

Mental Health Issues among University Students: A Study of Students' Experiences and Special Privileges

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Abstract

Mental health issues among university students have been a subject of debate among circles in Pakistan. The scholarship in the field suggests that there is an increase in the prevalence and severity of mental health conditions among university students. The aim of the study is to learn the response of university students living with mental health conditions and whether universities are meeting their needs to support their academic career. The study focuses on BUITEMS – a well renowned university in Quetta, Balochistan. The respondents of the study are individuals diagnosed with a mental health condition currently enrolled or were enrolled in the university for last four years. The survey questionnaire checks the responses of university students about their experiences about mental health condition and their level of satisfaction about the services and privileges provided by the university.

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Introduction

Mental health issues among students have been in focus among academic scholar and thus making medical education significantly important [1, 2, 3]. The societal issues coupled with study burden leaves little space for students to engage in recreational activities [4, 5]. As a result certain issues like lack of concentration, loss of self-esteem and an increased level of anxiety effect students' performance [6]. In fact, stress can best be handled by relaxing techniques such as exercises [7]. As far as student's life is concerned, they are exposed to certain stressors like study burden, adjustment with the system, future uncertainty, societal and family pressures [8,9]. As a result, students subject to mental disorder lack behind [10]. In fact, very few academic works exists on this important issue in the context of Pakistan and there is a need to properly investigate the issue.

This paper therefore attempts to learn the response of university students living with mental health conditions and whether universities are meeting their needs to support their academic career. The study focuses on BUIITEMS. The respondents of the study are individuals diagnosed with a mental health condition currently enrolled or were enrolled in the university for last four years. The survey questionnaire checks the responses of university students about their experiences about mental health condition and their level of satisfaction about the services and privileges provided by the university. The questionnaire focuses on the availability of services and support provided to students in the universities.

Method and Material

The study employs a quantitative survey. A survey is a methodological technique that requires a collection of systematic data from a population or a sample through either highly structured interviews or questionnaires that subsequently involve statistical analyses of the data collected [11]. A major advantage of a survey research lies in its ability to generalize its findings in a wider context [12]. The use of the quantitative method is beneficial to this research because it contains consistent methods for data collection in the form of a survey [13]. Information that comes through this method can be organized into figures/ numbers to facilitate a form of statistical analysis [13].

The data used in this study is provided by respondents in BUIITEMS. The respondents of the study are students diagnosed with any mental health condition currently enrolled or were enrolled in the university for last four years. The respondents cover a diverse geographical area coming from 7 different districts of Balochistan among which 66 % are females and 34 % are males.

Results

In terms of basic information, results suggest that among type of illness, 43% respondents have mental health issues in terms of depression, 38% in terms of anxiety 15% in terms of abuse. In addition, among respondents 8% have already graduated and 92 % are currently studying at BUIITEMS.

Type of Illness	
Depression	43 %
Anxiety	38 %
Abuse	15 %

Others	4 %
Students Status	
Graduated	8 %
Current students	92 %
Shared Information	
66 %	34 %

Furthermore, the results also suggest that 66% students have shared their mental health status with others and 34 % have not. Those who have shared pointed out several reasons, for instance, to avail accommodation at the campus, receive special care and clinical services and to be securing in terms of any disciplinary action by the university. Others who have not shared their problem also outline reasons such as their belief that mental health issues does not affect academic performance, their mental health status would be leaked to others and most importantly because of the fear that the staff and students may perceive it negatively.

Mental Health Awareness

In this section, the respondents were asked about mental health services available at the campus and their source of information. Majority of the respondents have heard the information from staff and students. This however also suggests that the university should provide detailed information about health facilities on their website. This also suggests that an overwhelming response at the health center should be made available to

students as the results suggests that only 11 % students have received information from the health centre.

Awareness	
Health Center	11%
Staff and students	62 %
Website	24 %
Other	3 %

Nature of Mental Health Activities

In this section respondents were about the nature of mental health activities available to them at the campus. Majority of the respondents were not satisfied from the nature of activities regarding mental health at BUITEMS. Only in one case, the response seems positive and that is session on health is delivered during orientation. Otherwise, the response is poor in terms of health clubs, mental health activities like seminar, sports events with reference to mental health and training programmes.

Nature of Mental Health Activities	
Training Programs	17 %
Precautionary measures	11%
Awareness activities about health such as seminars, fairs and sports events	19%

Mental Health clubs	2%
Mental health sessions especially during orientation	80%

The reasons given by respondents for poor performance regarding mental health are as follows: lack of proper coordination between health centre and the other departments, the health centre hardly refers cases to a specialized medical doctor of mental health, lack of importance to mental health issues and unawareness about its serious complications.

Rating

	Rating		
	Excellent	Good	Poor
	15 %	24 %	61 %

Obstacles

Survey respondents were asked about the obstacles towards accessing mental health services at the university. Majority of the respondents (51 %) believed that tight schedule is the leading obstacles in accessing mental health services at the campus. Respondents explained that there are no long breaks during classes and therefore they cannot find enough time for proper medical checkups.

Obstacles	
Disgrace	13 %
Consulting hours	16 %
Time consuming	7 %

Long queue	9 %
Tight Schedules	51 %
Others	4 %

Mental Health Crisis

Mental Health Crises	
Yes 55 %	No 45 %

Survey respondents were inquired about any experiences of mental health crisis while at campus. Majority of the respondents (55 %) had experienced this. Moreover, the survey respondents explained their experience with the response of the university in handling such crises. Majority seemed confident and happy with the response of the university.

Nature of the Crisis

With reference to the section above regarding a mental health crisis at the campus, this section therefore deals about the nature of that particular crisis. Both depression and anxiety were outlined as the main nature of mental health crises while at campus. Others (22 %) experienced a mental health crisis because of course load and 14 % because of anxiety.

Nature of the Crisis	
Anxiety	14 %
Depression	27 %
Isolation	10 %
Course load	22 %

Stress	27 %
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On Campus Support on Mental Health Issues

The survey respondents were asked about the level of support regarding mental health services at the university. Many (42 %) believed that it is very supportive and others (18 %) believed that it is not very supportive. Those who believed that University is very supportive explained the reasons as: staff is supportive in giving them access and information on health services; university organizes regular sports activities; and university negotiates the problems of students. Others who believed that it is not supportive outlined a main reason as – no mental health activities like workshops and trainings provided at the campus.

On Campus Support on Mental Health Issues

Somewhat Supportive	13 %
Very Supportive	42 %
Supportive	11 %
Not Supportive	18 %
Not very Supportive	16 %

Conclusion

Mental health is a serious issue among university students and therefore requires services and support at the educational institutes. The nature of support can be in the form of trainings, mental health education and information – while the services include timely information and access to mental health facilities, flexible hours for checkups and an environment where students can express their anxiety and depression. This study finds

that mental health issues is a serious problem in BUIITEMS - and the respondents of the study require more services and support for students diagnosed with mental health diseases.

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