

Mental Health Awareness Among Students – An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Mental health has become an increasingly important issue among students, yet many still hesitate to seek help when they are struggling. This study examines the barriers that stops students from reaching out for support and explores whether people with mental health issues are treated differently within the student community. The survey responses reveal that fear of being judged by others is the most common barrier to help-seeking. Many students also feel that their problems are not serious enough to require support, while others mention high therapy costs, lack of time because of academic pressure, and not knowing where to go for help. These findings show that both social stigma and practical difficulties continue to affect students' willingness to access mental health services.

The results also suggest that mental health stigma is still present among students as a considerable number of respondents believe that individuals with mental health issues are treated differently. This may create an environment where students feel uncomfortable discussing their struggles. When mental health concerns are ignored, students may delay support until their condition becomes more serious. Therefore, creating a safe and understanding atmosphere is essential for encouraging early help-seeking.

In addition, improving access to support services may help remove practical barriers that stop students from getting help. Overall, this study shows that both stigma and accessibility play a major role in shaping students mental health behaviour. Strengthening support systems within educational without fear.

The study shows that students face both emotional and practical barriers when it comes to expressing their problems. The findings also suggest that stigma remains a strong influence within the student community, affecting how mental health issues are viewed and experienced. Overall, the abstract highlights the need for greater awareness, open communication, and stronger support systems in educational settings so that students can seek help without hesitation or fear of being judged.

Keywords: Mental health, fear of being judged, stress, academic pressure, anxiety, counselling.

Introduction

Mental health awareness among students has become increasingly important in today's fast-paced and highly competitive world, where young individuals constantly face pressure to perform well academically, meet expectations from family and society, and keep up with social comparisons. In the middle of all these demands, many students silently struggle with stress, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional challenges, often without fully understanding what they are going through or how to deal with it. The lack of open conversations and the fear of being judged or misunderstood prevent many of them from seeking help.

This is where mental health awareness plays a crucial role, as it helps students recognize that their feelings are valid and that it is completely OKAY to ask for help when needed. Awareness not only educates students about common mental health issues but also encourages empathy, self-care, and emotional strength, allowing them to better manage their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, when schools and colleges actively promote mental health awareness through counselling services, supportive environments, and open discussions, it creates a sense of safety and belongingness among students. Such efforts can reduce stigma and make it easier for students to speak up without fear.

Mental health is something we often ignore until it starts affecting our daily life. Especially for college students it is a phase filled with pressure, expectations, competition, and major life changes. Many students move away from home, face academic stress, struggle with relationships, and worry about their future. All of this can quietly affect their mental well-being.

Mental health awareness helps students understand that it is ok to feel stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, and more importantly, that they are not alone. It encourages open conversations, reduces stigma, and helps students seek support when needed. By creating awareness, colleges can build a healthier and more supportive environment where students can grow not just academically, but emotionally too.

Behind the smiles, laughter, and busy college life, many students silently struggle with their mental health. What looks like a normal day filled with classes, friends, and activities can often hide stress, anxiety, loneliness, and self-doubt. College is a beautiful phase of life, but it also comes with pressure, the pressure to succeed, to fit in, to make the right choices, to not let parents down and to build a good future.

Many students hesitate to speak about what they feel, fearing judgment or misunderstanding. They carry their burdens quietly, believing they have to handle everything on their own. This is why mental health awareness is so important. It reminds students that their feelings are valid, and reminding them that asking for help is a sign of strength not weakness, and that they are never truly alone in their struggles.

Creating awareness is not just about understanding mental health — it is about creating a safe space where students feel seen, heard, and supported. Because sometimes, all a person needs is to know that there is always someone who cares.

Literature Review

According to Hernández-Torrano and his colleagues explored mental health conditions among university students and found that many experience significant levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional pressure during their academic journey. The study points out that although these issues are common, awareness and willingness to seek professional help remain relatively low. The authors stress the importance of universities taking active steps to promote awareness and provide accessible mental health support systems.

According to Research by Shim et al. (2022) examined mental health education, awareness, and stigma among college students, finding that many students lack adequate knowledge about mental illness, which contributes to persistent stigmatization of those experiencing mental health challenges. The study highlighted that increased mental health education within college settings significantly improves student awareness and reduces stigmatizing attitudes toward peers with mental illness.

According to Ahorsu et al. (2021) investigated the effect of a peer-led intervention that combined mental health promotion with coping-strategy-based workshops on university students in Hong Kong, finding that such interventions significantly improved mental health awareness, help-seeking behavior, and overall wellbeing among participants.

According to Shivani and Judge (2022) explored mental health awareness and stigma associated with mental illness among college students, revealing that a considerable proportion of students hold misconceptions about mental health conditions, contributing to deeply rooted stigmatizing attitudes within campus communities. The study found that limited mental health awareness among students not only perpetuates negative stereotypes but also discourages individuals experiencing mental health difficulties from openly discussing or seeking help for their conditions.

According to Worsley et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of review-level evidence examining interventions designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of university and college students, concluding that a broad range of institutional, psychological, and community-based interventions have demonstrated positive outcomes in improving student mental health. The review emphasized that multi-component interventions addressing both individual and environmental factors were consistently more effective than single-strategy approaches in promoting sustained psychological wellbeing among student populations.

According to Yang et al. (2022) conducted a bibliometric study mapping the knowledge landscape of students' mental health status during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing a substantial surge in research attention toward student mental health challenges triggered by the global health crisis. The study found that anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep disturbances were the most frequently reported mental health concerns among students during the pandemic, with academic disruptions, social isolation, and uncertainty serving as primary contributing factors.

According to Lai and Yeung (2022) addressed the growing mental health crisis among higher education students in their editorial, highlighting that university students represent a particularly vulnerable population facing unique psychological stressors including academic pressure, financial difficulties, social transitions, and career uncertainties. The authors emphasized that mental health problems among higher education students are alarmingly prevalent globally, with rates of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress continuing to rise across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

According to Hyseni Duraku et al. (2023) examined the relationship between mental health, study skills, social support, and barriers to seeking psychological help among university students, finding that poor mental health significantly undermined students' academic performance and overall ability to engage effectively with their studies. The study revealed that strong social support networks played a crucial protective role in buffering students against psychological distress, while the absence of such support was closely associated with heightened vulnerability to mental health difficulties.

According to Giroux and Geiss (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of a student-led mental health awareness campaign, finding that peer-driven initiatives were successful in meaningfully improving mental health knowledge and reducing stigmatizing attitudes among participating college students. The study demonstrated that students who were exposed to the awareness campaign showed notably greater understanding of mental health conditions and expressed increased willingness to seek professional help compared to those who had not participated.

According to Gere and Salimi (2025) investigated mental health literacy, stigma, and help-seeking behavior among Black male college students at historically Black universities, finding that despite being in culturally affirming academic environments, this population continued to demonstrate significant reluctance toward seeking professional mental health support. The study revealed that internalized stigma, masculine norms, and cultural beliefs surrounding mental health played a substantial role in discouraging

Black male students from acknowledging psychological distress and pursuing available mental health resources.

According to Sagar-Ouriaghli et al. (2023) examined a series of gender-sensitive mental health feasibility interventions aimed at improving help-seeking behavior among male university students, finding that traditional masculine norms and gender-role expectations represented the most prominent barriers preventing men from acknowledging and addressing their mental health needs. The study demonstrated that interventions specifically designed to align with male attitudes and communication preferences were significantly more effective in engaging male students and encouraging positive help-seeking behaviors compared to generic mental health programs.

Research Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to assess the level of awareness among the students and mainly focusing on the under graduate and post graduate students, as in the recent years they are becoming prone to mental health struggle which is ultimately leading them to taking their own life. The academic pressure, future stress, family pressure, social expectations and many such other reasons are the main reasons for mental health struggle. This survey consisted of seven questions covering key areas including awareness of campus mental health services, recognition of mental health symptoms, primary sources of stress, help-seeking behaviour, barriers to seeking support, perceived stigma within the student community, and general opinions on mental health awareness.

A total of 37 to 38 college students participated in the study, selected through convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to respond. This sampling method was deemed appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and the limitations of time and accessibility.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically, and participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, as no personally identifiable information like email id's was collected. All data were used exclusively for academic purposes only. The data gathered from the closed-ended items were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency counts and percentage distributions, as generated by Google Forms.

Results are presented through pie charts and bar graphs and are explained in detail for better understanding so as to facilitate clear visual interpretation and better understanding. The single open-ended item was reviewed qualitatively to identify recurring themes and general student sentiments regarding mental health awareness.

Objectives

1. To assess the level of mental health awareness among students specially among the undergraduate and postgraduate students, including their understanding of mental health symptoms and available support services.
2. To identify and understand the major sources of stress and mainly what exactly students face in their daily life apart from stress, anxiety, family pressure and social expectations. To examine students help-seeking behaviour, along with the barriers and stigma associated with accessing mental health support.

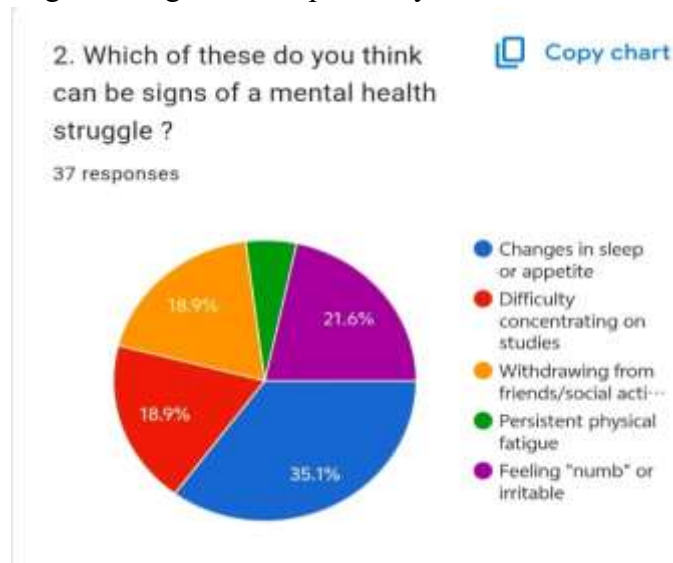
Findings and Solutions

1. The pie chart shows students' awareness of mental health support services in their college. A majority of respondents (67.6%) answered "Yes," indicating they are aware of these services. This reflects a

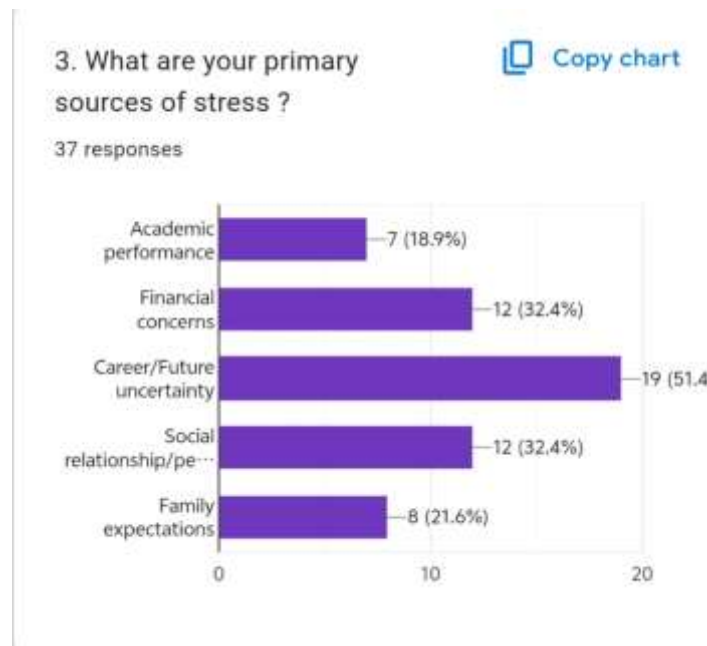
generally good level of awareness among students. However, 21.6% reported that they have heard about the services but do not know their location. This suggests a gap between awareness and accessibility. Additionally, 10.8% of students are completely unaware of such services. This highlights the need for better communication and promotion. Colleges should provide clearer information about where and how to access these services. Increasing visibility can encourage more students to seek help when needed. Overall, while awareness is high, accessibility and clarity still need improvement.



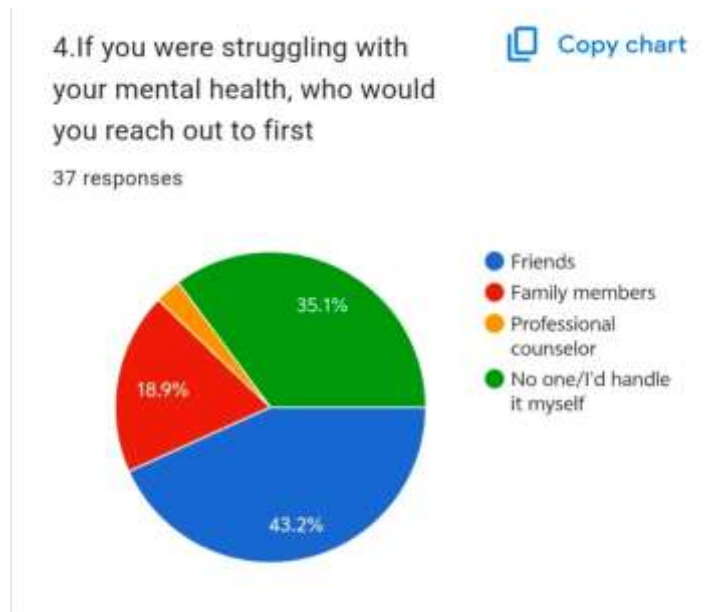
2. Most respondents (35.1%) identified changes in sleep or appetite as a key sign of mental health struggles. Feeling numb or irritable (21.6%) was the next most recognized sign, followed by difficulty concentrating and social withdrawal (18.9% each). Only 5.4% recognized persistent physical fatigue. This shows that students are more aware of emotional and behavioral symptoms than physical ones. It also suggests a need to spread awareness that mental health issues can affect the body as well. Improving understanding of all signs can help in early identification and support.



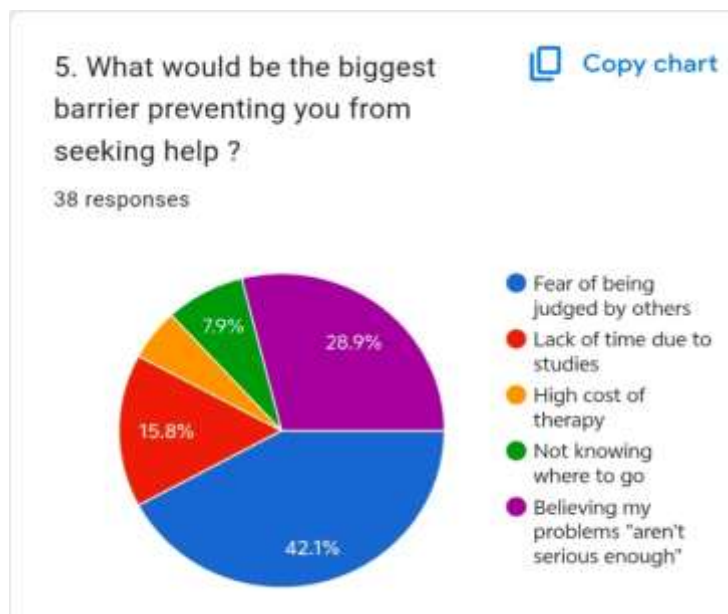
3. The graph shows the primary sources of stress among students based on 37 responses. The most common source of stress is career/future uncertainty, reported by 51.4% of respondents. This indicates that students are highly concerned about their future and job prospects. Financial concerns and social relationships/peer pressure are the next major stress factors, each at 32.4%. These factors highlight the impact of money issues and social life on students' mental well-being. Family expectations contribute to stress for 21.6% of students. Meanwhile, academic performance is reported by 18.9% of respondents. Although academics are important, they appear to be a relatively lower stress factor compared to others. Overall, non-academic factors play a significant role in student stress. This suggests the need for guidance, counselling, and career support programs in colleges.



4. The chart shows who students would reach out to first when struggling with mental health. Most respondents (43.2%) said they would turn to friends, indicating strong peer support. A significant portion (35.1%) chose no one, preferring to handle issues on their own. This suggests that many students may hesitate to seek help. Family members are the next preferred option, with 18.9% of responses. Only a very small percentage would approach a professional counsellor. This indicates low utilization of professional mental health services. The results highlight the importance of friends as a primary support system. However, the high number of students choosing isolation is a concern. Overall, there is a need to encourage help-seeking behaviour and promote counselling services.

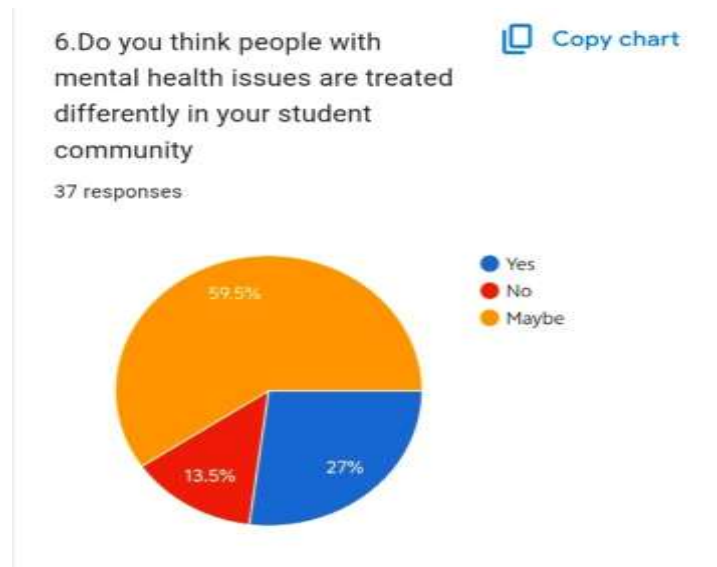


5. The pie chart illustrates the primary obstacles preventing 38 individuals from seeking help, likely in a mental health context. The most significant barrier is the fear of being judged by others, which accounts for 42.1% of the responses. This is followed by 28.9% of participants who believe their problems "aren't serious enough," suggesting a common tendency toward self-minimization. Practical issues also play a role, with 15.8% citing a lack of time due to studies and 7.9% admitting they do not know where to go for assistance. Interestingly, the high cost of therapy represents the smallest slice of the chart. Overall, the data suggests that internal perceptions and social stigma are much larger hurdles than logistical or financial factors for this specific group.



6. This pie chart displays survey results from 37 respondents regarding whether people with mental health issues face differential treatment within their student community. The most striking finding is that a significant majority, 59.5%, answered "Maybe," indicating a high level of uncertainty or observation of inconsistent social behaviours. Meanwhile, 27% of participants definitively feel that these individuals are treated differently, highlighting a clear perception of stigma or social division. In

contrast, only a small minority of 13.5% believe that no differential treatment exists. When combined, the "Yes" and "Maybe" categories suggest that roughly 86.5% of the community is at least wary of how mental health is perceived by peers. This data points toward a student environment where social acceptance is not fully guaranteed, potentially contributing to the "fear of judgment" noted in your previous chart. Overall, the results underscore a need for greater clarity and empathy regarding mental health awareness on campus.



7. This bar graph presents the qualitative opinions of 38 respondents regarding mental health awareness. Unlike the previous other graphs this data is completely based on the individuals perspective about the mental health awareness and their knowledge on it. Where it tracks individual open-ended responses rather than broad categories. Most of the unique sentiments—such as "Good," "Easy," and "Proper"—received only a single vote (2.6% each), resulting in a flat distribution across the horizontal axis. But unfortunately many appeared to remain blank or stay quiet for this question as the highest response received was the word "Nothing," both at 7.9% (3 responses each). This lack of consensus indicates a wide variety of personal perspectives or perhaps a lack of a unified definition of what mental health awareness looks like. Overall, the graph reflects a diverse range of individual thoughts, though the high number of unique, low-frequency answers makes it difficult to pinpoint a single dominant community opinion.



CONCLUSION

This study highlights that mental health awareness among students is gradually improving, but several challenges still prevent effective support and open communication. While a majority of students are aware of the mental health services available in their college, a significant portion remains either unaware, uncertain or stopping behind with the fear of being judged, which clearly indicates that awareness is still incomplete and needs to be strengthened.

The findings show that students are able to recognize some common signs of mental health struggles, such as changes in sleep and emotional instability. However, limited understanding of other symptoms suggests the need for more comprehensive mental health education. The study also reveals that career uncertainty, financial concerns, and social pressures are the major sources of stress, reflecting the complex environment students are navigating today.

A key concern identified is the hesitation to seek professional help or at least open up to a trusted person. Most students prefer turning to friends or handling problems on their own, while very few approach counsellors. This behaviour is strongly influenced by fear of judgment, the belief that their problems are not serious, and lack of clarity about available support systems. Additionally, the perception that individuals with mental health issues may be treated differently further discourages open expression.

Overall, this study makes it clear that both emotional barriers, such as stigma and fear, and practical barriers, such as lack of awareness and accessibility, continue to affect students' mental health behaviour. Therefore, educational institutions must take active steps to create a more supportive and inclusive environment. By promoting awareness, encouraging open conversations, and improving access to mental health services, colleges can help students feel more comfortable seeking help and prioritizing their well-being.

FUTURE SCOPE

The present study provides useful insights into mental health awareness among students. However, there is a significant scope for further research and improvement in this area. Future studies can be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample size, including students from different ages, academic streams, and regions, to gain a broader and more representative understanding of student mental health.

Further research can also adopt a mixed-method approach, combining surveys with interviews or focus group discussions to explore students thoughts, feelings, and experiences in greater depth. This would help in understanding not just what students feel, but also *why* they feel that way.

Another important area for future work is evaluating the effectiveness of mental health programs and awareness campaigns within educational institutions. Researchers can study how counselling services, workshops, and peer support systems impact students willingness to seek help over time.

In addition, future studies can focus on specific factors such as gender differences, academic pressure across different courses, the role of social media, and the impact of family expectations and comparison on mental health. Exploring these aspects can provide more targeted solutions.

Finally, there is scope to develop and test intervention strategies, such as mental health education programs, stress management training, and awareness initiatives, to determine what methods are most effective in reducing stigma and improving help-seeking behaviour among students.

Overall, future research can contribute to building stronger, more inclusive, and supportive educational environments where mental health is given equal importance as much as academic success.

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