

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract. The growth of digital technology has had a significant impact on both university education and daily student life. Digital platforms make communication easier and give students instant access to course materials, but they also bring up new psychological strains. This study explores the behavior-related and mental issues that learners in higher education encounter in the digital age. Survey research and semi-structured interviews are used in this study to find trends in academic overload, stress, anxiety, and excessive internet engagement. The results show that mental strain is increased by extended screen time, constant online availability, and social network comparison. In a world that is becoming more connected the overview points out practical steps that both learners and educational institutions can take to boost their mental resilience.

Key words: mental health, university students, digital era, social media, anxiety, academic stress;

Introduction. Universities' reliance on digital systems has grown within the past ten years. Online learning resources are posted, digital channels serve for communication with instructors, and evaluation processes are frequently automated. Students use laptops and cellphones to manage their social and personal life in addition to studying. International health statistics also show that young adults' emotional health issues are becoming more apparent [1]. In academic and social interactions, worry, mental fatigue, and a drop in motivation are common topics. Because they deal with academic competitiveness, money worries, and career uncertainties all at once, university students are an especially sensitive demographic.

These challenges are made worse by the digital environment. Online platforms updates, academic reminders, and signaling foster an ongoing state of involvement. It is uncommon for many pupils to have moments without using technology. This continual stimulation may make it harder to focus, disrupt sleep cycles, and make you more irritable. Additionally, recent research shows that amongst college students, problematic internet use is strongly linked to feelings of anxiety and sadness[6]. Consequently, it is critically important to analyze an interaction between technological behaviors and mental well-being.

Review of the Literature and Methods

Scholars have investigated the impact of persistent connection on psychological development. Twenge (2019) links heavy smartphone use to changes in social behavior

and a rise in the youth's loneliness complaints [3]. The younger group of attendees likewise reveal greater doses of stress than those of previous generations, according to American Psychological Association study outcomes [2].

Scholars saw an increase in academic tiredness and social apathy when on the international shift toward distant schooling over the COVID-19 period [4]. Students stated that spending a lot of time in front of devices while studying decreased their drive and harmed their relationships with their peers. Furthermore, sleep specialists emphasize that artificial light from gadgets might cause unstable moods by delaying regular sleep cycles. A continuous link between social media use and worse psychological well-being in teenagers and young adults is further supported by systematic reviews [5]. Despite these results, it is crucial to handle the subject with caution. The impact of technology varies depending on its utilization, frequency, and individual coping mechanisms. This study aims to comprehend students' subjective experiences as well as detrimental effects.

A mixed research design was used in terms of methodology. One hundred and twenty undergraduates, ages eighteen to twenty-four, were given a structured questionnaire. Daily device use, perceived stress, mental health, sleep quality, and communication styles were all questioned. Furthermore, 15 participants consented to one-on-one interviews where they discussed their daily routines and emotional responses to pressures from digital devices. Comparative judgement and rate evaluations have been utilized to put together the study material that was gathered. Careful reading and grouping of recurring topics were utilized to analyses the questionnaire content. Privacy was assured, and involvement was entirely optional.

Results

The results of the survey show that heavy device use has become commonplace. Over two-thirds of those surveyed said they used mobile devices or personal computers for no less than six hours per day in addition to the necessary academic responsibilities. Many acknowledged that it had become second nature to check messages. In terms of mental condition, 63% reported experiencing strain on a regular basis due to completion dates and educational notifications. Students clarified that they frequently experience pressure to reply to digital messages from teachers or classmates right away. Physical exhaustion is exacerbated by this expectation of quick response. Sleep habits were also impacted. Fifty-seven percent said they had trouble falling asleep after using screens for a long time in the evening. Interviewees recounted instances where they planned to take a break but instead spent a lot of time on social media.

Comparative procedures are another obvious trend. More than half of those surveyed said they occasionally doubt their own development when they see their peers' accomplishments on the internet. Online groups might inspire some participants, but they can also make others feel less confident.

Discussion

The findings show that daily emotional balance is influenced by internet interaction. It's getting harder to distinguish between study time and personal time. Learners seldom fully unplug since social interaction and educational content take place on the same gadgets. It seems that the perception of continuous availability and burden of schoolwork both contribute to psychological strain. Excessive digital demands can have a detrimental impact on academic achievement and emotional stability, as explained by the idea of "technostress"[7]. Constant notifications make it difficult to

focus entirely on one task. Such disarray may eventually reduce academic effectiveness and raise stress levels.

A further substantial problem is social comparison in online spaces. Triumph tales and strategically selected photos paint a selective impression of reality. Students can get dissatisfied when they contrast such idealized images alongside their everyday challenges. Interviews did, however, show that technology can also be helpful. A number of students cited internet discussion boards where they freely express concerns or share coping mechanisms. This implies that based on the way they are applied, digital platforms may either exacerbate issues or provide support.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates the strong correlation between student's mental health issues and their digital behavior patterns. The psychological strain is exacerbated by prolonged screen time, the need to stay engaged all the time, and digital comparison. Instead of advocating for technological rejection, these studies support thoughtful and balanced use. Topics related to virtual wellness ought to be included in university student assistance programs. Healthy behaviors can be developed by learners through consciousness lectures and counselling services. Simple habits like setting unplugged intervals or reducing late-hour smartphone usage can help people feel less exhausted. Future studies might contrast observations in different socioeconomic groups and look at permanent psychological adaptation in digital learning frameworks.

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