The International Journal of
INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Research Paper

Exploring College Student's Perspectives on Mental Health Services: Awareness, Accessibility, and Satisfaction in University Settings: A Qualitative Focus Group Study

Diksha Tamta[1]*

ABSTRACT

In an educational landscape where the well-being and academic success of college students are intricately intertwined, understanding their perspectives on mental health services within university settings is not just crucial but imperative. This qualitative focus group study delves into college students' perspectives on mental health services within university settings, aiming to address the profound impact of mental health on students' well-being and academic success. Through structured focus group discussions with first-year college students, seven key themes emerge, including the influence of the academic environment on student's mental health, students coping strategies, student's perceptions of mental health services, institutional support, barriers to seeking support in university setting, student's attitudes towards counseling, and cultural influences on student's mental health. The findings underscore the need for colleges to prioritize mental health initiatives, improve accessibility and awareness of support services, combat stigma, and tailor interventions to meet the diverse needs of students. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of fostering a supportive campus environment conducive to students' holistic well-being and academic success.

Transitioning to university marks a critical phase of change and development for young individuals, presenting various challenges such as making independent choices in personal and academic realms, adapting to a less structured learning environment, and interacting with a diverse peer group. Many students also face the challenge of leaving their familiar support systems and home comforts, often for the first time (Cleary et al., 2011). These cumulative challenges can significantly impact the mental health and well-being of students in higher education. Research shows that students often experience increased mental strain upon entering university. Although these stressors may lessen over time (Macaskill, 2013; Mey and Yin, 2015), they generally do not revert to pre-university levels (Cooke et al., 2006; Bewick et al., 2010). The prevalence of psychological issues like depression, anxiety, and stress tends to rise during adolescence, peaking around age 25 (Kessler et al., 2007), which makes university students particularly vulnerable.

---

[1]MA Applied psychology Student, Humanities and social sciences department, Netaji Subhas University of Technology, New Delhi, India
*Corresponding Author

Exploring College Student's Perspectives on Mental Health Services: Awareness, Accessibility, and Satisfaction in University Settings: A Qualitative Focus Group Study

In recent years, there has been growing attention to the mental health and well-being of university students, as it significantly affects their overall health and academic performance. Alarmingly, only about 15% of students with mental health disorders received intervention in the past year (Jaisoorya, 2021). This statistic emphasizes the need for effective strategies to enhance access to and utilization of mental health services on campuses. Several factors contribute to this troubling trend (Campbell et al., 2022).

First, stigma surrounding mental health issues can act as a major barrier to seeking help, fostering feelings of shame, embarrassment, and fear of judgment. This stigma often prevents students from pursuing the support they need. Additionally, a lack of awareness regarding available mental health resources can impede students' ability to seek help, as they may be unsure of where to find support. Some students may also fail to recognize their need for intervention, whether due to denial, minimization of symptoms, or a misunderstanding of the seriousness of their mental health concerns. This lack of awareness can delay or prevent timely assistance, worsening symptoms and heightening the risk of adverse outcomes (Fergusson et al., 2007).

Second, the psychological distress encountered in early adulthood is linked to various short-term negative outcomes, such as decreased college attendance, lower academic performance, and higher dropout rates. Long-term consequences may include dysfunctional relationships, recurring mental health issues, university withdrawal, lower employment rates, and diminished personal income (King et al., 2006; Antaramian, 2015; Kerr and Capaldi, 2011). Time constraints also pose significant challenges, as students must juggle coursework, extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, and social commitments, often leaving little time to prioritize their mental health. Consequently, seeking help for mental health issues may be delayed or neglected, leading to further declines in well-being (Campbell et al., 2022).

Third, higher education institutions have unique opportunities to promote young adults' mental health and well-being. Universities serve as comprehensive settings that combine academic, professional, and social activities with health and support services. Despite this potential, many students experiencing mental health challenges do not receive adequate treatment. Studies by Blanco et al. (2008), Eisenberg et al. (2011), and Lipson et al. (2019) illustrate this gap. Concerns have also been raised about the insufficient availability of support services as universities expand (Davy et al., 2012).

Given the rising concerns regarding students' mental health and well-being, it is essential to explore their perspectives on the mental health services provided by their universities. Understanding students' views can help bridge the gap between the increasing prevalence of mental health issues and the adequacy of support services. By gaining insight into students' perspectives, institutions can tailor mental health initiatives to meet diverse needs, fostering an environment conducive to holistic well-being and academic success.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ridner et al. (2016) conducted a study to examine the well-being of undergraduate students and identify health-related risk behaviors that influence their well-being. This cross-sectional web-based survey, administered at a metropolitan university in the Southeastern United States, included responses from 568 students. The findings revealed that physical activity, tobacco use, depression, mental health service utilization, and sleep quality were significant predictors of well-being. Among these, sleep quality was the most influential

factor, accounting for 35% of the variance in well-being. These results suggest that focusing on improving sleep quality could be key to enhancing college students' well-being.

A study by Kamimura et al. (2018) explored perceptions of mental illness and mental health services among college students in Vietnam and compared them with those in the United States. Cross-sectional data were collected via self-administered surveys at a national university in Vietnam and a state university in the US. The findings revealed differences in beliefs about the causes of mental health issues as Vietnamese participants tended to perceive individuals with mental illness as dangerous and needing exclusion from the community. In contrast, US participants viewed mental illnesses similarly to other illnesses. Notably, Vietnamese participants showed a low likelihood of seeking formal help due to a preference for seeking support from family or friends for mental illness. The study suggests the importance of providing interventions such as mental health awareness campaigns or training courses for college students in Vietnam to reduce stigma toward mental illness.

Another subsequent study by Baik et al. (2019) explored student perspectives on improving mental well-being in university environments. Analyzing 2776 student responses, the study identifies seven categories of recommendations: Academic teachers and teaching practices; student services and support; environment, culture, and communication; course design; program administration; assessment; and student society activities. The findings underscore the importance of university educators and administrators partnering with students to better support mental well-being. The process of seeking and acting on student suggestions fosters inclusion and empowerment, crucial for addressing high rates of psychological distress among students.

Park et al. (2020) explored how university students manage their mental well-being amid significant life events and the difficulties that arise during emerging adulthood. Using semi-structured interviews with 19 undergraduate and graduate students from a large Midwestern university, the study sought to gain insights into how students pursue and receive mental health support, as well as to outline design recommendations for sustaining their mental health practices. The results highlighted three primary needs: matching support to the perceived seriousness of the issue, reestablishing relationships with support providers following life transitions, and navigating conflicts between self-disclosure and stigma.

Robinson et al. (2020) investigated the impact of a mental health course elective on student pharmacist attitudes. Implemented in a doctor of pharmacy program, the course aimed to address stigma and equip student pharmacists with skills to manage mental health crises. Pre- and post-course assessments using the Opening Minds Scale for Health Care Providers (OMS-HC) and guided reflections measured changes in attitudes. Results indicated improvements in attitudes toward disclosure and help-seeking, as well as attitudes of healthcare providers. Student reflections supported these findings, indicating enhanced confidence and willingness to engage in mental health conversations. Overall, the study demonstrated that the mental health course elective positively influenced student pharmacist attitudes and readiness to address mental health issues.

Morris et al. (2022) investigated mental health stigma among first-year student service members/veterans (SSM/Vs) in a first-year seminar. The participants, 107 SSM/Vs, completed pre- and post-tests measuring constructs including stigma toward mental health in the military, academic readiness, mental health stigma in college, connection to campus, and

resiliency. Results showed an increase in stigma toward mental health in the military and connection to campus, while stigma toward mental health in college was reduced. Predictors of stigma included the number of deployments and combat role experience. The findings suggest that classroom interventions in a first-year seminar for SSM/Vs may contribute to reducing stigma toward mental health services and provide insights for future research on health and wellness curricular interventions for this population.

Rational

The rationale for this qualitative focus group study lies in the recognition of the profound impact of mental health on the well-being and academic success of university students, particularly during the transition into higher education. Despite the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among students, there remains a concerning gap between the need for support and the availability of adequate services. By exploring college students' perspectives on mental health services provided by their universities or colleges, with a focus on awareness, accessibility, and satisfaction, this study seeks to bridge this gap. Through structured discussions, the study aims to uncover insights into students' experiences, preferences, and challenges related to mental health support within the collegiate environment. This understanding will inform the development of tailored interventions and initiatives aimed at fostering a supportive and inclusive campus environment conducive to students' holistic well-being and academic success.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: To explore the college students' perspectives on mental health services provided by their universities or colleges.

Objectives

- To assess students' awareness and perception of mental health services available on campus.
- To assess college students' accessibility and satisfaction with campus mental health services.

Research Design:

The present study adopted a focused group discussion research design, a qualitative approach commonly utilized to attain a nuanced understanding of social issues. Employing this methodology, the research aimed to explore the perspectives of college students regarding mental health services. Through structured discussions participants were encouraged to share their insights, experiences, and perceptions concerning mental health support within the college setting. This qualitative research design provided a platform for rich dialogue and comprehensive exploration, contributing to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Research Paradigm:

In this study, the Interpretivism or Constructivism Paradigm is employed to delve deeply into individuals' subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations. This paradigm recognizes that reality is socially constructed and subjective, emphasizing the importance of understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their world. By adopting this paradigm, the study aims to uncover the diverse and nuanced viewpoints of college students regarding mental health services. It acknowledges that mental health experiences and perceptions are complex and multifaceted, influenced by personal, cultural, and contextual

factors. Through focus group discussions, participants have the opportunity to co-construct meaning, providing rich insights into their perspectives on mental health services within the collegiate environment.

Sample

The participants selected for this study were first-year college students residing in Delhi, India. Purposive sampling was employed for sample selection, aiming to include individuals who could provide valuable insights into the research topic. This deliberate approach allowed for the selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study objectives, ensuring representation from the target population. The sample consists of 10 people including both males and females.

Table 1: Participant demographic details

Participants	Age	Gender	Courses
P1	19	Male	B.Tech programme in computer science and Engg.
P2	19	Female	B.Tech programme in computer science and Engg.
P3	18	Female	Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Programme
P4	19	Male	Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Statistics
P5	19	Male	Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Statistics
P6	18	Male	Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Programme
P7	18	Female	Bachelor of Arts (BA. hons.) Political Science
P8	18	Female	Bachelor of Arts (BA. hons.) Political Science
P9	18	Male	Bachelor of Arts (BA. hons.) Sociology
P10	18	Female	Bachelor of Arts (BA. hons.) Sociology

Data Collection:

The present study employed a focused group discussion method to delve into the perspectives of college students regarding mental health services. Participants engaged in structured dialogue facilitated by moderators, enabling an in-depth exploration of their attitudes, experiences, and opinions related to mental health support within the collegiate environment. This approach fostered a collaborative environment where participants could share diverse viewpoints and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Procedure:

To achieve the objectives of the study, participant recruitment was conducted by identifying first-year college students enrolled in universities or colleges in Delhi, India, utilizing various communication channels such as email, social media platforms, and on-campus announcements. Prospective participants were provided with detailed information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and assurances of confidentiality.

Prior to their involvement, recruited students were thoroughly briefed about their rights, including voluntary participation, confidentiality maintenance, and the option to withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before the initiation of focused group discussions. These discussions were structured around predetermined topics concerning mental health services on campus, ensuring equitable participation and expression of perspectives among all participants.

Throughout the discussions, moderators meticulously documented key points and obtained consent for audio recording to aid in accurate transcription and subsequent analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data, aligning with the study's objectives and research questions. Ethical considerations were prioritized, with strict adherence to guidelines aimed at safeguarding participants' rights and ensuring confidentiality. Additionally, ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional review boards or ethics committees prior to the study's commencement.

Ethical Consideration
- Before the focused group discussion (FGD) commenced, participants were requested to sign a consent form, ensuring they understood the aim, procedures, and confidentiality measures in place. They were informed that the FGD, if permitted, would be recorded using a digital microphone recorder, and potential risks such as discomfort or emotional stress related to discussing mental health issues could arise.
- Confidentiality was assured, with all information collected kept strictly confidential. Participants' identities would remain undisclosed in any resulting reports or publications, with code names/numbers assigned for anonymity.
- The researcher facilitated a non-judgmental space during the FGD to encourage open discussion. Participants were informed they could decline to answer any questions and could terminate their involvement at any time.

RESULTS

The findings of the study are obtained through a thematic analysis of qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a well-suited method for examining the intricate and multifaceted narratives provided by the participant. Seven themes are produced from the qualitative thematic analysis. The presentation of results has been organized in a manner ensuring clarity and comprehension. A themes table has been utilized to visually represent the key topics emerging from focused group discussions.

Table 2: Themes table

Themes	Codes	Interpretation
1. **Impact of Academic Environment on Student's Mental Health**	• Emotional Overwhelm from Academic Responsibilities • Inadequate Curriculum and Academic Overload • Uncertainty in Education and Career Pathways • Lack of Career Relevance in Studies • Unhealthy Competition and Isolation	Highlights how academic pressures contribute to emotional strain and mental health challenges. Students often experience emotional overwhelm due to heavy workloads, while inadequate or irrelevant curricula exacerbate stress. Uncertainty in education and career pathways creates anxiety, especially when studies lack clear career relevance. Additionally, unhealthy competition fosters isolation, leaving students feeling disconnected and further impacting their mental well-being.
2. **Student Coping Mechanisms and Self-Care Strategies**	• Physical Activity for Stress Relief • Spiritual Practices for Mental Balance	Focuses on how students manage academic stress and maintain their mental health. Physical activities like exercise or yoga are commonly

Exploring College Student's Perspectives on Mental Health Services: Awareness, Accessibility, and Satisfaction in University Settings: A Qualitative Focus Group Study

	Themes	Codes	Interpretation
		• Creative Outlets for Emotional Expression • Peer Support for Coping • Social Interaction for Stress Relief • Engaging in Hobbies for Self-Care	used to relieve stress, while spiritual practices such as meditation help achieve mental balance. Creative outlets, including art or music, allow emotional expression. Peer support plays a key role in coping with challenges, and social interactions provide a break from academic pressures. Additionally, students engage in hobbies as a form of self-care to recharge and manage their mental well-being.
3.	**Perception and Utilization of University Mental Health Services**	• Lack of Institutional Mental Health Services • Barriers to Accessibility of Support Services • Stigma Around Help-Seeking • Student recognition of the Importance of Counseling • Student acknowledging the need	Explores how students view and access mental health resources on campus. Many students feel that universities lack adequate mental health services, with accessibility barriers such as long wait times or limited availability further compounding the issue. Stigma around help-seeking discourages students from utilizing these services, even when they recognize the importance of counseling and acknowledge their need for support. This theme underscores the gap between awareness of mental health needs and the ability to access proper care.
4.	**Institutional Response and Support for Student Mental Health**	• Institutional Neglect of Mental Health Priorities • Advocacy for Inclusive Mental Health Initiatives • Prioritization of Academic Success Over Mental Health • Institutional ignorance in Addressing Mental Health • Advocacy for peer support groups and safe spaces. • Educational Initiatives for Mental Health Awareness	Examines how universities address (or fail to address) the mental health needs of their students. There is a perception of institutional neglect regarding mental health priorities, with academic success often taking precedence over student well-being. Advocacy for inclusive mental health initiatives highlights the need for services that cater to diverse student populations, while institutional ignorance in addressing these issues further exacerbates the problem. Students also advocate for the establishment of peer support groups and safe spaces to foster open discussions about mental health. Moreover, educational initiatives for mental health awareness are crucial for creating a supportive environment and reducing stigma around seeking help.

Exploring College Student's Perspectives on Mental Health Services: Awareness, Accessibility, and Satisfaction in University Settings: A Qualitative Focus Group Study

Themes		Codes	Interpretation
5.	**Comfort and Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Support in University Settings**	• Discomfort in Seeking Mental Health Support from Professors • Peer Support as a Source of Comfort • Concerns About Confidentiality • Stigma and Disgrace Around Seeking Help • Economic Barriers to Accessing Counseling Services • Accessibility Issues with Counseling Services • Professors' Focus on Academic Rigor Over Mental Health Awareness	Many students experience discomfort in approaching professors for support due to fears of judgment or being perceived as weak. In contrast, peer support often serves as a vital source of comfort, enabling students to share experiences and cope together. However, concerns about confidentiality can deter individuals from utilizing counseling services, compounded by the stigma and disgrace associated with seeking help. Economic barriers and accessibility issues further limit students' access to mental health resources. Additionally, professors' emphasis on academic rigor over mental health awareness can create an environment where students feel unsupported and reluctant to prioritize their well-being.
6.	**Student Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Counseling Services**	• Recognition of the Need for Counseling Services • Fear of Judgment in Seeking Help • Skepticism Regarding Counseling Effectiveness • Personal Experiences Highlighting Counseling's Importance • Mixed attitudes About Seeking Counseling	Examines how students view and respond to mental health counseling on campus. Many students recognize the need for counseling services, understanding their importance in addressing mental health challenges. However, a significant fear of judgment can hinder their willingness to seek help, as they worry about how they will be perceived by peers and faculty. Additionally, skepticism regarding the effectiveness of counseling can lead to reluctance in utilizing available services. Personal experiences often highlight the positive impact of counseling, yet students may still have mixed attitudes about seeking help, reflecting a complex interplay of awareness, fear, and personal beliefs regarding mental health support.
7.	**Cultural and Societal Influences on Student Mental Health Perception**	• Cultural Stigma Surrounding Mental Health • Lack of cultural understanding in mental health • Unique Challenges Faced by Marginalized	Explores how cultural beliefs and societal norms shape students' views on mental health. Cultural stigma surrounding mental health often discourages individuals from discussing their struggles or seeking help, leading to feelings of isolation. There is also a significant lack of

Themes	Codes	Interpretation
	Community • Pressure to conform to societal expectations	cultural understanding in mental health services, which can alienate students from diverse backgrounds who may feel that their unique experiences are not acknowledged or addressed. Additionally, marginalized communities face unique challenges, such as systemic discrimination and limited access to resources, exacerbating their mental health issues. Finally, the pressure to conform to societal expectations can create further stress, as students navigate the demands of academic success while adhering to cultural norms and values.

DISCUSSION

The present study is carried out with an objective to explore the college students' perspectives on mental health services provided by their universities or colleges. For the purpose of this study, first-year college students were recruited as the participants, with a total of 10 individuals, including both males and females. Data was collected from the participant using the focused group discussion method to delve into the perspectives of college students regarding mental health services. Data collection was followed by thematic analysis, and some overarching themes were observed in the responses of the participants.

Theme 1: Impact of Academic Environment on Student's Mental Health
This theme shed light on the profound impact that the academic environment can exert on the mental well-being of students. It reveals a multitude of factors contributing to this impact. Firstly, students articulate the burden of academic stress and emotional strain stemming from the relentless pressure to maintain attendance and juggle numerous responsibilities concurrently. This portrayal reflects a pervasive atmosphere of stress pervading academic life. Moreover, the influence of the curriculum and associated expectations is highlighted as a significant stressor. The inadequacy of the curriculum leads to feelings of being overwhelmed by academic demands, while doubts regarding its relevance to future career prospects cast doubt on the value of academic pursuits, potentially eroding motivation. Additionally, the presence of unhealthy competition exacerbates the already stressful academic milieu. Students describe a toxic environment fueled by competitiveness, where fear of appearing weak inhibits help-seeking behavior, further isolating individuals and impeding effective coping mechanisms. In essence, this theme underscores the intricate interplay between academic factors and mental health, emphasizing the imperative for educational institutions to implement supportive systems and enact reforms aimed at fostering student well-being.

The aforementioned theme is exemplified by the verbatim excerpts provided below:
P1: "Constant pressure to maintain attendance."
P3: "It's like this lingering worry in the back of my mind all the time."
P6: "Trying to juggle multiple assignments and exams at once leaves me feeling like I'm drowning in responsibilities."

P8: "Additionally, the competitive environment amplifies the negativity, worsening the situation."
P10: "Sometimes, I question the relevance of what we're learning to our future careers. It's hard to stay motivated when you're not sure if it's all worth it."

This theme finds corroboration in previous research. Erskine (2015) and Patel (2007) emphasize the global importance of this issue, shedding light on the weight of mental and substance use disorders among children and adolescents. Left unaddressed, these disorders can significantly impact academic achievement. In another investigation, Grøtan et al. (2019) discovered a strong correlation between severe mental distress and academic outcomes. Their research revealed that students experiencing severe mental distress were four times more likely to report low academic self-efficacy and twice as likely to report delayed study progress compared to their peers with few or moderate symptoms of mental distress. This study underscores the link between mental distress, academic self-efficacy, and study progress. Deb et al. (2015) echoed similar findings, reporting that depression, anxiety, behavioral issues, and irritability are among the challenges faced by students dealing with high levels of academic stress. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2021) asserted a direct association between heightened academic stress and increased levels of school burnout, leading to a subsequent rise in depression levels.

Theme 2: Student Coping Mechanisms and Self-Care Strategies
This theme explores the various individual-focused mechanisms that college students employ to manage stress and enhance their well-being. It presents a diverse range of approaches that participants reported utilizing to cope with the challenges they face. Initially, physical activities like running are highlighted as effective methods of stress relief, emphasizing the importance of exercise in promoting mental health. Additionally, spiritual practices such as meditation are emphasized for their ability to center individuals and provide moments of tranquility amidst chaos. However, participants also mentioned the difficulty of finding time for these practices. Furthermore, they expressed that engaging in creative pursuits like painting, playing music, or journaling is recognized as therapeutic, offering them a means to unwind and express themselves.

The aforementioned theme is exemplified by the verbatim excerpts provided below:
P4: "Engagement in physical activities for stress relief."
P9: "Personally, I find that meditation can be a lifesaver. It really helps me center myself and find some peace amidst all the chaos."

A study conducted by Klonoff in 2022 revealed similar findings regarding beneficial coping strategies for mental health among college students. According to the study, the most effective coping mechanisms, as ranked by the respondents, were as follows: a skills training development program (30%), meditation (19%), mindfulness exercises (15%), and physical education (11%). Additionally, when it came to preventing self-harm and suicide ideation/behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents ranked the following strategies as most helpful: improving support from friends (32%), building self-esteem (29%), and addressing anger, depression, stress, and loneliness (25%). Furthermore, the study found that 50% of participants believed that parents should be involved in college student interventions. Students identified emotional support (31%), direction and/or assistance with solutions (27%), and problem-solving (16%) as the most significant types of support they received from their parents.

Theme 3: Perception and Utilization of University Mental Health Services

This theme elucidates the ways individuals perceive and access mental health services within their college or institutional settings. Participants express disappointment and frustration over the absence or lack of prioritization of mental health support services within their college, raising concerns about the accessibility of these services due to potential barriers such as lack of awareness or inconvenient location. Additionally, the absence of counseling services is perceived as a critical need, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing mental health support within educational institutions. Participants underscore the necessity for colleges to effectively address these needs. Stigma surrounding help-seeking behaviors is identified as a significant barrier, with some students feeling embarrassed or ashamed to seek help. However, there is also recognition of the importance of seeking support, with participants indicating a willingness to utilize counseling services if available. The theme highlights a sense of isolation and struggle among students who feel they have nowhere to turn for help. Overall, this theme underscores the importance of raising awareness, improving accessibility, and addressing stigma to promote the utilization of mental health services among college students. It emphasizes the need for educational institutions to prioritize mental health support to effectively meet the needs of their students.

The aforementioned theme is exemplified by the verbatim excerpts provided below:
P1: "Absolutely, if my college offers counseling services, I would definitely consider reaching out to them."
P5: "It's obvious how badly these services are needed, and it's frustrating that the institution isn't making them a priority."
P2: "A lot of students might feel too embarrassed or ashamed to ask for help."

Theme 4: Institutional Response and Support for Student Mental Health

This theme delves into how colleges respond to and advocate for mental health initiatives and services. Participants express disappointment over their college's lack of prioritization of mental health services, emphasizing the critical need for inclusive and diverse initiatives. They lament the institution's apparent focus on academic success over student well-being, highlighting a perceived ignorance of mental health issues. Proposed solutions and advocacy efforts emerge, with participants advocating for the establishment of peer support groups and safe spaces within the college community. Additionally, they stress the importance of education to help students recognize signs of mental distress. Overall, this theme underscores the necessity for colleges to prioritize mental health initiatives, ensure inclusivity and diversity, and actively advocate for supportive environments and educational resources to address the mental health needs of their students.

The aforementioned theme is exemplified by the verbatim excerpts provided below:
P1: "Yeah, it's like they're more focused on academic success than on our well-being. But mental health is just as important, if not more so."
P7: "Mental health should come first, but it feels like our college doesn't view it that way."

A study conducted by Kinman (2019) revealed similar findings indicating a high level of over-commitment among students, which served as a significant predictor of health status. This highlights the risks associated with excessive striving at work over time. The study also identified that the negative impact of being overcommitted to work on mental health was exacerbated by a need for approval and esteem. To enhance the well-being of academic

employees, interventions are essential to rebalance efforts expended and rewards received from various domains.

Theme 5: Comfort and Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Support in University Settings

The theme of "Comfort and Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Support in University Settings" delves into understanding how students perceive the support available to them and the challenges they encounter when accessing it. On one hand, investigating the level of comfort students feel within the mental health services framework can reveal insights into the effectiveness of these resources. Are students finding the services supportive, accessible, and tailored to their needs? Are they comfortable reaching out for help, knowing that they will be met with understanding and confidentiality? On the other hand, examining the barriers students face sheds light on why some may be hesitant to seek support. These barriers could encompass societal stigmas surrounding mental health, logistical challenges like long wait times or limited resources, or personal concerns such as privacy and cultural appropriateness. By exploring both comfort and barriers, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of mental health services in academic settings, ultimately guiding efforts to enhance support systems and promote student well-being.

The above theme is illustrated in the verbatims given below:

P1: "It seems like the professors on our campus are always swamped with tasks, and talking to them about personal stuff sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable."

P5: "Every professor pushes us to stay focused only on grasping the concepts, and they don't put emphasis on our emotional mental health."

P 3: "Personally, I find discussing issues with peers brings me more comfort compared to discussing them with professors."

P 6: "Well, one barrier could be the stigma surrounding mental health. Some students might feel embarrassed or ashamed to admit they need help".

P 8: "Accessibility could be another issue. If students don't know where to find the counseling services or if they're located in a remote or inconvenient location, it might discourage them from seeking help."

P 4: "Financial barriers could also be a concern. If the counseling services aren't covered by student fees or if there are additional costs involved, it could deter students from seeking help."

P 1: "Yeah, and there could also be concerns about confidentiality. Students might worry about their privacy being compromised if they reach out to a counselor."

The study by Burlaka et.al (2014) revealed similar findings regarding perceived barriers to professional mental health help-seeking among Ukrainian college students, psychologists, and psychiatrists. The qualitative stage involved participants from eight universities and psychologists, which identified two main sets of barriers: structural (related to service availability, location, and hours) and attitudinal (including stigma and trust issues) which supports our findings.

Theme 6: Student Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Counseling Services

In understanding college students' perspectives on mental health services provided by their universities or colleges, it's essential to delve into the theme of "Student Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Counseling Services". This theme punctuates the importance of

understanding students' beliefs, perceptions, and feelings regarding seeking professional mental health support. By exploring their attitudes towards counseling and therapy, it delivers valuable insights into the effectiveness and accessibility of the mental health services offered by institutions. Positive attitudes towards counseling and therapy services may indicate that students feel supported, empowered, and comfortable accessing these resources. Conversely, negative attitudes could reveal barriers or concerns that prevent students from seeking help when needed. By uncovering students' attitudes, helps in identifying areas for improvement in mental health services, address misconceptions or stigma, and develop strategies to promote more positive perceptions of mental health support among college students. Ultimately, examining attitudes towards counseling and therapy provides a nuanced understanding of students' perspectives on mental health services, guiding efforts to enhance support systems and promote student well-being on college campuses.

The aforementioned theme is exemplified by the verbatim excerpts provided below:
P 3: "I agree. There's often this fear of being judged or labeled as "weak" for seeking help with mental health issues."
P 2: "I don't believe a counselor is necessary because the age group we belong to is past the stage where we need counseling."
P 9: "I'm not sure. I mean, I'd like to think I could handle things on my own, but if I ever found myself struggling, I guess it wouldn't hurt to talk to someone."
P3: "We definitely need a counselor since our minds can get chaotic, and stress can really build up during this time."
P 1: "Yes, there is an immediate need for counseling services that are easily accessible and offer confidential support to all students."

Similar findings were observed in previous studies, such as; study conducted by Eisenberg et al. (2009) examined the relationship between mental illness stigma and help-seeking behavior among college students, addressing a recognized barrier to mental health support majorly focusing on perceived public stigma and individuals' personal stigmatizing attitudes (personal stigma). This study highlights the similar key findings: firstly, perceived public stigma was notably higher than personal stigma among the participants. Secondly, personal stigma tended to be more pronounced among certain demographic groups, including male, younger, Asian, international, more religious, or lower-income students. Lastly, the study found a significant negative association between personal stigma and help-seeking behavior, including perceived need and utilization of psychotropic medication, therapy, and nonclinical sources of support.

Another study by Shea et al. (2008) investigated factors influencing attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help among Asian American college and graduate students highlighting the similar findings as showing lower adherence to Asian values, lower stigma, and a higher relational-interdependent self-construal were associated with more positive attitudes toward seeking help. Female and older students also displayed more positive attitudes. The study highlights barriers to seeking help and offers implications for mental health counseling practice.

Theme 7: Cultural and Societal Influences on Student Mental Health Perception
In the exploration of college students' perspectives on mental health services provided by their universities or colleges, delving into the theme of "Cultural and Societal Influences on

Student Mental Health Perception" is paramount. This theme punctuates the profound impact of cultural norms, societal attitudes, and intersecting identities on how mental health is perceived and addressed within student populations. Cultural norms and values significantly shape students' perceptions of mental health and their willingness to seek support. These norms may vary widely across different cultural backgrounds, influencing whether mental health issues are openly discussed or stigmatized within communities. By understanding these cultural nuances, institutions can develop more culturally sensitive support services that resonate with the diverse backgrounds of their students. Societal attitudes towards mental health also play a pivotal role in shaping students' perceptions and behaviors. The stigma surrounding mental illness can create barriers to seeking help, as students may fear judgment or discrimination. Exploring these societal influences allows for the identification of strategies to combat stigma and foster a more supportive environment for students to address their mental health needs. By examining the theme of "Cultural and Societal Influences on Mental Health Perception," fosters valuable insights into the contextual factors that shape college students' attitudes towards mental health services. This understanding informs the development of more effective and inclusive support systems that better meet the diverse needs of students on campus.

The above theme is illustrated in the verbatims given below:
P 1: "People often lack a sufficient level of understanding, and from my analysis, many individuals are consistently in need of these types of services."
P 4: "Students from marginalized communities may face unique challenges, and it's essential that support services are tailored to their needs."
P 2: "Absolutely. How long can others manage things for you? We should learn to overcome and manage things ourselves."
P 2: "It varies from person to person. Definitely, this is the age only to consult a counselor."

The study done by Chen et al. (2020) revealed similar findings on the cultural influences on stigma toward mental illness and perceived barriers to help-seeking among Hong Kong Chinese, Chinese Americans, and European Americans (N = 555 university students). Results revealed significant cultural differences, with both Chinese groups reporting higher levels of stigma and barriers compared to European Americans, attributed to face concern. Paths from face concern to stigma and barriers were consistent across all groups. These findings emphasize the need to examine cultural differences both at the mean and structural levels, highlighting the mediating role of cultural values.

Implications
Informing Campus Mental Health Policies: The findings of this study can inform college administrations about students' awareness, accessibility, and satisfaction with mental health services. This information can guide the development of policies and initiatives aimed at improving mental health support on campus.

Enhancing Service Provision: Understanding students' perspectives can help mental health service providers tailor their offerings to better meet the diverse needs of the student population. This may involve expanding services, improving accessibility, and implementing culturally sensitive approaches to support marginalized communities.

Promoting Mental Health Awareness: Insights from this study can contribute to raising awareness about mental health issues among college students. By highlighting students'

experiences and perceptions, educational campaigns and outreach programs can be developed to reduce stigma, promote help-seeking behaviors, and foster a supportive campus environment.

Supporting Student Well-being: The study underscores the importance of prioritizing student well-being within the college environment. Implementing recommendations derived from the findings can contribute to creating a campus culture that values mental health, supports students in times of need, and promotes overall well-being.

Limitations
- **Sampling Bias:** The study's findings may be influenced by the sample's demographic characteristics, such as age and geographical location. Since the study focused on first-year college students in Delhi, India, the perspectives obtained may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across different student populations.
- **Generalizability:** Due to the specific context and sample characteristics, the findings may have limited generalizability to other college settings or student populations. Factors such as cultural differences, institutional policies, and regional variations in mental health resources may impact the applicability of the findings beyond the study context.
- **Social Desirability Bias:** Participants may have been inclined to provide socially desirable responses during the focused group discussions, potentially leading to a distortion of their true perspectives. Efforts were made to mitigate this bias through the use of trained moderators and assurances of confidentiality, but its influence cannot be entirely eliminated.

CONCLUSION

The present study embarked on a journey to unravel the intricate tapestry of college students' perspectives regarding mental health services provided by their universities or colleges. Through the lens of focused group discussions with first-year college students, a vivid panorama of insights emerged, painting a comprehensive picture of the challenges, coping mechanisms, perceptions, and societal influences surrounding mental health in the academic realm.

The thematic analysis uncovered seven overarching themes, each offering a unique glimpse into the multifaceted landscape of college students' mental health experiences. From the profound impact of the academic environment on mental well-being to the intricate interplay of cultural and societal influences, each theme provided valuable insights into the complexities of navigating mental health services within educational institutions.

Furthermore, the study's implications extend beyond mere academic discourse, offering tangible recommendations to inform campus mental health policies, enhance service provision, promote mental health awareness, and support student well-being. By heeding these recommendations, educational institutions can foster a nurturing environment that prioritizes mental health and empowers students to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge the study's limitations, including potential sampling bias, limited generalizability, and the influence of social desirability bias. These limitations

underscore the need for further research and ongoing efforts to refine our understanding of college students' mental health experiences and inform evidence-based interventions.

In essence, this study serves as a poignant reminder of the imperative to prioritize mental health within the educational landscape and underscores the collective responsibility to create supportive environments that nurture the holistic well-being of college students, empowering them to embark on their academic journeys with resilience, purpose, and vitality.

REFERENCES

Antaramian, S. (2015). Assessing psychological symptoms and well-being: Application of a dual-factor mental health model to understand college student performance. Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 33(5), 419–429. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282 914557727

Baik, C., Larcombe, W., & Brooker, A. (2019). How universities can enhance student mental wellbeing: The student perspective. Higher Education Research & Development, 38(4), 674–687. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1576596

Blanco, C., Okuda, M., Wright, C., Hasin, D. S., Grant, B. F., Liu, S. M., & Olfson, M. (2008). Mental health of college students and their non-college-attending peers: Results from the national epidemiologic study on alcohol and related conditions. Archives of General Psychiatry, 65(12), 1429–1437. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc .65.12.1429

Burlaka, V., Churakova, I., Aavik, O. A., & Goldstein, D. (2014). Perceived barriers to mental health services: A mixed-method study with Ukrainian college students. European Journal of Higher Education, 4(2), 167–183. https://doi.org/10.1080/21 568235.2014.890524

Campbell, F., Blank, L., Cantrell, A., Baxter, S., & Goyder, E. (2022). Factors that influence mental health of university and college students in the UK: A systematic review. BMC Public Health, 22, 1778. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13943-x

Chen, S. X., Mak, W. W. S., & Lam, B. C. P. (2020). Is it cultural context or cultural value? Unpackaging cultural influences on stigma toward mental illness and barrier to help-seeking. Social Psychological and Personality Science, 11(7), 1022–1031. https://doi .org/10.1177/1948550619897482

Cleary, M., Walter, G., & Jackson, D. (2011). Not always smooth sailing: Mental health issues associated with the transition from high school to college. Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 32(4), 250–254. https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2010.548906

Cooke, R., Bewick, B. M., Barkham, M., Bradley, M., & Audin, K. (2006). Measuring, monitoring and managing the psychological well-being of first-year university students. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 34(4), 505–517. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/03069880600942624

Davy, C., Dobson, A., Lawrence-Wood, E., Lorimer, M., Moores, K., Lawrence, A., & et al. (2012). The Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) health study: Prospective study report. University of Adelaide.

Deb, S., Strodl, E., & Sun, H. (2015). Academic stress, parental pressure, anxiety, and mental health among Indian high school students. International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, 5(1), 26–34. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJAR BSS/v11-i3/8465

Eisenberg, D., Downs, M. F., Golberstein, E., & Zivin, K. (2009). Stigma and help seeking for mental health among college students. Medical Care Research and Review, 66(5), 522–541. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077558709335173

Eisenberg, D., Hunt, J., Speer, N., & Zivin, K. (2011). Mental health service utilization among college students in the United States. The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 199(5), 301–308. https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e3182175123

Fergusson, D. M., Boden, J. M., & Horwood, L. J. (2007). Recurrence of major depression in adolescence and early adulthood, and later mental health, educational and economic outcomes. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 191(4), 335–342. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.107.036079

Grøtan, K., Sund, E. R., & Bjerkeset, O. (2019). Mental health, academic self-efficacy and study progress among college students – The SHoT study, Norway. Frontiers in Psychology, 10, Article 45. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00045

Jaisoorya, T. S. (2021). A case for college mental health services. Indian Journal of Medical Research, 154(5), 661–664. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijmr.IJMR_37_20

Kamimura, A., Trinh, H. N., Johansen, M., Hurley, J., Pye, M., Sin, K., & Nguyen, H. (2018). Perceptions of mental health and mental health services among college students in Vietnam and the United States. Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 37, 15–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2018.07.012

King, K. M., Meehan, B. T., Trim, R. S., & Chassin, L. (2006). Marker or mediator? The effects of adolescent substance use on young adult educational attainment. Addiction, 101(12), 1730–1740. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2006.01507.x

Kinman, G. (2019). Effort-reward imbalance in academic employees: Examining different reward systems. International Journal of Stress Management, 26(2), 184–192. https://doi.org/10.1037/tr0000128

Klonoff-Cohen, H. (2022). College students' opinions about coping strategies for mental health problems, suicide ideation, and self-harm during COVID-19. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, Article 918891. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.918891

Macaskill, A. (2013). The mental health of university students in the United Kingdom. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 41(4), 426–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.743110

Mey, S. C., & Yin, C. J. (2015). Mental health and wellbeing of the undergraduate students in a research university: A Malaysian experience. Social Indicators Research, 122(2), 539–551. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0704-9

Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. Annual Review of Sociology, 22(1), 129–152.

Morris, P. A., Carpenter, D., Agbonlahor, O., & Rodriguez, F. (2022). Examining mental health stigma in a first-year seminar for student veterans. Journal of American College Health, 70(8), 2247–2252. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1851231

Park, S. Y., Andalibi, N., Zou, Y., Ambulkar, S., & Huh-Yoo, J. (2020). Understanding students' mental well-being challenges on a university campus: Interview study. JMIR Formative Research, 4(3), e15962. https://doi.org/10.2196/15962

Patel, V., Flisher, A. J., Hetrick, S., & McGorry, P. (2007). Mental health of young people: A global public-health challenge. The Lancet, 369(9569), 1302–1313. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(07)60368-7

Ridner, S. L., Newton, K. S., Staten, R. R., Crawford, T. N., & Hall, L. A. (2016). Predictors of well-being among college students. Journal of American College Health, 64(2), 116–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481

Robinson, J. D., Maslo, T. E., McKeirnan, K. C., Kim, A. P., & Brand-Eubanks, D. C. (2020). The impact of a mental health course elective on student pharmacist

attitudes. Currents in Pharmacy Teaching & Learning, 12(7), 885–892. https://doi.or g/10.1016/j.cptl.2020.02.011