

## **Prevalence of Psychological Distress: Gender Differences among University and College Students and Teachers**

**Arooj Zahid<sup>1</sup> & Syed Azizuddin Agha<sup>2</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Present study explored the prevalence of psychological distress among students and teachers (N = 170) of different colleges and universities of Quetta city. Mean age of students was (M = 23.99, SD = 7.82). Mean age of teachers was (M = 19.30, SD = 9.28). This study was based on quantitative approach with cross sectional design. Psychological distress was measured through Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. Results revealed that female (23.61%) experienced more psychological distress than male (21.94%), however this difference was non-significant (t = -1.30, P > .193). The results further indicated non-significant differences in psychological distress on the basis of ethnicity.*

**Keywords:** Psychological distress; Gender differences; Balochistan

### **Introduction**

Psychological distress refers to perceived incapability to cope successfully with social demands (Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan, & McNamara, 2014). Researchers such as Horwitz (2007) defined psychological distress as a temporary emotional reaction toward stress that, if not cured, is pathological and consequently it will change into depression. Other researchers, for instance Wheaton (2007), noted that psychological distress is proportionately balanced mental state that influences social and daily life activities. A study by Barlow and Durand (2005) has reported that psychological distress is a condition characterized by signs of anxiety and depression. Cassidy, Connor, Howe, and Warden (2004) and Drapeau et al. (2010) have also reported that anxiety and depression are the indicators of psychological distress. Anxiety and depression are the prevailing mental health issues and they usually coexist (Brown, Harris, & Eales, 1996; Eaton et al., 2012).

---

<sup>1</sup> M.Phil Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Balochistan.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Balochistan. Correspondence. Email. azizphd14@nip.edu.pk

Psychological distress is one of the integral public health problems across the world which is affecting young population to a great extent. Cvetkovski, Reavley, and Jorm (2012) and Leahy et al. (2010) have reported that the prevalence of mental health issues are common in society and the ratio of psychological disorders among university students are comparatively higher. They have suggested that this is owing to the reasons that university students have to confront with number of stressors like workload, academic pressure and pressure to get success. These stressors may cause psychological problems in students and put negative impact on their academic achievement. The very common mental health issues observed among university students are depression and anxiety. Studies across the globe have shown higher proportion of these psychological disorders among students.

Latest researches show that more than 50% of university students express signs of depression soon after starting their studies. Researches in Europe and North America have indicated that college and university students express high level of psychological distress compare to common population (Verger, Guagliardo, Gilbert, Rouillon, & Kovess-Masfety, 2010; Dahlin, Joneborg, & Runeson, 2005).

Various studies have reported gender variations in psychological distress. Studies conducted in different countries have demonstrated that female experience high level of psychological distress than male (Robert, Abbott, & McKee, 2010; Marchand, Drapeau, & Beaulieu-Prevost, 2012). A study by Wamala, Bostrom, and Nyqvist (2006) on the sample of men and women in Sweden concluded that psychological distress was observed 22% in female and 14% in male. Present study examined whether there is gender and ethnicity based differences in psychological distress among college and university students and teachers.

Researchers have indicated that college and university students are endangered to mental health issues. Increasing level of psychological distress among students has led to escalated public apprehension in western societies, however in eastern societies their problem remains usually unrevealed due to this the mental health of the students deserves our special attention in Pakistan (Kumar, shaheen, Rasool, & Shafi, 2016).

### **Research Design and Sample**

The present study was descriptive and cross sectional design was used.

### **Objectives**

- To investigate prevalence rate of psychological distress among university and college students and teachers.
- To examine variations in psychological distress on the basis of gender.
- To investigate differences in psychological distress on the basis of ethnicity.

### **Hypothesis**

Female teachers and students experience greater psychological distress than male teachers and students.

### **Sample**

Purposive convenient sample ( $N = 170$ ) of male and female teachers and students was taken from university of Balochistan, Govt girls degree college and Musa Boys college Quetta. The study included those students who were enrolled in universities and colleges at the time of data collection.

### **Questionnaires**

**Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K 10).** Psychological distress was measured through Kessler Psychological Distress Scale originally developed by Kessler in 1992. The present study used an Urdu version of K10 scale. The K10 contains 10 items that records level of psychological distress of the participants during last 30 days. It has five response options ranging from 1(None of the time) to 5(All the time). Score range is 10 to 50. There are no reverse coded items on the scale and its alpha reliability is  $\alpha = .93$ .

### **Procedure**

The data was collected after getting permission from the authorities of universities and colleges. The questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students after obtaining their consent and the researcher collected these questionnaires from them on the spot as they were filled in.

### **Results**

Table 1 shows demographic description of the sample. Table 2 shows mean score ( $M = 22.88$ ) and ( $SD = 8.40$ ) on psychological distress. Skewness and kurtosis were both in acceptable range. Table 3 indicates that female experience slightly more psychological distress as compared to male however this difference is non-significant ( $t = -1.30, p > .193$ ).

### **Discussion**

The present study aimed at investigating the prevalence of psychological distress and gender and ethnic variations in psychological distress. The findings revealed that female experienced slightly greater psychological distress than male however, this difference was non-

significant. This finding is somewhat in line with the findings reported in the earlier literature. Researches in Pakistan and other countries have consistently reported gender differences in psychological distress. Najma and Hussain (2015) on the sample of men and women in Gilgit Baltistan identified higher psychological distress in women than men. Another study by Warmala et al. (2006) in Sweden reported that psychological distress was observed 22% in female and 14% in male. In western countries women are more likely to face psychological distress like depression and anxiety comparatively men. Whereas, Khalid and Aslam (2011) on the sample of epileptic patients in Islamabad and Muzzafrabad reported that psychological distress was higher among male patients rather than female patients. In a study with the sample of Chinese adults Kong, Zhao, and You (2012) found no gender variations in psychological distress. Studies by Chou (2007) and Kilkkinen et al. (2007) also reported no gender variations in psychological distress.

The present study findings also revealed non-significant differences in psychological distress on the basis of ethnicity. Past studies have indicated some ethnic differences in psychological distress. For example, Non-Hispanic whites reported higher distress as compared to older Korean-Americans (Sorkin, Nguyen, & Ngiono-Metzger, 2011). In Asian American population older Korean showed higher psychological distress than Japanese, Filipino, Chinese and Vietnamese (Kim et al., 2010).

### ***Limitations and Suggestions***

The present study employed sample from college and university students and teachers of Quetta city only, future researches should obtain data from students of colleges and universities of entire province of Balochistan along with students of schools. It may be also of greater interest to include sample from general population other than students and teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The present study found differences (but non-significant) in level of psychological distress on the basis of gender and ethnicity of the students and teachers. Many of the past studies have reported significant differences in psychological distress both on the basis of gender and ethnicity. Both of these findings endorse the findings of the earlier empirical studies. Some studies have also shown no differences in psychological distress.

## References

- Barlow, D. H., Durand, V. M. (2005). *Abnormal psychology: An integrative approach*. (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Belmont, CA: Thomson/ Wadsworth.
- Brown, G. W., Harris, T. O., & Eales, M. J. (1996). Social factors and comorbidity of depressive and anxiety disorders. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 168(S30), 50-57.
- Cassidy, C., O'Connor, R. C., Howe, C., & Warden, D. (2004). Perceived discrimination and psychological distress: The role of personal and ethnic self-esteem. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 51(3), 329.
- Cvetkovski, S., Reavley, N. J., & Jorm, A. F. (2012). The prevalence and correlates of psychological distress in Australian tertiary students compared to their community peers. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 46(5), 457-467.
- Chou, K. L. (2007). Psychological distress in migrants in Australia over 50 years old: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 98(1-2), 99-108.
- Drapeau, A., Beaulieu-Prévost, D., Marchand, A., Boyer, R., Prévile, M., & Kairouz, S. (2010). A life-course and time perspective on the construct validity of psychological distress in women and men. Measurement invariance of the K6 across gender. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 10(1), 68.
- Deasy, C., Coughlan, B., Pironom, J., Jourdan, D., & Mannix-McNamara, P. (2014). Psychological distress and coping amongst higher education students: A mixed method enquiry. *PloS One*, 9(12).
- Dahlin, M., Joneborg, N., & Runeson, B. (2005). Stress and depression among medical students: A cross-sectional study. *Medical Education*, 39(6), 594-604.
- Eaton, N. R., Keyes, K. M., Krueger, R. F., Balsis, S., Skodol, A. E., Markon, K. E., & Hasin, D. S. (2012). An invariant dimensional liability model of gender differences in mental disorder prevalence: Evidence from a national sample. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 121(1), 282-288.
- Horwitz, A. V. (2007). Distinguishing distress from disorder as psychological outcomes of stressful social arrangements. *Health*, 11(3), 273-289.

- Kong, F., Zhao, J., & You, X. (2012). Social support mediates the impact of emotional intelligence on mental distress and life satisfaction in Chinese young adults. *Personality and Individual Differences, 53*(4), 513-517.
- Kilkinen, A., Kao-Philpot, A., O'neil, A., Philpot, B., Reddy, P., Bunker, S., & Dunbar, J. (2007). Prevalence of psychological distress, anxiety and depression in rural communities in Australia. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 15*(2), 114-119.
- Kessler, R. C., Andrews, G., Colpe, L. J., Hiripi, E., Mroczek, D. K., Normand, S. L., ... & Zaslavsky, A. M. (2002). Short screening scales to monitor population prevalences and trends in non-specific psychological distress. *Psychological Medicine, 32*(6), 959-976.
- Kim, G., Chiriboga, D. A., Jang, Y., Lee, S., Huang, C. H., & Parmelee, P. (2010). Health status of older Asian Americans in California. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 58*(10), 2003-2008.
- Khalid, A., & Aslam, N. (2011). Psychological distress among patients with epilepsy. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine, 33*(1), 45-48.
- Kumar, H., Shaheen, A., Rasool, I., & Shafi, M. (2016). Psychological distress and life satisfaction among university students. *Journal of Psychology and Clinical Psychology, 5*(3).
- Leahy, C. M., Peterson, R. F., Wilson, I. G., Newbury, J. W., Tonkin, A. L., & Turnbull, D. (2010). Distress levels and self-reported treatment rates for medicine, law, psychology and mechanical engineering tertiary students: Cross-sectional study. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 44*(7), 608-615.
- Marchand, A., Drapeau, A., & Beaulieu-Prévost, D. (2012). Psychological distress in Canada: The role of employment and reasons of non-employment. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 58*(6), 596-604.
- Najam, N., & Hussain, S. (2015). Gender and Mental Health in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. *Journal of Pioneering Medical Sciences, 5*(4).
- Roberts, B., Abbott, P., & McKee, M. (2010). Levels and determinants of psychological distress in eight countries of the former Soviet Union. *Journal of Public Mental Health, 9*(3), 17-26.

- Sorkin, D. H., Nguyen, H., & Ngo-Metzger, Q. (2011). Assessing the mental health needs and barriers to care among a diverse sample of Asian American older adults. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 26(6), 595-602.
- Verger, P., Guagliardo, V., Gilbert, F., Rouillon, F., & Kovess-Masfety, V. (2010). Psychiatric disorders in students in six French universities: 12-month prevalence, comorbidity, impairment and help-seeking. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 45(2), 189-199.
- Wamala, S., Bostrom, G., & Nyqvist, K. (2006). Perceived discrimination and psychological distress in Sweden. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 190(1), 75-76. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.105.021188
- Wheaton, B. (2007). The twain meet: distress, disorder and the continuing conundrum of categories (comment on Horwitz). *Health*, 11(3), 303-319.