

Emotional disturbances in low and high achieving students

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the differences in depression, anxiety, and stress between low-and high-achieving students. 274 undergraduate students of the Swarna Bharathi Institute of Technology, Khammam were involved in this study. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) was used to measure the depression, anxiety, and stress among students. Independent Sample T-test was used to differentiate the depression, anxiety, and stress between low-and high-achieving students. The findings of this study revealed that there were significant differences in depression, anxiety, and stress between low-and high-achieving students. The findings of the study will be useful in assisting educators, counselors, psychologists, and researchers to develop strategies to enhance student's psychological well-being.

Key Words: Depression.

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Received Date: 08/06/2018 Revised Date: 11/07/2018 Accepted Date: 02/08/2018

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26611/107721>

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:

www.medpulse.in

Accessed Date:
06 August 2018

INTRODUCTION

Performance in academic life demands all aspects of well being. Psychological stability is indeed an important predictor that could contribute to high academic achievement. Students who are physically and psychologically stable are expected to perform better compared to those who are not physically, mentally and psychologically fit, like those experiencing depression, anxiety, stress may face problem in managing academic performance.¹ Psychiatric morbidity such as pathological stress, depression and anxiety in this period constitute a major public health concern and can result in serious consequences, either academically, emotionally or physically. Studies suggest high rates of psychological

morbidity among university students worldwide are especially depression and anxiety.² Bernstein *et al.*, said that these psychological problems lead to difficulties in concentration, lack of motivation and interest, poor attendance and physical ill health such as headache and fatigability which affect the student's academic achievement. Williamson *et al.*, reported that stressful life events are significantly elevated in anxious and depressed youths, thus could lead to low performance in academics. Porter *et al.*, study showed that 60% of the students left university without finishing their degrees as they are unable to cope up with the stress.³ Steinberg and Darling mentioned that 50% of students who consulted Mental Health Service complained of difficulties in studying revealed anxiety, stress, tension, depression. They reported that these conditions contributed to poor grades in courses. The overlapping of these symptoms can lead to all sorts of academic problems that can have impact to academic achievement among students. Abouserie *et al.*, study indicate that over 75% of college students report being moderately stressed and over 10% report experiencing severe levels of stress.⁴ In addition to academic performance demands, college life itself provides additional unique stressors such as fiscal challenges involving tuition and book expenses, peer

relationship adjustments, living arrangements adjustments, time constraints, and a host of bothersome daily hassles.⁴ The higher the level of stress the more it cause negative effects on students mental and physical health.⁵ Among adolescents and young adults, emotional disorders are a serious risk to mental health which could lead to the further development of depression episodes and sometimes even influence them negatively during crucial phases of their life.⁶ Aldwin *et al.*, study showed that academic stress often leads to outcomes such as severe clinical depression, mild anxiety disorder. The high rates of depression and anxiety among university students have major implications, not only with psychological morbidity that will have adverse effects on students' health, development, educational attainment and quality of life, but also the deteriorating influence on their own families, institutions and even on other people's lives.⁷

Depression Among Students: A depressed mood is the experience of unhappiness or distress. Depression may involve feelings of being sad, weak, disappointed, frustrated, despairing, helpless, and hopeless (Sarason and Sarason 2002). Many depressed individuals may be unable to perform well in academic life because they do not have courage in what they are doing. They feel that they cannot reach the standard set for them which make them disappointed and perceive things negatively and consider themselves as failures that can definitely contribute to many serious problems in their academic life such as poor grades. It can be said that depression does affect academic achievement of the students. This means the higher the depression level of the students, the lower is their academic performance.

Anxiety Among Students: Anxiety is a psychological disorder that is associated with significant suffering and impairment in functioning. It is a blend of thoughts and feelings characterized by a sense of uncontrollable and unpredictably over potentially adverse life events (Wilson, Nathan, O'leary, and Clark, 1996). Anxiety in general is expected to have a negative effect on performance. In a study conducted by Anson *et al.* (1984) on the relationship between anxiety and academic performance, it was found that anxiety was significantly and negatively correlated with grades obtained by the students. Another study on anxiety was conducted by Seligmen and Wuyek (2007). They found that highly-anxious students were significantly more likely to score lower on measures of academic achievement and peer acceptance. It showed that anxiety can directly influence students academic achievement and reported that anxiety could effect students academic achievement in the sense that students with high anxiety level perform poorer compared to those with low anxiety.

Stress Among Students: Stress is a mechanism of any internal or external demand made upon the body (Dusselier *et al.*, 2005). Stress is considered as a state of individual that result from their interaction with the environment that is perceived as too demanding and a threat to their well-being. Stress was found to be a part of students life and could give impact on how students cope with the demands of academic life. When education is perceived as a threat, stress can elicit feelings of hopelessness and a foreboding sense of loss, thus leading to lower academic achievement.⁸ The findings highlighted that the presence of stress could affect students performance in their academic life. Thus, the higher the stress level, the lower the academic achievement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Place of study: Swarna Bharathi Institute of Technology, Khammam.

Study design: Cross sectional study.

Study period: 1st July 2014 - 1st June 2015.

Study sample: 274 students.(137 were high achieving and 137 are low achieving students)

Materials: DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) by Lovibond *et al.*, It is a 42 item self reported instrument designed to measure the three related negative emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress with 14 items per scale. Each item is scored from 0 ("did not apply to me at all") to 3 ("applied to me very much, or most of the time") in terms of how much the item applied within the past week.

Inclusion Criteria: All students who had given informed verbal consent for the study.

Exclusion Criteria: All students who have not given verbal consent for the study

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to examine the differences between psychological problems between low and high achieving students. 274 undergraduate students were selected as participants in this study. As per the conducted study, there is significant difference between the high and low achieving students. The hypothesis revealed the results as expected that...

1. Low achieving students are having high depression as compared to high achieving students,
2. Low achieving students are having high anxiety as compared to high achieving students, and
3. Low achieving students are having high stress as compared to high achieving students.

The findings of the study clearly indicated that there were differences in psychological problems between low and

high achieving students. This further supports the importance of recognizing and managing psychological problems, so as not to let the problems affect academic performance. Students and educators should be aware of the existence of psychological problems so that these problems might be under control. DeRosier *et al.* study showed that College students (especially fresher's) report high levels of stress.⁹ Eberhart *et al.* study said that life stressors may potentially trigger negative symptoms in individuals who are vulnerable to developing certain mental disorders. Psychological distress may result in withdrawal from study as first-year students were found to be twice as likely to drop out as their counterparts in the second and third years (Curtis and Curtis, 1999).¹⁰

RESULTS

Table 1:

PARAMETERS	HIGH	LOW	T value	P value
	Mean± SD	Mean ±SD		
DEPRESSION	13.02±8.17	32.68 ±2.34	27.07	<0.001*
ANXEITY	12.97 ±7.71	31.28± 2.05	26.84	<0.001*
STRESS	15.03± 7.79	32.9± 2.24	25.86	<0.001*

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence with regards to negative effects of psychological problems on students' achievement. Specifically the findings suggested that an increase in psychological problems may lead to a decrease in academic achievement among students. Anxiety and depression prevailing among students negatively affects their academic performance due to low self-esteem "children with low self-esteem" are less interactive while "children with high self-esteem. Depression, anxiety and stress have been found to be interlinked that negatively affect the academic achievement. Thus greater the "depression", "anxiety" and "worry" poorer the academic performance in students.¹¹ Thus students who are confident and expressive can execute their superiority more than those who suffer from depression, anxiety and stress. By

concentrating on this area, it could be helpful for the educators, psychologists to reduce emotional disturbances among students which could benefit the students to handle themselves and to increase their academic achievement.

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Source of Support: None Declared
Conflict of Interest: None Declared