Report
On
World Mental Health Day, 2023
By
Assessing and Intervening Mental Distress of Student Youth at Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh

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Contents:

1. Background

The Centre for Youth Development and Leadership Studies (CYDLS) was founded in 2016 by the Department of Social Work at Rajiv Gandhi University, located in Rono Hills, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh. The center's objectives include promoting the psychosocial wellness of young people, fostering their leadership abilities, and facilitating sustainable community development through youth engagement by offering training and mentoring. To implement the different aims effectively, the Centre has established three specialised cells: The Counselling Resource Cell (CRC), the Youth and Community Engagement Cell, and the Training and Leadership Cell. Each cell is supervised by a single faculty member from the Department of Social Work.

The Counselling Resource Cell (CRC) is overseen by Ms Chaphiak Lowang, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work. This programme aims to collaborate with young individuals in order to prevent, encourage, and intervene in their mental distress.

The one-day awareness programme on World Mental Health Day, which took place on 10th October 2023, had the objective of promoting and protecting mental health as a universal human right. The programme aims to enhance understanding, create awareness, and encourage actions that support the mental well-being of all individuals. The CRC programme seeks to educate students about mental health, enabling them to assess their own mental health state and build appropriate coping mechanisms to handle mental distress.

2. Introduction

As per the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), approximately 6-7% of the population experiences mental health issues. Mental health refers to a condition of psychological wellness that empowers individuals to effectively manage life's pressures, recognise their capabilities, acquire knowledge proficiently, perform well in their occupation, and make meaningful contributions to their community. Health and well-being rely on this essential element, which is crucial for our capacity to make choices, form connections, and influence our environment. Access to mental health care is an inherent entitlement of every individual. Furthermore, it is vital for the advancement of individuals, communities, and socio-economic progress.

Mental health encompasses more than simply the lack of mental diseases. The phenomenon exists on a multifaceted spectrum, which is subjectively perceived by individuals with varying degrees of challenge and emotional strain, potentially resulting in diverse social

and therapeutic consequences. Mental health issues encompass a range of mental disorders, psychosocial disabilities, and other mental states that are characterised by considerable distress, impaired functioning, or a risk of self-harm. Individuals with mental health disorders are prone to encountering diminished levels of mental well-being, however this is not invariably or inevitably true.

Various factors, including individual, social, and structural influences, can either safeguard or weaken our mental well-being and influence our placement on the mental health spectrum. Promotion and preventive interventions aim to uncover the underlying factors that contribute to mental health, such as individual, societal, and structural determinants.

The one-day awareness program is an attempt to address mental health issues among student youth in the central university at Arunachal Pradesh.

3. Rationale

India offers the highest population of young individuals globally. According to a survey from Sapien Labs Centre for the Human Brain and Mind, over 50 percent of young individuals (aged 18-24) in India have inadequate mental well-being. The data revealed that in 2023, 51 percent of young individuals experienced distress or were facing difficulties, as indicated by a Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) score below 0. A negative Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) indicates that the individual's capacity to perform tasks is being hindered by their poor mental well-being.

Dr. Shetty, speaking at the India Today Conclave 2023, reported that 35 students die by suicide every day. He stated that several children desire to communicate, nevertheless there is a lack of attentive individuals. "We are currently experiencing a significant increase in mental health issues, indicating a widespread and concerning problem." We require a strategic campaign. The youth are eager to engage in conversation, although there is a lack of attentive listeners.

According to Dr. Rohit Verma, an Additional Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the primary mental health diseases affecting young people on the Indian subcontinent are depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Dr. Sunil M R, Director & In charge Clinical services at Cadabams Hospital, has expressed concern over the dangerously high treatment gap for psychiatric problems, despite the ongoing mental health crisis. He additionally asserted that around 60 to 80% of individuals experiencing mental health problems do not actively pursue treatment, and even among those who do, barely 20 to 40% seek assistance from professionals. Among these, a substantial proportion still rely on informal channels.

Emphasising the increasing prevalence of mental health illnesses among young individuals, Dr. Anand Jayram, a Consultant Psychiatrist at SPARSH Hospital in Bangalore, stated that in order to tackle this crisis, it is essential to prioritise early intervention and eliminate the social stigma associated with seeking assistance.

The programme recognises the mental well-being of young people in the country. The one-day awareness programme aims to address the lack of intervention and reach out the students in order to prevent, promote, and improve their well-being.

4. Goal and Objectives

To identify one's own mental health status, and to enhance effective coping mechanism in addressing mental distress. To obtain this gaol the awareness program aims to obtain the following objectives:

1. To educate and create an awareness among the student participants in enhancing their mental well-being through the workshop.
2. To know the mental health status of students by assessing various level of depression, anxiety and stress by application of DASS 21.
3. To identify the various factors of mental distress and its impact on the students.
4. To explore various coping mechanisms of students as a problem-solving strategy in their mental distress.
5. To enlist the various measures and suggestions of the students in addressing their mental distress issue in the university.

6. Disseminated Preventive and Promotive Strategies

The awareness program was divided into various sections such as: understanding and identifying symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress; secondly through the DASS 21 the assessment on depression, anxiety and stress was performed through collective questionnaire.; lastly a discussion on their coping and ineffective coping mechanism along with providing various preventive and promotive strategies. Few of these strategies are mentioned hereafter:

6.1 Palliative coping
It means managing the symptoms such as by deep breathing, meditation, exercise, yoga, relaxation, (in case of severity refer professionals/psychiatrist for medicines)

6.2. Corrective Coping
It means managing the situation. Such as asking oneself, "Can I do something about it for the problem?" Accordingly do what can be done by you. The various corrective coping strategies included of problem-Solving Matrix (Covey's Time management Quadrants). Another example of problem-solving strategy was as shown below:

Stressors/Distress	Causes of Distress	What can be done?	Implement the best alternatives
Report writing/ Assignment	Bad time management	Do not procrastinate, make time table, things to do list every day,	If you can do now do it, follow the time table strictly with slight flexibility if necessary, every morning making the list and fulfilling it as per priority.

Interpersonal relational (partner/family)	Misunderstanding, Insecurity & lack of trust	Talk it out assertively, Understand and mitigate the cause of trust and insecurity	Seek and talk on appropriate time, be empathetic in understanding the other person but do not compromise

6.3 Adapting Coping

It means managing thoughts. Students were made to understand with an exercise that many of the times we create our own problems. Hence, it was necessary to understand the relationship between thoughts, emotions, behavior and performance. Such as:

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        Thoughts
           ↓
Performance   Emotions
           ↓
         Behavior
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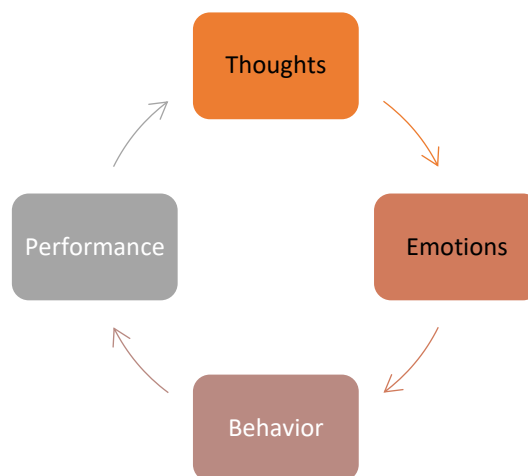
The students were informed on some of our irrational thoughts (negative thoughts). Such as:
- I have no control over my happiness.
- I need someone stronger then me to depend on.
- My past history greatly influences me.
- I must be perfect.
- It usually rains when I go out.

The students through Albert Ellis's ABCDE model were acknowledged that situation do not determine our belief and behaviour but the way we think and perceive the event that determines our consequences. Hence, positive thought is essential.

Negative event (A)	**Negative event (A)**
Rational Belief (B)	Irrational Belief (B)
Healthy negative Emotion (C)	Unhealthy negative emotion (C)

The disputing technique that assisted the students in applying the model was given with this example:

A: She failed her paper in working with individuals
B: I must have good grades or I am worthless.
C: She feels depressed
D: Disputing this negative thought by logical reasoning and persuasion. (reframing thought)
Therapist: where is it written that you must have good grades to be worthwhile, or getting bad grades is awful. She desires to have them and it would be good to have them, but it hardly makes here worthless.
E: effective thoughts replaces irrational thoughts.
getting bad grades is disappointing but not awful, it means she is currently bad at CHC or studying, but not as a person, she will feel sad and frustrated but not depressed. Sadness and frustration are healthy negative emotions and may lead her to study harder from then on.

6.4 Buffering

It means preventing for the future. Some of the tips to help students to prevent anxiety, depression and stress during their student life were highlighted as below:

- Lessen or moderate the impact
- How can you do it? (maintain time management, do not leave work for 2moro if you can do it today, learning to say 'no' assertively if you are over burden, See the possibilities, do not accept failure before you try, replace bad habits with good ones. Ex: adequate sleep, eat, and exercise)

7. Exploration on Mental Health of Students

7.1 Student Participants' Profile

A total of fifty-nine (59) students participated in the departmental workshop. The students were in between the age group 20 to 31 years in which three (3) students were of 20 years, seven (07) of them were of 21 years, eighteen (18) of them 22 years, fourteen (14) of them 23 years, six (06) of them 24 years, five (05) of them 25 years, three (03) of them 26 years, two (02) of them 29 years and one (01) of them was 31 years. The majority of them were female participants (40) than male (16). Three of them belong to other gender (LGBTQIA+). The majority of them were acquiring their master degree, twelve of them graduation and one of them MPhil currently from the university. From the participants fifty-eight (58) students identified themselves as unmarried and one of them married. The family income of the students ranged from a minimum of 10,000/ to four lakhs in a month. The students identified their residential place as rent (27), hostel (13), paying guest (06), with family (10) and with extended family (03).

7.2 Mental Health Status

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 21 (DASS 21) was used to assess depression, anxiety and stress among the student participants. Through collective questionnaire the data was assessed. The following findings were obtained.

Level of Stress:
The data showed thirty-five (35) students with normal level (0-14), ten (10) students with mild (15-18), six (06) students with moderate (19-25), five (05) with severe (26-33) and three (03) students with extremely severe (34+) level of stress.

Level of Depression:
The data showed twenty-four (24) students with normal level (0-09), thirteen (13) students with mild (10-13), sixteen (16) students with moderate (14-20), four (04) with severe (21-27)) and two (02) students with extremely severe (28+) level of depression.

Level of Anxiety:
The data showed twenty-three (23) students with normal level (0-07), thirteen (13) students with mild (8-9), thirteen (13) students with moderate (10-14), eight (08) with severe (15-19)) and two (02) students with extremely severe (20+) level of anxiety.

7.3 Factors of Mental Distress in Students

Through these stressors it aims to explore the various causes of depression, anxiety and stress among the students. Out of fifty-nine (59) students, twenty-six (26) students acknowledged that the interpersonal problems such as strainful relationship with significant others cause them mental distress. Thirty-one (31) of them mentioned financial problems in meeting daily expenses such as paying their rent, fees as one of the factors in causing distress. Academic pressure such as inability to study was stated by forty (40) students as cause of their distress. Forty-eight students (48) also acknowledged that they fear of being unemployed after the completion of their degree. Fifteen (15) students also acknowledged that presence of physical illness also caused them mental distress.

Few students expressed the cause and effect of their mental distress. The following are few verbatim of students expressing the cause effects of their distress:
- *"Having a biased professor in the classroom can also be a problem to some students".*
- *"Unable to speak up and express the feelings"*
- *"Stressed of being a disappointment for my family because of me"*
- *"I'm worthless and I don't deserve this life. If only someone worthier would be given this life".*

7.4 Magnitude of the Factors in Causing Mental Distress

Fear of being unemployed severely affected thirty-five (35) students, the other seventeen (17) were moderately affected, and seven (07) of them were mildly affected. Academic pressure is another factor that mostly affected the students. Twenty-one (21) students stated it severely affected them, twenty (20) of them stated moderately affected, and fifteen (15) of them were mildly affected. The magnitude of factors affecting the mental distress is shown below (Table 1)

Table 1
Factors of Mental Distress and its Impact in a Student

Factors Inducing Mental Distress	Magnitude of the Factors			
	No Effect at all	Effects Mildly	Effects Moderately	Effects Severely
Interpersonal Problems	03	31	14	11
Financial Problems	04	18	25	12
Academic Pressure	03	15	20	21
Fear of Unemployment	00	07	17	35
Physical Problems (ailment or sickness)	19	23	12	05

7.5 Sources Approached for Emotional/psychological Problems

The friends and families are the main source of support for the students in times of distress. Thirty-two (32) students stated friends, and eighteen (18) of them stated families as source of support. Ten (10) students stated they seek online helplines or an internet; only four (04) sought mental health professionals and one (01) student stated hospital as source of seeking help in distress. There were also three (03) student who sought religious assistance such an approaching a pastor or priest. Seventeen (17) of them stated any other sources. One student mentioned not seeking any assistance. It stated, *"Basically I don't approach others most of the time. I keep feelings inside in my own". Another one stated, "If I'm in stress I cry or sit alone and listen to song".*

7.6 Coping Mechanism to Address Mental Distress

Students mentioned various coping mechanism to address their psychological distress. Some effective coping mechanism they mentioned were:

"Whenever I feel emotionally weak I take a deep breath"
"Friends and families are always the first one to talk to relief my stress. Sometimes I just call them without telling my problems to distract myself from thinking of the problems. Through my mother I get a motivation".
"Exercise or play games"
"Go to church and fellowship"
"I listen to music to lighten my mood and think about my parents"
"I rest for a while and think positive about it"
"I listen to music or read"
"I give myself personal time"
"Consult from teacher"
"Write down all problems in a paper, try to work on time, self-motivate, listen to music"
"Mediate and walk in the nature"
"Share with my brother"
"Watch motivational videos"

"write some notes or quotes, it brings me positive vibe?

Some ineffective coping mechanism identified in student participants were:

Two of them mentioned, *"Drink",* indicating behavioral symptoms of alcohol consumption.
"I simply lie in bed and focus more on problem"
"Distract myself or most of the time indulge myself in deep thoughts"
"I just sleep"
"I lock myself for hours"
"In Isolation"
"Shut myself down completely for a duration of time and avoid doing anything"
"I become lazy"

7.7 Suggestions and Measures Addressed by Students

Students suggested various suggestions and measures to address their mental distress in the university/institution. These are:
"There should be a counsellor in the university to help students cope with mental health issues"
"Awareness and Counselling should be accessible to the students"
"Conduct mental health program interactive in nature"
"Accessible to psychiatrist for the university"
"Teachers should be a counsellor too"
"There should be counsellor where students can freely go and talk about their problems"
"Conducting therapy sessions at least once a month"
"Psychological assessment should be performed once in a while"
"Conduct productive talking session and yoga classes"
"Yoga and meditation should be free of cost; also, free counselling for students"
"Student helpline and confidentiality of the students in counselling"
"Counselling syllabus to be included in the course"

8. Major Observation

- Out of 59 student participants, the analysis of students' questionnaire on depression, anxiety and stress showed six (06) students with depression, ten with anxiety and eight with stress with severe or extremely level in need of intervention.
- The family and friends are the main source of support for their mental distress.
- The main factors inducing mental distress are academic pressure and fear of unemployment.
- The students are aware of effective mechanism. Some students also use ineffective coping mechanism.
- The mental health professionals and teachers are approached by few students; which need to be enhanced and acknowledged by the university authority.
- The students suggest a counsellor to be in their reach. Trained teachers could be effective in filling up the paucity of trained mental health professionals in the university.

9. Conclusion

The awareness program conducted on World Mental Health Day, 10th October 2023 had been fruitful in identifying the students among the participants with severe level of depression, anxiety and stress in need of intervention. The program showed that academic pressure and unemployment are major factors in causing their mental distress. The family and friends are the main source of support in times of distress. Such awareness program could be effective in addressing the mental distress of students.