Perceived Social Support predicts Psychological Problems among University Students

Dr. Syeda Razia Bukhari[1], Firdous Afzal[2]*

ABSTRACT

Background: psychological problems are prevailing among university students, which need the attention of university management, government, social workers, and counsellors as well. *Aims:* to find out the prevalence of depression, anxiety, stress among students, and their level of perceived social support. Study also aims to find the impact of perceived social support on psychological problems (depression, anxiety, and stress). *Methodology:* Cross sectional survey designed was used to collect data, from 200 university students (m=100; f=100). They were selected through purposive sampling technique from various universities of Karachi, Pakistan with mean age (21.79 ±2.970). Depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21) was used to measure the student's level of depression, anxiety and stress (Lovibond & lovibond, 1995). Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MPSS) (Zimet et al. 1988) was used to measure social support. Regression analysis was used to test assumption. *Results:* In our sample out of 200 students, 58%, 69%, 40% have mild to severe level of depression, anxiety and stress respectively. Perceived social supports predict 6%depression and 2% anxiety in our sample respectively. *Conclusion:* Depression, Anxiety and Stress are highly prevailing among university students. Perceived social support is negatively associated with depression, anxiety and stress. While perceived social support is a significant negative predictor of depression and anxiety. *Implications:* It is implicated that university students needs counselling services as they are having high rate of psychological problems and low levels of perceived social support. University management should develop policies and programs for increasing perceived social support among students. Future research should look at role of coping in influence of perceived social support on psychological problems.

Keywords: *Perceived Social Support, Depression, Anxiety, Stress & University Students*

[1] Faculty, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan
[2] Clinical Psychologist, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan
*Responding Author

Psychological problems (depression anxiety stress) are current global problems (Bilgel & Bayram, 2014). Psychologists are looking for interventions that can best help reduce depression anxiety and stress. Theorists Cohen & McKay (1984) proposed that social support acts as stress buffer, they posits that social support promote health by facilitating psychological resources under highly stressful circumstances. Stress buffer function of social support is supported by clinical research findings, such as Dour et al. (2014) found that in primary care intervention social support mediates symptoms of anxiety and depression in patients. There are a growing number of researches on exploration of relation between perceived social support and psychological problems these days. (Alimoradi et al. 2014; Awang et al. 2014; Jibeen, 2015; Safree et al. 2010; Wang et al. 2014).

Stress is anything that place strong demands on individual, thus creating imbalance in individual's mindset (Kondalkar, 2007, p.178*). Stress is a *"pattern of cognitive appraisals, physiological responses, and behavioral tendencies that occurs in response to a perceived imbalance between situational demands and the resources needed to cope with them" (*Passer, 2009, p.499). Anxiety is a state of tension, apprehension that is a natural response to perceive threat which is out of proportion to the situation in intensity that trigger them, and it interfere with daily functioning. It   disturb one's emotional, cognitive, physiological and behavioral functioning and manifest itself in form of tension, sense of inability to cope, muscle tension, avoidance, and impaired task performance respectively(Passer, 2009, p.546-47).

While the depression is characterized by presence of sad, irritable, empty mood followed by somatic and cognitive changes that impair the psycho-social functioning. As a result of depression people develop pain, physical sickness and noteworthy decrease in physical, social functioning (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorder, 2013).

Research indicates that depression, anxiety and stress are most prevalent psychological problems and specifically university students are suffering the most (Abdl Wahed et al. 2016; Bilegel. et al 2014; Bukhari et al. 2015; kessler et al. 2013; Saleem et al. 2013). In Pakistan, a survey of mental health problems of university students in Lahore indicated that 47 % of students are having mental health problems from severe to very severe level (Saleem et al., 2013). Furthermore in Pakistan, Bukhari et al. (2015) found that depression is common in male female university students in Karachi, Pakistan.

There can be many factors operating in prevalence of psychological problems among university students; at university students face many stressors, according to research students experience stress due to various social and academic stressors which affects their mental health. Students belongs to differing cultures which create difficulty in communicating with others , competition of maintaining good grades and completion of assignments in limited time increases their stress level which leads to physical symptoms of feeling tired, bodily pains. (Thawabieh et al., 2012).

Theoretical and empirical research findings have shown that social support play important role in student psychological well being. Perceived social support is function of social relationship, the perception of a person that he will be provided with resources (emotional, informational) in time of need from the social relationship (Cohen, 1992). If individuals feel that they are supported, many of their emotional needs get fulfilled, which develops a sense of being loved cared and understood by significant others (Thoits, 1995). Social support is of three types: informational, emotional, and instrumental. Informational support helps individual in redefining or understanding their circumstances , emotional support increases distressed person's feeling of being loved, cared, reassured, accepted and encouraged (Helgeson & Cohen,1996), while instrumental support fulfill individuals need directly (i.e., performing household tasks, providing finances) and permit individual to resolve their stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Perceived social support influence university students' social, emotional, academic well being and family, friends play important role in their wellbeing (Awang et al., 2014). Perceived social support also influence academic motivation, as Emadpoorl et al. (2015) showed that the perceived social support directly and positively influence significant psychological well-being and academic motivation. The perceived social support explained 13 % of the academic motivation. Rees & Freeman (2009) found that social support moderates relation between stressors and task performance. He found the relationship between social support and objective task performance is positive. Social support increases the self efficacy which in turn results in increase performance. This literature shows that if an individual feels that he/she is supported by friends, family in time of need, and significant others, it will have positive impact on their wellbeing, academic achievement and task performance. But when the perceive social support is low, it leads to psychological, social, educational problems. Research evidence indicates that marked difficulties in social support increases the chances of mental health problems Kilneberg et al. (2006) , relapse in treatment of depression Back et al. (2010) and adverse medical outcomes (Pederson, 2009) among young people.

Wang et al. (2014) found the stress moderating effect of social support on depression. They concluded that social support moderates association between stress and depression. Safree et al. 2010; Wongpakaran et al. 2011; Alimoradi et al. 2104 found significant negative relationship among social support and psychological distress(depression. anxiety, stress). Jibeen (2015) conducted a research on perceived social support and mental health problems among Pakistani university students, she found significant negative relation between perceived social support and mental health problems. This literature review suggests that there is a strong negative relation between perceived social support and psychological problems.

Current research aims to find out the prevalence of depression anxiety and stress among university students in Pakistan, the relationship between perceived social support and depression

anxiety stress. It is hypothesized that perceived social support will be a negative predictor of depression anxiety and stress.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

Population consisted of all universities students of Karachi Pakistan. Sample was taken through purposive sampling technique from various universities of Karachi Pakistan. Sample consisted of 100 (50%) male and 100 (50%) female students with mean age of 21.79 and a standard deviation of 2.970.

Design

Cross sectional survey design was used to collect data.

Measures

1. **Perceived social support:** Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MPSS) by Zimet et al 1988 was used to measure social support. It is 12 item self report measures having 7point likert scale rating assessing three dimensions of perceived social support such as support from friends, family and significant others. The score is obtained through adding all item scores which ranges from 12 to 84. Higher score means higher perception of social support and lower scores means low perception of social support. Scale has .8 0 to .95 internal consistency.

2. **Depression Anxiety Stress:** Depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21) was used to measure the student's level of depression, anxiety and stress. It was developed by Lovibond & lovibond 1995. It is divided into three scales: depression (D), Anxiety (A) and Stress(S) each scale has 7 items. All items are rated on 3 point likert scale 0= did not apply to me at all, to 3=applied to me most of time. Total score is multiplied by 2 to obtain to reflect the original 42 item scale. Higher score indicate high level of depression anxiety stress while low score indicates low level of depression anxiety and stress. The internal consistencies of the three subscales were 0.71 for depression, 0.79 for anxiety and 0.81 for stress.

Procedure

All the moral rules in regards to the utilization of people in research were taken after. Participant's ethical right of confidentiality, informed consent and the privilege to pull back was seen in the information accumulation process. For data collection, the authors visited various universities of Karachi and asked students for their volunteer participation in study; those who agreed were given demographic sheet along with other test tools, and were informed about study purpose. After completion of data collection data was feed on SPSS for statistical analysis.

Data analysis: descriptive statistics were used to summarize the prevalence level of depression anxiety stress among university students. Regression analysis was used to find the relationship between overall social support and level of depression, anxiety and stress.

Results

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characters of sample as shown in table 1. Sample consisted of equal male female (m=100, f=100), and their family status (joint, nuclear).

Variables	M(SD)	f (%)
Age	21.79(2.970)	-
gender		-
male	-	100(50)
female	-	100(5)
Family status		
Joint	-	73(36.5)
nuclear	-	127(63.5)
Depression		
normal	-	52(20.5%)
mild	-	29(11.4%)
moderate	-	68(26.8%)
severe	-	51(20.1%)
Anxiety		
normal	-	24(9.4%)
mild	-	18(7.1%)
moderate	-	55(21.7%)
severe	-	103(40.6%)
Stress		
normal	-	98(38.6%)
mild	-	41(16.1%)
moderate	-	45(17.7%)
severe	-	16(6.3%)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of sample (n=200) and Prevalence of Depression Anxiety and Stress among university students

	Stress Model			Anxiety Model			Depression Model		
	B	**SE**	**β**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**B**	**SE**	**B**
Perceived social support	-.047	.083	-.108	-.073	.032	-.157	-.134	.036	-.255
R square	.012			.025			.065		
F	2.330			5.001			13.764		
Adjusted R square	.007			.020			.060		
	-1.527			-2.236			-3.710		
T	.128			.0236			.000		

For depression $\rho < .01$; for anxiety $\rho < .05$ for stress $p > .05$

Table 1 shows the prevalence of depression anxiety and stress among university students. It is indicated in table 1 that 20.5% students have normal level of depression while 58 % of students

have mild to severe level of depression. Table 1 also shows that 9.4% students have normal level of anxiety while 69.4% have mild to severe level of anxiety. Furthermore it also shows that 38.6% have normal stress level while 40.1% students have mild to severe level of stress.

Perceived social support explained 6.5% of variance in level of depression [R2 = .065, F(1,200)=13.764, p=.000], and 2% of variance in level of anxiety [R2 =.020, F(1,200) =5.001, ρ = .026*] And .07% variance in level of stress [R2= 0.007, F(1,200)= 2.330, ρ= 0.128]. Depression and anxiety is significantly predicted by perceived social support (β = -.255, ρ < .01), (β = -.157, ρ < .05) respectively. While stress is only negatively associated with perceived social support.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the level of depression anxiety stress among different universities students in Karachi Pakistan; it also examined impact of perceived social support on level of psychological problems. Results indicated that 20.5% of total sample had normal level of depression whilst 11.4%, 26.8%, and 20.1% had reported mild, moderate and severe levels of depression respectively. It was also found that 9.4% of total sample had normal anxiety level whilst 7.1%, 21.7%, 40.6% had reported mild, moderate, and severe level of anxiety respectively. Results further showed that 38.6% of total sample had normal stress levels whilst 16.1%, 17.7%, 6.3% had reported mild, moderate, and severe level of stress respectively. These findings indicate that there is a high level of psychological problems (depression, anxiety, and stress) among university students. These findings are consistent with previous research findings, as (Bilgel et al. 2014; Kugbey at al. 2015) found similar level of psychological distress among university students.

Present research also examined does perceive social support predicts depression, and does perceived social support predicts anxiety. Result indicated that both for depression and anxiety, the perceived social support is a significant negative predictor as perceived social support predicts 6%depression and 2% anxiety in our sample respectively. Worfel et al. (2016) have found social support from friends as significant predictor of depression and anxiety which is in support of our findings. All other pervious researches are co-relational in nature and they all have found significant negative relationship between perceived social support and depression, anxiety and stress. (Alimoradi et al. 2014; Dzulkifli et al. 2009; Glozah, 2013; Kugbey et al. 2015) and are supportive of our findings.

Furthermore, current study also examined the predictive value of perceive social support for stress, our study found that perceived social support is negatively associated with stress. Remezankhani et al. (2013) and many other studies have also found significant negative relationship between stress and perceived social support. But no previous research has found predictive value of perceived social support for stress. Our research has successfully established

negative relationship between perceived social support and stress as was establish by previous researches (Alimoradi et al. 2014, Kugbey et al. 2015; Remezankhani et al. 2013) but in our data perceive social support did not explain the variation in stress. This could be due to fact that small sample size has affected the result. Future research should take it into consideration while deciding sample size for study.

Our research findings have established that university students in Pakistan are suffering from depression anxiety and stress, and perceived social support is important negative predictor of depression and anxiety. This could be understand by following explanations, as literature review established that perceived social support is the perception of a person that he will be provided with resources (emotional, informational) in time of need from the social relationship. And If individuals feel that they are supported, many of their emotional needs get fulfilled, which develops a sense of being loved cared and understood by significant others (Thoits, 1995). But unfortunately students are not receiving sufficient emotional, informational and instrumental support which is aiding in the prevalence of psychological problems. They are handling many stressors such as excessive study demands; poor study resources; excessive school work; financial problems; inadequate recreational facilities; overcrowded accommodation; inconsiderate insensitive lecturers are sources of psychological distress among students (Omigbodun et al. 2004; Worfel et al. 2016). According to definition of perceived social support, under such stressful circumstances students perceive them as unsupported; uncared; unloved by friends, family and significant others which leads to increase in depression, anxiety and stress.

Our findings provide an evidence for relation between social support and psychological problems among university students. Depression, anxiety and stress will be lower if perceived social support is increased because social support serves to buffer against life stressors and improve wellbeing (Dollete et al., 2014). Perceived social support predicted 43 per cent of subjective well-being; increases mental health; improves task performance; increases self efficacy; self esteem; academic achievement (Gulact, 2010; Ikiz et al. 2010; Kilneberg et al. 2006; Rees et al. 2009; Safree et al. 2009). Social support could play its role in dealing depression anxiety stress; it helps college students to lessen depression, anxiety, and stress (Elliot & Gramling, 1990). These finding are further backings the significance of perceived social support in controlling psychological problem among university students.

Along these lines, upgrading students' perceived social support in controlling psychological issues among students will expand their academic accomplishment. The present study gives noteworthy data relating to the relationship between perceived social support and psychological problems among university students in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that depression, anxiety and stress are prevailing among university students. Perceived social support is negatively associated linked with depression, anxiety and stress. Furthermore, it is found that Perceived social support is a significant negative predictor of depression and anxiety. Future research should look at role of coping in influence of perceived social support on psychological problems in Pakistan.

Implications: It is implicated that university students needs counseling services as they are having high rate of psychological problems and low levels of perceived social support. University management should develop policies and programs for increasing perceived social support among students.

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