

PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT MANIPUR UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The incidence of mental health problems among graduate students is a matter for concern. Stressful daily university life brings about more mental health problems for students than for the general population: living away from family, academic pressure, adjustment to a new culture and social norms, and making new friends are contributing factors. **Aims:** The present study intends to assess the extent of mental health problems among postgraduates of Manipur University and the part played by gender in the same. **Methods:** This study was cross-sectional and based on a stratified random sampling method. A total of 1034 students were selected from six schools and various departments at Manipur University. A semi-structured questionnaire for socio-demographic information and GHQ-28 for assessment of mental health status were used to gather the data. **Results:** 43% of the postgraduate students of Manipur University were mentally healthy, whereas 57% were reported to have one or the other form of mental problems. Among the affected, 26% suffered from mild, 46% from moderate, and 28% from severe distress. In addition, there was a significant relationship between gender and mental health disorders (p -value=0.002), but not for age groups. Results show that the experiences of distress were highest among female students (64%), followed by male students (36%). **Conclusion:** It is concluded that 57% of the postgraduates of Manipur University are suffering from some or another mental health problem, with an interesting finding that more female students (64%) reported having higher levels of distress compared to male students.

Keywords: Mental health issues, postgraduate student, prevalence.

Introduction

India is currently facing a significant mental health crisis, with approximately 10.6% of its population suffering from some form of mental illness. Of this, 0.8% are impacted by severe disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (Murthy et al., 2016). According to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019, an estimated 197.3 million Indians experience mental disorders, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent, particularly among adolescents, women, and urban populations (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2020). Alarmingly, suicide rates remain high, with 164,033 deaths reported in 2022, predominantly among daily wage workers and young people aged 18 to 30 years. This highlights the significant burden of undiagnosed mental disorders in the country (National Crime Records Bureau, 2023).

A population-based study conducted in Manipur among the general population using a standardised methodology documented lifetime and current prevalence of mental illness as 19.9% and 13.9%.

Substance use disorders were most prevalent (23.7%), followed by mood disorders (9.4%), depressive disorders (9.1%), schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders (2.4%), and bipolar affective disorder (0.4%). Neurotic and stress-related disorders were reported to have lifetime and current prevalence rates of 6.3% and 5.7%, respectively. Phobic Anxiety Disorder (2.8%) and Agoraphobia (2.6%) were the most common (Lenin Singh et al., 2018).

The prevalence of mental health issues among postgraduate students is severe (Brown, 2018; Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018). When compared to the general population, university students face more mental health issues (Nsereko, 2018; Dessauvague *et al.*, 2022) with everyday stresses like living apart from family members, academic pressure, adapting to new culture and societal norms, and meeting new friends (Kantaris, 2018; Duffy, 2023). Students need to make friends with new people and establish good relationships, especially for students away from home, who want to pursue higher studies for the first time; however, this can be pretty distressing (Deb *et al.*, 2016). Apart from that, they experience stress and anxiety due to a competitive atmosphere and the desire to do better than their peers in the examination and compare themselves with others (Olivera et al., 2023). Identifying and studying the problems these youngsters encounter is vital to provide early intervention to help them acknowledge their capabilities (Kirsh *et al.*, 2014; Bhattarai *et al.*, 2023).

The incidence of mental health problems among postgraduate students is a matter for concern. In Manipur, these issues are worsened by sociopolitical turmoil, limited access to mental health care, and cultural stigma associated with mental illness. In the state of Manipur, research on the mental health issues of postgraduate students is minimal. This study focuses on the prevalence of mental health issues in students at Manipur University, while also considering the role of gender in these challenges.

Objectives

- 1) To estimate the mental health problems among postgraduate students of Manipur University
- 2) To assess the role of gender in influencing mental health issues among postgraduate students of Manipur University.

Methodology

A cross-sectional research design was adopted in the current study by collecting data from postgraduate students across various departments at Manipur University, using a general health questionnaire. Students registered in different departments across multiple schools at Manipur University, located in Canchipur, were chosen as the study area in the current study. The population of the present study consisted of the first-year and final-year post-graduate students studying in various departments across six different schools at Manipur University. A stratified random sampling technique was employed for the study. In the first stage, three departments were randomly selected from each Dean of Schools using the lottery method, resulting in 18 departments. In the second stage, lists of first and final-year postgraduate students from these departments formed the sampling frame, which was further stratified by year of study. From each department, 58 students were randomly selected, totalling 1,034 students. Prior permission was obtained from the university authorities, and potential participants were informed about the study's objectives, confidentiality, and their right to voluntary participation before providing consent. Socio-demographic details were collected using a semi-structured proforma and the GHQ-28 to assess mental health status. Chi-square test was applied to examine the associations among variables.

Result

The present study was based on the primary data collected from 1034 postgraduate students, including first-year and final-year students, across different departments at the university. It consists of two sections, namely 1) To estimate the mental health problems among postgraduate students of Manipur University, and 2) To assess the role of gender in influencing mental health issues among postgraduate students of Manipur University.

Table 1 (a)
Prevalence of mental health problems among postgraduate students

Mental health problem	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-square	d.f.	P-value
Absence	447	43	18.956	1	0.001**
Presence	587	57			
Total	1034	100			

**Significant at 0.01 levels of significance

Table 1 (a): It was witnessed from the table that 43% of postgraduate students at Manipur University had no mental health issues, while the remaining 57% had some form of mental health issues. A chi-square test was performed to examine the distribution between the two categories of mental health problems, and the results revealed a highly significant difference, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.001. The findings projected that the majority of postgraduate students at Manipur University had some form of mental health issues.

Table 1 (b)
Levels of mental health problems among postgraduate students

Levels of mental health problems	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-square	d.f.	P-value
Mild	157	26	41.267	2	0.001**
Moderate	269	46			
Severe	161	28			
Total	587	100			

**Significant at 0.01 levels of significance

Table 1 (b): It was viewed from the table that 26% of postgraduate students at Manipur University had a mild level of distress, 46% had a moderate level of distress, and 28% had a severe level of mental health issues. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the distribution across the three categories of levels of mental health status, and the results showed a highly significant difference, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.001. These findings projected that most postgraduate students at Manipur University experienced moderate distress.

Table 2
Gender and mental health problems among postgraduate students

Gender	Mental Health Problems			Chi-square	d.f.	p-value
	Absence	Presence	Total			
Male	204 (46%)	212 (36%)	416 (40%)	9.568	1	0.002**
Female	243 (54%)	375 (64%)	618 (60%)			
Total	447 (100%)	587 (100%)	1034 (100%)			

** Significant at the 0.01 level of significance

Table 2: The table displayed that among postgraduate students at Manipur University, 46% of male students reported not experiencing any mental health issues, while 36% reported experiencing discomfort. For female postgraduate students, 54% had not experienced any mental health issues, compared to 64% who reported experiencing distress. When a chi-square test was conducted, it revealed a highly significant relationship between gender and mental health problems, with a p-value of 0.002. The findings indicated that female postgraduate students had experienced higher levels of mental health issues compared to their male counterparts.

Discussion

The study revealed that 57% of postgraduate students at Manipur University had mental health issues. This finding was in the same line as a study conducted by Imnasangla and Anu (2025), which reported that approximately 55% of postgraduate students in Nagaland University had mental health issues. Internationally, Sokratous et al. (2023) discovered that 52% of postgraduate students in Cyprus reported poor mental health. However, studies by Auerbach et al. (2018) discovered that 35% of students had a common mental condition, which contradicts the present findings.

Regarding the levels of mental health issues, it was reported that 26%, 46% and 28% of postgraduate students at Manipur University had a mild, moderate, and severe level of distress, respectively. Similar trends are observed in a study conducted by Behera et al. (2021), which discovered that 40% of Indian students suffered moderate to severe distress. Devi et al. (2024) reported that over 60% of B.Ed. Student instructors at Manipur University experienced moderate to severe psychological distress. In the United Kingdom (Campbell et al., 2022). Milicev et al. (2021) found that more than half of postgraduate researchers experienced significant mental health concerns. A global review by Hernández-Torrano et al. (2020) found that moderate psychological discomfort is the most commonly reported among university students. However, a study by Menon et al. (2025) discovered that over 70% of higher education students in major Indian cities had moderate to severe psychological discomfort, much higher than in the present study.

The study claimed that among postgraduate students at Manipur University, 36% of male students reported experiencing any mental health issues, while 64% of female students reported experiencing distress. The present findings are supported by an earlier study, which found that female university students report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Eisenberg et al., 2007; Verger et al., 2009). According to Indian studies, female postgraduate students had a higher level of psychological morbidity than their male counterparts. Thorough research confirms these gender disparities, demonstrating a higher frequency of depression among female students in university populations (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Bayram and Bilgel (2008) discovered relatively minimal variations between male and female students, implying that cultural and institutional circumstances may influence the magnitude of gender discrepancies.

Conclusion

The study reported that 57% of postgraduate students at Manipur University have any form of mental health issues. Regarding the levels, the maximum of them, i.e., 46% had a moderate level of distress. Furthermore, a significant gender difference was observed, as female students reported higher levels of psychological distress (64%) compared to male students.

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