

Investigation of the Level of Mental Unrest among Undergraduate
Students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

This current study was intended for the determination of the level of mental unrest among undergraduate students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The primary objective was to find out the level of mental unrest of university students at the undergraduate level within the region, while also identifying key stressors contributing to their psychological challenges. The assessment encompasses various aspects such as emotional distress, academic pressure, sleep disturbance, and anxiety levels. The main focused goals of this study included determining the prevalence and severity of mental unrest, identifying the major sources contributing to it, and highlighting the need for institutional support mechanisms to address the issue effectively. This research followed a quantitative approach, utilizing a self-structured questionnaire and employing a descriptive survey design. The sample consisted of 315 undergraduate students selected from various universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Data analysis involved the systematic application of logical and statistical techniques to summarize, evaluate, and describe the collected data. Based on the findings, the study offers recommendations and practical insights aimed at improving mental health support, stress reduction strategies, and overall psychological well-being for undergraduate students in the region.

Keywords: Mental unrest, undergraduate students, academic stress, emotional well-being, higher education, Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mental health has emerged as one of the most pressing concerns in higher education globally. University life, once considered a transformative and enriching phase, has increasingly become a source of intense pressure, anxiety, and psychological instability for students. Among undergraduate populations, particularly in resource-constrained and geopolitically sensitive areas such as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K), the issue of mental unrest has escalated into a silent epidemic, often overlooked by educational institutions and policymakers. Mental unrest refers to a state of persistent psychological disturbance marked by emotional instability, academic stress, disrupted sleep patterns, and social or behavioral issues, all of which collectively impair a student's well-being and academic performance.

The academic environment in AJ&K presents a unique blend of challenges. Students not only grapple with heavy academic workloads, competitive grading systems, and high expectations from family and society, but also face regional stressors such as political instability, limited mental health resources, and socio-economic barriers. These cumulative stressors frequently manifest as symptoms of mental unrest ranging from anxiety, irritability, and burnout to social withdrawal, chronic fatigue, and lack of motivation. While these symptoms are common in university settings worldwide, their prevalence and intensity are often heightened in marginalized or conflict-affected regions like AJ&K, where institutional support structures are either minimal or non-existent.

Several studies conducted in Pakistan and other parts of South Asia highlight that mental health challenges among university students are on the rise, with academic pressure identified as one of the leading causes of anxiety and depression (Ahmad & Sohail, 2023; Rehman et al., 2022). However, in the context of AJ&K, there is a lack of empirical data exploring the depth and scope of mental unrest among undergraduates. Most of the existing literature either focuses on general stress or overlooks the regional and cultural nuances that shape students' psychological experiences.

This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating the level of mental unrest among undergraduate students across multiple universities in AJ&K. It examines key indicators such as academic stress, emotional strain, physical fatigue, sleep disturbances, and social behavioral changes. Understanding these indicators is essential for developing institutional strategies that support student well-being, enhance academic performance, and prevent long-term mental health issues. Given the crucial developmental stage that undergraduate students are in, any unresolved psychological distress can have lasting effects on their careers, relationships, and overall life satisfaction.

Furthermore, this research is timely and relevant in light of increasing global recognition of student mental health as a critical component of educational success. Universities around the world are now incorporating wellness initiatives, stress-reduction programs, and peer support services into their academic frameworks. In contrast, institutions in AJ&K are still in the early stages of recognizing and addressing mental unrest, making this investigation not only necessary but also urgent.

By providing data-driven insights into the prevalence and severity of mental unrest, this study aims to inform educational administrators, policymakers, and mental health professionals about the current psychological state of undergraduate students in the region. The findings will serve as a foundational step toward developing culturally sensitive, sustainable, and evidence-based interventions that promote mental well-being and academic resilience among students in AJ&K.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mental unrest among undergraduate students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir is an emerging concern, marked by academic stress, emotional instability, sleep disturbances, and social withdrawal. Despite its growing impact on students' academic performance and wellbeing, there is limited empirical research in this region. The absence of mental health services and structured support systems further aggravates the issue. This study aims to assess the level of mental unrest among undergraduates in AJ&K to provide evidence-based insights for institutional interventions and policy development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the level of student mind unrest at the undergraduate level in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the present state of mental unrest among undergraduate students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental unrest, often manifested as emotional imbalance, academic stress, anxiety, sleep disturbance, and social withdrawal, has emerged as a critical issue in the academic and psychological well-being of university students. Over the past decade, both national and international scholars have extensively examined mental health issues among undergraduate students, shedding light on their causes, indicators, and implications for academic performance and life outcomes.

MENTAL UNREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

International studies highlight a growing concern regarding student mental health in higher education. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) notes that over 35% of university students globally report symptoms of anxiety and depression. Contributing factors include academic overload, fear of failure, financial insecurity, and social isolation. Ibrahim et al. (2013) found that stress levels among university students in developing countries were consistently high, affecting concentration, academic performance, and decision-making abilities.

According to Eisenberg et al. (2019), the transition from secondary to tertiary education brings about lifestyle changes, academic competition, and identity challenges that can increase vulnerability to psychological distress. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to this burden by isolating students, increasing digital fatigue, and disrupting academic routines, leading to a rise in emotional instability and mental health complaints across universities worldwide.

MENTAL UNREST IN SOUTH ASIAN AND PAKISTANI CONTEXTS

In South Asia, mental health remains a sensitive and often overlooked issue. Cultural stigma, lack of mental health awareness, and inadequate institutional support contribute to rising mental unrest among university students. A study by Rehman, Jadoon, and Shah (2022) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa found a strong correlation between academic pressure and sleep disorders among undergraduates. Similarly, Ahmad and Sohail (2023) reported high levels of emotional instability and academic anxiety among students in Northern Pakistan, linking them to poor academic outcomes and lack of support services.

In Pakistan, universities often lack dedicated mental health infrastructure. According to Naz and Kausar (2015), public universities in rural areas face more severe challenges, including limited awareness, minimal access to psychologists or counselors, and poor stress management practices. Khan and Alvi (2017) emphasized the role of timely

intervention and institutional commitment in addressing mental health concerns among students, recommending that psychological support services be formally integrated into the academic system.

REGIONAL FOCUS: AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR (AJ&K)

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, student mental unrest has become an increasingly noticeable phenomenon, though it remains under-researched. The region's unique socio-political setting, combined with economic constraints and frequent natural disasters, contributes to an environment of uncertainty and pressure. Students in AJ&K face significant academic challenges, including outdated teaching methods, poor infrastructure, and a lack of extracurricular and counseling services.

Younus, Khan, and Malik (2023) explored mental health concerns in conflict-prone regions and noted that students in such areas often exhibit higher levels of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and behavioral withdrawal. The lack of institutional preparedness to deal with these issues results in students developing maladaptive coping strategies, such as isolation or disengagement.

Moreover, Fatima and Mahmood (2021) pointed out that students in AJ&K report experiencing constant worry about their academic and personal future, largely due to the absence of career guidance, mental health education, and structured emotional support systems in universities.

COMMON INDICATORS OF MENTAL UNREST IN STUDENTS

Literature consistently identifies several recurring indicators of mental unrest among university students:

- **Academic Stress:** Caused by exams, grades, assignments, and competition (Sohail, 2018).
- **Emotional Stress:** Manifesting as anxiety, irritability, or low self-esteem (Ali & Ahmed, 2020).
- **Sleep and Physical Health Issues:** Poor sleep quality, fatigue, and neglect of physical health are prevalent signs (Rehman et al., 2022).
- **Social Withdrawal:** Students facing mental unrest often withdraw from peer interaction and group participation (Khan et al., 2021).

These indicators are interrelated and often compound over time, affecting students' mental state, academic achievement, and social life.

GAPS AND NEED FOR REGIONAL STUDIES

While considerable work has been done in understanding student mental health at the national and global level, there remains a notable gap in region-specific studies in AJ&K. There is a lack of comprehensive research that captures the psychological experiences of undergraduate students in this region, including how contextual factors such as economic hardship, political instability, and cultural stigma influence mental unrest.

Given the absence of mental health services in AJ&K universities and the increasing academic pressure, it is essential to investigate the current level of student mental unrest to guide policy decisions and develop localized intervention strategies. As Fatima and Khan (2023) argue, effective research on student mental health should consider cultural sensitivities and regional disparities in infrastructure and support.

METHOD AND MATERIAL

This section outlines the research approach and procedures employed to investigate the level of mental unrest among undergraduate students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The aim of the study was to examine the extent and nature of psychological challenges such as



academic stress, emotional strain, sleep disturbances, and behavioral changes affecting university students. The research adopted a quantitative descriptive approach, designed to systematically collect, measure, and analyze data related to student mental unrest using structured instruments.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study followed a quantitative survey-based design, allowing for the collection of data from a large and diverse sample of students enrolled at various undergraduate institutions. A self-developed, structured questionnaire was administered to assess key indicators of mental unrest. This design enabled the researcher to quantify the prevalence and severity of psychological challenges in measurable terms and facilitated comparative analysis across demographic variables such as gender and academic program.

POPULATION

The population of the study included undergraduate students of Azad Kashmir universities. These universities were: Women University Bagh, University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muzaffarabad, University of Poonch Rawalakot, University of Kotli, Mohi-ud-Din Islamic University and MUST (Mirpur University of Science and Technology). A total of 1,736 social sciences students in education departments from these universities constituted the population.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A sample consists of individuals who actually participate in the research study. For this investigation, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proper representation of students from universities of AJ&K. The final sample included 315 undergraduate students, proportionally selected from each institution based on enrollment numbers. This method ensured diversity in gender, academic program, and regional representation across AJ&K.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Based on insights gathered from the literature review and under the supervision of academic experts, the researcher developed a closed-ended structured questionnaire. The instrument included items across four domains of student mental unrest:

- Academic Stress & Anxiety • Emotional Stress • Sleep and Physical Health Impact • Social and Behavioral Changes

Each item was formatted with Yes/No response options, followed by a three-level intensity rating scale: Mild, Moderate, or Severe. The structure allowed for both binary classification and intensity level analysis of symptoms. The instrument was designed to ensure clarity, relevance, and ease of response for undergraduate students.

RELIABILITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted prior to full-scale data collection. This pilot involved 30 students from selected institutions within the study area. Based on expert feedback and the results of the pilot, modifications were made to refine the items and remove redundancies. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, a widely accepted statistical method for assessing scale reliability. The result is shown in the table below:

TABLE 3.1 RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Total No of Items	Cronbach Alpha Reliability
30	0.912



The reliability score of 0.912 indicates a high level of internal consistency, confirming that the items within the questionnaire were suitable for measuring the intended constructs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter covered up the response’s ratio through data collection techniques as well the analysis interpretation of the data collection using study instruments which consist of SPSS version 27.0.2.0 was employed to analyze the dataset, utilizing percentage and frequencies. The results are organized into four key indicators of mental unrest: academic stress and anxiety, emotional stress, sleep and physical impact, and social and behavioral changes. Each section includes both the presence of the issue (Yes/No responses) and its intensity level as reported by the students (Mild, Moderate, or Severe).

TABLE 4.1 ACADEMIC EXPECTATION PRESSURE AMONG STUDENTS.

Question	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Do you feel pressure to meet academic expectations?	Yes	229	72.7
	No	86	27.3
	Total	315	100
If Yes, How much?	Mild	98	31.1
	Moderate	100	31.7
	Severe	31	9.8
Total only		(Yes 229)	100%

Table 4.1 shows that a vast majority of students (72.7%) feel pressure to meet academic expectations, indicating that academic stress is a common concern among undergraduates. Only 27.3% reported not experiencing this pressure. Among those who do (n = 229), most students (31.7%) experience it at moderate level, while 31.1% feel it mildly, and 9.8% report it as severe.

TABLE 4.2 FEELING EMOTIONALLY DRAINED

Question	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Do you often feel emotionally drained?	Yes	256	81.3
	No	59	18.7
	Total	315	100



If Yes, How much?	Mild	101	32.1
	Moderate	31	9.8
	Severe	124	39.4

Total (Yes only)		256	100
Table 4.2 shows that 81.3% of students reported often feeling emotionally drained, indicating this is a common concern among undergraduates. Among these students, 39.4% described their feelings as severe, 32.1% as mild, and 9.8% as moderate. this way, 41.9% described their feelings as moderate, 26.0% as mild, and 19.7% as severe.			

TABLE 4.3 FEELING EMOTIONAL DUE TO ACADEMIC STRESS

Question	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Do you cry or feel like crying due to academic stress?	Yes	285	90.5
	No	30	9.5
	Total	315	100
If Yes, How much?	Mild	165	52.4
	Moderate	105	33.3
	Severe	15	4.8
Total (Yes only)		285	100

Table 4.3 shows that 90.5% of students reported crying or feeling like crying due to academic stress, indicating that emotional distress related to academics is very common. Among those students, 52.4% rated their feelings as mild, 33.3% as moderate, and 4.8% as severe.

TABLE 4.4 WITHDRAWAL AND ISOLATION DUE TO STRESS AND ANXIETY

Question	Categories	Frequency	Percent age
Do you become more withdrawn and isolated due to stress and anxiety?	Yes	224	71.1
	No	91	28.9



	No	91	28.9
	Total	315	100.0
If Yes, How much?	Mild	160	50.8
	Moderate	29	9.2
	Severe	35	11.1
Total (Yes only)		224	100.0%

Table 4.4 indicates that 71.1% students reported becoming more withdrawn and isolated due to stress and anxiety. Among these, over half (50.8%) experienced mild withdrawal, while 9.2% reported moderate and 11.1% severe levels.

FINDINGS

1. Significant proportion of undergraduate students (72.7%) reported feeling pressure to meet academic expectations. This reflects a widespread presence of academic stress among the student population. Among those who experienced such pressure (n = 229), the highest proportion (31.7%) rated their stress as moderate, followed closely by those experiencing it mildly (31.1%), while 9.8% reported severe pressure. This distribution suggests that while most students face academic pressure, for many it does not reach debilitating levels, although a notable minority experience it severely.
2. A large number of students 81.3% often feel emotionally drained. This emotional fatigue appears to be a significant mental health concern. Among the affected students (n = 256), 39.4% described their emotional drain as severe, while 32.1% labeled it as mild, and 9.8% as moderate. These figures indicate that a large portion of students suffer from high emotional stress, potentially impairing their academic performance and personal well-being.
3. A large proportion of students (90.5%) reported crying or feeling like crying due to academic stress. Among them, 52.4% experienced this emotional response mildly, 33.3% moderately, and 4.8% severely. This indicates that academic stress leads to significant emotional distress among undergraduates.
4. 71.1% of students admitted to becoming more withdrawn and isolated due to stress and anxiety. Among these (n = 224), the majority (50.8%) experienced mild withdrawal, while 9.2% experienced moderate and 11.1% experienced severe social withdrawal. This indicates that stress not only affects students emotionally but also socially, leading to disengagement and isolation which may further exacerbate mental unrest.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study emphasize the multifaceted nature of student mental unrest and its strong connection with academic and emotional stressors in university life. Although the majority of students reported experiencing stress at varying levels, the results reveal

that academic expectations, emotional exhaustion, and social withdrawal significantly shape students' mental well-being and indirectly influence their academic engagement and performance. A significant proportion of students reported pressure to meet academic expectations. This finding aligns with the work of Ahmad and Sohail (2023), who emphasized that academic stress is one of the most dominant stressors in higher education, especially in Pakistani universities. Their research suggests that continuous academic demands, coupled with fear of failure, create a persistent sense of pressure among students, which mirrors the experiences reported in this study. Emotional exhaustion was another critical finding, with a large number of students describing themselves as emotionally drained. This supports earlier research by Rehman et al. (2022), who found that high emotional fatigue, driven by academic workload and poor coping mechanisms, often leads to reduced academic performance and motivation. Emotional fatigue also affects personal well-being, limiting students' ability to manage stress effectively and increasing the risk of academic burnout. high percentage of students reporting crying or feeling like crying due to academic stress indicates deep emotional vulnerability. This result corresponds with Khan and Zahra (2020), who noted that emotional outbursts such as crying often serve as immediate responses to overwhelming academic situations. These findings suggest that academic institutions must prioritize emotional support systems, such as counseling and stress-relief programs, to help students manage these intense feelings. a large number of students admitted to becoming more withdrawn and isolated due to stress and anxiety. This is consistent with findings by Shah et al. (2022), who identified social withdrawal as a common behavioral response to academic-related stress, particularly when students lack supportive peer or faculty networks. Social disengagement not only limits access to academic collaboration and peer learning but also increases feelings of loneliness and detachment from university life.

SUMMARY

The investigation of the level of mental unrest among undergraduate students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir was conducted to assess the psychological and emotional challenges faced by students in the region. Findings reveal a high prevalence of academic pressure, emotional exhaustion, and social withdrawal among undergraduates. A majority of students reported experiencing stress related to academic expectations, along with frequent feelings of emotional fatigue and distress. Many also admitted to becoming socially withdrawn as a result of persistent anxiety and mental strain. These patterns suggest that mental unrest is a widespread issue among university students in the region. The study underscores the urgent need for institutional awareness and strategic interventions focused on promoting mental health, improving emotional support systems, and integrating student-centered well-being services in academic settings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the investigation into the level of mental unrest among undergraduate students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir highlights the pressing need to address the psychological and emotional well-being of students at the university level. The findings reveal that a significant number of students are experiencing academic pressure, emotional exhaustion, and social withdrawal, all of which contribute to a high level of mental unrest. This study underscores the importance of recognizing student mental health as a priority within higher education institutions. The widespread nature of emotional and academic distress points to gaps in institutional support systems and a lack of structured mental health services. The results call for urgent attention from policymakers, university

administrators, and mental health professionals to introduce targeted strategies that promote mental well-being and reduce academic stress. These challenges and implementing focused, student-centered interventions such as mental health awareness campaigns, access to psychological counseling, and the creation of emotionally supportive learning environments universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir can foster a more resilient, balanced, and academically successful student population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Universities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir should set up dedicated mental health and counseling centers staffed with qualified psychologists and counselors. These centers should offer confidential and accessible services to students experiencing academic stress, emotional distress, or social difficulties.
2. Regular assessments and workshops should be conducted to identify students struggling with mental unrest. Institutions should hold awareness sessions on stress management, emotional well-being, and healthy coping strategies to build resilience among the student population.
3. Mental health literacy must be included as a part of university orientation programs and general education courses. Educating students about symptoms, risk factors, and the importance of mental health can help in early identification and intervention.
4. Government and educational authorities should support further research on student mental health issues across the region and develop policy guidelines for standardized mental health practices in all universities of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

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