

Investigating Psychological Distress and Its Association with Socio-Demographic Characteristics Among Indian Youth

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ABSTRACT

Psychological distress is the condition in which the individual may experience the distress and acute agony which harms and traumatizes the person in their day to day life. The aim of the research paper was to explore the level of psychological distress among Indian youth and its association with socio-demographic variables. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from 173 Indian youth by using Kessler Psychological Stress scale (K10). Descriptive statistics revealed that majority of the Indian youth is facing psychological distress with varying levels. t-test and chi-square was used for data analysis which revealed that gender and locale wise differences exists in psychological distress among Indian youth. Type of the family and socio-economic status is significantly associated with the psychological distress among Indian youth.

Keywords: *Psychological Distress, Socio-Demographic, Indian Youth*

Youth plays a vital role in building the nation because they are considered to be the most diligent and energetic in doing their task. Youth is the treasure that has to be protected for the growth of the nation. However, studies worldwide have shown that youth is suffering from various mental health issues as evidenced by World Health Organization Report that young people were 30% to 80% more likely to report symptoms of depression or anxiety than adults in Belgium, France and the United States in March 2021. The health of the youth has become a global concern and the period of youth is so fragile that it leads to the destruction of them. This age walks through various challenges in their academic life, owing to the huge expectation from the parents, and youth grapple themselves in making their career and establishing the social relationship (Bhuyan & Deuri, 2020). These issues accumulate the psychological distress among youth that may lead to destruction of individual life like career, social relationship and associated health problems.

According to the American Psychological Association, Psychological distress is “a set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people. It is thought to be what is assessed by many putative self-report measures of depression and anxiety.” It is the annoying and obnoxious feeling and emotions people would feel due to the unpleasant environment around them. This may happen when the

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person is unable to cope up with some traumatic experiences, grave life events, family problems, unhealthy work environment and unfavorable health issues. Psychological distress may impede the daily activities of human life. It manifests the restlessness, dearth of concentration, distractions, anxiety, and incapacity to make a decision in humans. Therefore, psychological distress is the outcome of the adverse effect of the environment, others, and the self (Jospeh& Abraham, 2018). Psychological distress can envisaged the mental health of the youth. This results into the potential harm which leads to increasing the chance of substance dependency and abuse (Siddiqui, et al., 2019). Psychological distress is also explained as the distinctive annoying state which experienced by the youth or an individual in reaction to the particular stressor which affect the physical and mental health of the person either permanently or temporary. This predicament distress is the manifestation of the profound anxiety and depression (Sahu,et al., 2020).

Psychological distress may leads to suicidal ideation (Jaisooriya,et al.,2017& Bhuyan& Deuri, 2020). A study focused that psychological distress have a major effect on the adolescents' age group and they also emphasized that it is a pivotal time for the well-being and mental health intervention to give protection in the development of mental health issues (Pengpid &Peltzer; 2020). Anyanwu in 2021 documented that psychological distress is common in adolescents and its prevalence of 35% have been shown in the report from Canada, 54% in China and 40% in Saudi Arabia. Psychological distress has been massively widespread in the general population which is being estimated between the 5-48% of the population (Abraham & Joseph, 2018). Quite a few studies of past have discovered the great prevalence of self-reported psychological distress among medical students that have been found due to the improbable expectations from the environment of university. This situation gets aggravated owing to the different kind of challenges toward teaching learning environment, evaluation process, issues related to finance, and the problem related to the adjustment in the society (Banga,et.al, 2020). Matud, in 2020 uncovered the fact that the psychological distress becomes a significant mental health problem in university students. This is extremely associated with the suicidal behavior and which have been shown more frequent in female than in male students of the university. The factors related to environment and health is associated with the psychological distress of the adolescents (Rahman. et al, 2020). Psychological distress among individuals has various associated effects like it may elevate the possibility of problems related to personal and social issues (Patel,et al.,2007). According to World Health Organization Report (2021), psychological distress affects the daily activities of adolescents' like- performance in school and work place, adolescents' relationship with friends and family. Mubasyiroh, et al. in 2017 explored that the greater intensity of prolong psychological distress if not treated on time would imperil the mental condition of an individual. Psychological distress is a non-specific symptom which consists of anxiety, stress, depression and so on (Vierteo,et al.,2021). A handful of studies investigated that social isolation and worldwide lockdown due to pandemic COVID-19 exacerbate the psychological distress in the citizens of the worldwide nations (Fernandez, et al.,2022). Arbabisarjou A., et al., 2015 investigated that psychological distress is also related with the problems of burnout, cognitive and behavioural issues. Yamada, 2014 examined that the poor academic self- perception among students is significantly associated with psychological distress.

There is no dearth of studies in the body of the literature on psychological distress and its association with other variables among population of diverse nature. However, there are

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only handful studies that explored the level of psychological distress among youth residing in Bathinda District. Therefore, the researches aimed to conduct this study.

Objectives

1. To study gender wise and locale wise differences in psychological distress among Indian youth.
2. To find the association of socio-demographic variables i.e. area of residence, socio-economic status, marital status and nature of family with psychological distress among Indian youth.

Methods of Data Collection

Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from 173 participants with age range of 16-30 years from District Bathinda. All the participants gave their informal consent for the present study. The general demographic characteristics revealed that 44% are males and 56% are females whereas 63% of respondents reside in rural area and remaining 37% were urban dwellers. 95% of the respondents were single and the rest 5% were married. 58% and 14% of the respondents belongs to upper high class and high class respectively whereas 15% belongs to lower middle and poor socio-economic status.

Tools used for the Data Collection

1. To obtain demographic details of the participants i.e. age, gender, area of residence, education and marital status socio-demographic sheet was used. To assess the socio-economic status of the respondents, Prasad socio-economic status classification updated in 2019 was used. This scale has five categories ranging from upper high, high, upper middle, lower middle to poor socio- economic status.
2. Kessler Psychological Stress scale (K10) - a 10 item questionnaire was used to assess the rate of emotional state of the individual. It is 5 point Likert Scale with options ranging from none of the time (0) to All of the time (5). Responses on all the 10 items were added to get the total K10 score. Scores will range from 10 to 50. Low K10 scores (scores under 20) reflects the individual is likely to be well. High K10 scores (ranging from 30 and above) indicate high likelihood of psychological distress in an individual.

Statistical Analysis

Percentage analysis, Independent t-test and chi-square were used for the analysis of the data. Percentage analysis representing the descriptive statistics of the data disclosed that 42.77% of respondents were found to be likely well where as 57.23% of the respondents experience psychological distress. Among them, the major proportion of respondents was having severe disorder (30.01%) followed by mild disorder (15.60 %) and moderate disorder (11.62%).

Independent t-test Analysis

To locate gender and locale wise differences in psychological distress among Indian youth, independent t-test was computed which is represented in Table-1 & Table-2.

Table 1-Gender wise differences in psychological distress among Indian Youth

Gender	Mean	N	SD	t-value
Females	27.53	97	9.04	7.38**
Males	18.38	76	7.29	

*significant at 0.01 level of significance

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Table-1 shows comparison of females and males in psychological distress. Females were found to have more psychological distress (M=27.53, SD=9.04) as compared to males students (M=18.38, SD=7.29) with t- value of 7.38 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Table 2-Locale wise differences in Psychological Distress among Indian Youth

Gender	Mean	N	SD	t-value
Rural	22.28	108	8.83	2.16*
Urban	25.59	64	10.19	

*significant at 0.05 level of significance

Independent t-test (Table-2) showed that there is statistical significant difference in mean scores of respondents belonging to rural and urban locality. The mean scores of youth residing in urban locality (M=25.59, SD=10.19) on psychological distress scale is more as compared to the youth living in rural area (M=22.28, SD=8.83). Therefore, urban dwellers have more psychological distress as compared to their rural counterparts.

Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-Square is used to find the association of socio-demographic variables i.e. area of residence, socio-economic status, nature of the family and marital status with psychological distress among youth of India.

Table-3 Psychological Distress and its association with socio-demographic variables

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Categories	Psychological Distress		χ^2
		Present	Absent	
Area Of Residence	Urban	41(23.70%)	23(13.30%)	1.95 ^{NS}
	Rural	58(33.52%)	51(29.48%)	
Socio economic status (PrasadSES updation, 2019)	Upper High	47(27.17%)	54(31.21%)	14.73 ^{**}
	High	14(8.09%)	10(5.78%)	
	Upper Middle	17(9.83%)	06(3.47%)	
	Lower Middle	09(5.20%)	02(1.16%)	
	Poor	12(6.94%)	02(1.16%)	
Nature of family	Nuclear	65(37.57%)	34(19.65%)	6.73 ^{**}
	Joint	34(19.65%)	40(23.12%)	
Marital status	Single	94 (54.34%)	66(38.15%)	2.01 ^{NS}
	Married	5(2.89%)	8(4.62%)	

**significant at 0.01 level, NS-not significant

Table-3 represents that 23.70% of urban and 33.52% of rural inhabitants experiences psychological distress where as 13.30% of urban and 29.48% of rural respondents were found to be likely well. The chi-square testing the association between area of residence and psychological distress came out to be non-significant at 0.05 level of significance. This reflects that area of residence of the youth is not significantly associated with psychological distress.

In terms of socio-economic status, the results of chi-square reveals that socio-economic status of a youth is significantly associated with the psychological distress ($\chi^2=14.73$,

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significant at 0.01 level). Table -3 reflects that youth who belongs to upper high socio-economic status does not experience psychological distress whereas distress is present in every individual who belongs to category other than upper high class.

It is evident from Table-3 that 57.22% of the youth respondents belong to nuclear family whereas 42.78% resides in joint family. The chi-square testing the association between nature of family and psychological distress came out to be 6.73 which is significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, nature of family of the youth is significantly associated with psychological distress, thus revealing that youth belonging to nuclear family experiences psychological distress.

Table- 3 represents 54.34% of youth who are single and 2.89% of the married respondents experiences psychological distress. However, the value of chi-square is 2.01(Table-3) which is not significant that reflects no association between marital status of the youth with psychological distress.

DISCUSSION

Descriptive characteristics of the data showed that more than half of the Indian youth i.e. 57.23% are facing psychological distress ranging from mild to moderate to severe level. Kessler et al. in 2004 documented that individual belonging to 15-24 years age group reported higher mental health problems. Literature revealed innumerable reasons accounted for psychological distress among youth like financial constrains, unrealistic expectations, fear of failure, low self-esteem, low autonomy in personal and professional decision making, academic pressure, stereotypical gender roles, disturbed relationships, rapid technological overload, social isolation, fear of missing out etc.

Findings of the present research paper revealed that psychological distress is significantly higher in females when compared with their male counterparts. This study is in line with the findings by Shaheen et al. (2014). Islam (2019) revealed that male and female do not differ significantly on psychological distress, results which are not consistent with the present study. There is no single but there can be range of factors i.e. physiological or biological; psychological as well as societal and cultural stressors that contributes to mental health issues among females (Ball,2013).

Additionally, results indicated that urban dwellers have more psychological distress as compared to rural counterparts. These results are supported by Holy et al. (1997). This particular finding is not in consonance with the findings by Bhuyan & Deuri (2020) that evidenced that rural youth is experiencing more psychological distress than urban youth. One plausible reason for high psychological distress in urban inhabitants is pressure of keeping pace with the fastest changing life-styles and advancement in urban areas (Modi and Singh, 2018).

Chi-square analysis uncovers that socio-economic status and nature of family is significantly associated with psychological distress among Indian youth. Youth residing in nuclear family have more psychological distress as compared their counterparts residing in joint family. Murthy in 2017 documented that in nuclear families there is lack of support system which increases the expectation of parents on the individual and this contributed to depression among youth. Youth belonging to lower socio-economic status found to have more psychological stress. Turner, Wheaton and Lloyd in 1995 & Kohn 1981 documented that

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low social-economic status can play a role in the etiology of mental disorders by damaging the psychological functioning of the individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

Present study aimed to explore the psychological distress among Indian youth. The findings of the present study uncovered the fact that majority of the youth is under some psychological distress. Females and urban dwellers experiences more psychological distress. As females are more psychologically distress, this demands gender-specific interventions for psychological distress among youth. Youth belonging to low socio-economic status and nuclear families feels more depressed and anxious as compared to their counterparts. This demands timely and careful handling of the youth by teachers, parents and significant others along with the crafting of proper intervention strategies like early screening and counseling sessions for the youth for addressing their depression and anxiety related issues. The inclusion of stress management components in the curriculum can work wonders in shielding the youth from deleterious effects of psychological distress.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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