing and addressing psychosomatic disorders as a significant risk factor in college environments, advocating for tailored support systems and resources to promote the holistic health of college students.

## REFERENCES

1. H. B. Jethloja, P. B. Unadkat, R. K. Raichura, J. N. Rana, and N. S. Ved, "Correlation between Occurrence of Psychosomatic Disorders and Age during COVID-19 Lockdown," *J. Clin. Diagnostic Res.*, no. July 2020, pp. 10–12, 2021, doi: 10.7860/jcdr/2021/46716.15093.
2. B. Katherine H., "The Effect of Anxiety and Depression on College Students' Academic Performance: Exploring Social Support as a Moderator," *Digit. Commons @ ACU*, p. 51, 2017.
3. A. K. Satsangi and M. P. Brugnoli, "Anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms in palliative care: From neuro-psychobiological response to stress, to symptoms' management with clinical hypnosis and meditative states," *Ann. Palliat. Med.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 75–111, 2018, doi: 10.21037/apm.2017.07.01.
4. D. Ochnik *et al.*, "Mental health prevalence and predictors among university students in nine countries during the COVID-19 pandemic: a cross-national study," *Sci. Rep.*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1–13, 2021, doi: 10.1038/s41598-021-97697-3.
5. M. A. B. Siddik, A. Ali, S. Miah, M. Hasan, M. Ahmed, and T. C. Sunna, "Psychological disorders among college going students: A post Covid-19 insight from Bangladesh," *J. Affect. Disord. Reports*, vol. 15, no. November 2023, p. 100686, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.jadr.2023.100686.
6. T. N. Uise, *The Psychosomatic Assessment Strategies to Improve Clinical Practice Persistent somatization Allostatic overload Phobic avoidance Perfectionism Lack of assertiveness*, vol. 32. 2018.
7. Z. Feizollahi, H. Asadzadeh, and S. R. Mousavi, "Prediction of Symptoms of Psychosomatic Disorders

- in University Students Based on Perfectionism Mediated by Smartphone Addiction,” *Casp. J. Heal. Res.*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 151–158, 2022, doi: 10.32598/cjhr.7.3.421.1.7.
8. R. VanderLind, “Effects of Mental Health on Student Learning,” *Learn. Assist. Rev.*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 39–58, 2017.
  9. B. Pikó, K. Barabás, and K. Boda, “Frequency of common psychosomatic symptoms and its influence on self- perceived health students,” vol. 23, no. 5, 2020, doi: 10.1093/eurpub/7.3.243.
  10. R. Arora, “Stress, Anxiety and psychomatic disease in college students.” 2023.
  11. B. Gupta, “Efficacy of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy on Dysfunctional Attitude among Psychosomatic Patients: Case Reports,” *Int. J. Indian Psychol.*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2017, doi: 10.25215/0501.051.
  12. M. Malobabic, D. Živković, and N. Randelović, “the Severity of Psychosomatic Problems and Procrastination in Students,” *Facta Univ. Ser. Teaching, Learn. Teach. Educ.*, no. 1, p. 109, 2020, doi: 10.22190/futlte1902109m.
  13. T. Karmakar and S. K. Behera, “Depression among the College Students: An Empirical Study,” *Educ. Quest- An Int. J. Educ. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 163, 2017, doi: 10.5958/2230-7311.2017.00024.1.
  14. P. Cuijpers *et al.*, “The Associations of Common Psychological Problems With Mental Disorders Among College Students,” *Front. Psychiatry*, vol. 12, no. September, pp. 1–9, 2021, doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2021.573637.
  15. V. Lönnfjord, *Social stressors and their association with psychosomatic problems among adolescents Implications for school social work.* 2021.
  16. G. Stiglic, R. M. Creber, and L. C. Budler, “Internet Use and Psychosomatic Symptoms among University Students: Cross-Sectional Study,” *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2022, doi: 10.3390/ijerph19031774.
  17. E. Rajkumar, K. V Sooraj, B. H. Sandeep, and C. Harish, “Psychosocial problems among students of Central University of Karnataka : A comparative study,” *Int. J. Sci. Study*, vol. 3, no. 9, pp. 44–47, 2015, doi: 10.17354/ijss/2015/552.
  18. T. A. Murberg and E. Bru, “School-related stress and psychosomatic symptoms among norwegian adolescents,” *Sch. Psychol. Int.*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 317–332, 2014, doi: 10.1177/0143034304046904.
  19. P. Pedrelli, M. Nyer, A. Yeung, C. Zulauf, and T. Wilens, “College Students: Mental Health Problems and Treatment Considerations,” *Acad Psychiatry*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 503–511, 2015, doi: 10.1007/s40596-014-0205-9.College.
  20. O. Koić, P. Filaković, V. Dordević, E. Koić, I. Požgain, and D. Laufer, “Psychosomatic disorders in secondary school students in Osijek,” *Acta Clin. Croat.*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 257–267, 2014.
  21. K. G. M. Jereward and U.L. Bhuvanewari, “Psychosomatic Symptoms and Higher Secondary School Students,” *Indian J. Appl. Res.*, no. 11, pp. 37–39, 2019.
  22. J. M. Chinawa, A. R. C. Nwokocha, P. C. Manyike, A. T. Chinawa, E. C. Aniwada, and A. C. Ndukuba, “Psychosomatic problems among medical students: A myth or reality?,” *Int. J. Ment. Health Syst.*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–5, 2016, doi: 10.1186/s13033-016-0105-3.
  23. J. Hefner and D. Eisenberg, “Social Support and Mental Health Among College Students,” *Am. J. Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 79, no. 4, pp. 491–499, 2019, doi: 10.1037/a0016918.