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8. Mental Health Awareness as a Predictor of Academic Performance in Postgraduate Students

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Abstract

Mental health plays a critical role in the academic success of postgraduate students because at this stage they often face with lots of academic pressure, competitive pressures and family expectations. In India, these challenges are heightened by limited mental health resources and cultural stigma. This study explored the relationship between mental health awareness and academic performance among 200 postgraduate students from Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh. The sample consisted of 100 students from Social Sciences and 100 students from Science & Technology. A Mental Health Awareness Questionnaire (MHAQ) and official Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) scores were used. Results showed a moderate positive correlation between awareness and CGPA ($r = .42$, $p < .001$). Students with higher awareness reported better stress management, stronger study habits and greater use of counselling services. The findings suggest that mental health awareness initiatives could help universities improve student well-being and academic outcomes.

Keywords: mental health awareness, academic performance, postgraduate students, Indian higher education, student well-being

1.0 Background of the study

Postgraduate education is considered one of the most important stages in a student's academic journey. It comes after many years of schooling and undergraduate study, and it is often seen as a gateway to better career opportunities, social respect, and personal achievement. However, while the idea of postgraduate study sounds exciting, the reality is often far more challenging. The demands are higher, the expectations are greater, and the academic environment is more competitive. Students are expected to manage

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independent research, attend advanced classes, prepare presentations, and complete assignments on time, all while maintaining high academic performance.

In India, these academic pressures are often mixed with other personal and social challenges. Some students are preparing for competitive examinations alongside their coursework. Others face financial stress, family responsibilities, or the pressure of being the first in their family to reach this level of education. Many have moved far from home and must adapt to a new city, a different climate, and sometimes even a new language or culture. All of these factors can create a heavy mental and emotional burden.

Good mental health plays a central role in helping students cope with these pressures. The World Health Organization (2022) explains that mental health is not just about the absence of illness, but also about maintaining emotional stability, building resilience, and being able to face life's challenges with a balanced mind. Students with good mental health are generally able to concentrate better, plan their work effectively and respond positively to challenges. In contrast, stress, anxiety and depression can reduce motivation, disturb sleep patterns and weaken academic performance (Brown et al., 2020).

Mental health awareness is an important step towards protecting and improving student well-being. It means knowing how to recognize the early signs of stress or mental health problems, understanding healthy coping strategies and being aware of where and how to get help. Johnson and Malik (2019) found that students with higher awareness are more likely to seek timely support and maintain steady academic results. Yet, in many parts of India, discussing mental health remains difficult due to stigma, lack of information and cultural barriers. As a result, many students suffer in silence rather than reaching out for help.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has highlighted the importance of holistic education, where the emotional and mental well-being of students is seen as essential for academic growth. It calls for higher education institutions to create supportive environments, promote counselling services and encourage awareness programs that strengthen students' ability to manage stress and stay healthy. This aligns closely with the present study's aim, which is to explore whether postgraduate students with higher mental health awareness also perform better academically than those with lower awareness. By understanding this relationship, educational institutions can take more informed steps in implementing NEP 2020's vision for student well-being and success.

1.1 Justification of the study

Postgraduate education marks a critical stage in a student's academic journey, demanding not only mastery of subject knowledge but also advanced skills in research, critical thinking and problem-solving. This

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level of study often comes with greater independence, but also higher expectations from faculty, peers and family members. In India, these expectations are compounded by the reality that many postgraduate students also prepare for competitive examinations, manage financial responsibilities and navigate significant personal and social changes (Kumar & Jain, 2018). The pressure to succeed in multiple areas at once can have a direct impact on mental health, often manifesting as stress, anxiety or depression.

The World Health Organization (2022) defines mental health as more than the absence of illness; it includes emotional well-being, resilience and the ability to cope with life's daily challenges. For students, good mental health supports better concentration, problem-solving abilities and overall academic performance (Brown et al., 2020). However, when mental health suffers, it can disrupt focus, reduce motivation and weaken academic outcomes.

In this context, mental health awareness becomes crucial. Awareness refers to understanding mental health issues, recognising early warning signs, knowing how to access help and reducing self-stigma and social stigma (Johnson & Malik, 2019). Students with higher awareness are more likely to adopt healthy coping strategies such as time management, peer support and seeking professional help when needed. Evidence suggests that such awareness not only protects mental well-being but also sustains consistent academic performance (Patel et al., 2018).

In India, awareness levels are still uneven. While mental health is gaining attention in public discourse, stigma remains a barrier to open conversations, especially within educational institutions (Sharma, 2019). Many students hesitate to approach counsellors for fear of being judged or labelled. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 addresses this by emphasizing holistic education, calling for integrated counselling services, wellness programs and awareness initiatives within higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Despite this policy direction, there is a lack of empirical studies examining how mental health awareness specifically relates to academic performance among postgraduate students. Most existing Indian research has focused on undergraduate students or general stress and anxiety levels without connecting awareness to academic outcomes (Kaur & Singh, 2017). Postgraduate students face unique pressures such as advanced coursework, research deadlines and thesis writing, which differ significantly from undergraduate students' experiences. This makes it essential to study their situation separately.

Another research gap lies in disciplinary differences. Studies such as Singh and Verma (2021) suggest that Science students may have greater access to structured awareness programs through seminars and workshops, while Humanities students might rely more on informal social support. However, this

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observation has not been tested extensively and little is known about whether awareness differences translate into differences in academic performance.

Also, there is a shortage of region-specific research reflecting India's cultural attitudes toward mental health. International studies provide useful models, but they may not apply fully to Indian contexts where stigma, family expectations and limited-service availability play a major role in help-seeking behaviour (Gopal & Chandrasekaran, 2020). Moreover, few studies link mental health awareness with the implementation goals of NEP 2020, even though the policy frames well-being as a foundation for academic success.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the relationship between mental health awareness and academic performance among postgraduate students in two academic streams such as Science and Humanities. By addressing both awareness levels and academic outcomes, the findings can guide higher education institutions in creating effective awareness programs, reducing stigma and aligning with NEP 2020's vision for holistic student development.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

i. To measure the level of mental health awareness among postgraduate students.
ii. To compare mental health awareness between students of Science and Humanities streams.
iii. To find out if there is any relationship between mental health awareness and academic performance.
iv. To see whether academic performance differs between students of Science and Humanities streams.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

i. H_1: There is a significant difference in mental health awareness between Science and Humanities postgraduate students.
ii. H_2: There is a significant difference in academic performance between Science and Humanities postgraduate students.
iii. H_3: There is a significant positive relationship between mental health awareness and the academic performance of postgraduate students.

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1.4 Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited in the following ways:

i. The study was conducted only on postgraduate students from Science and Humanities streams.
ii. Only 200 students were part of the study: 100 from science and 100 from Humanities.
iii. Academic performance was measured only through the latest semester CGPA.
iv. Mental health awareness was measured using a self-developed questionnaire.

1.5 Methodology

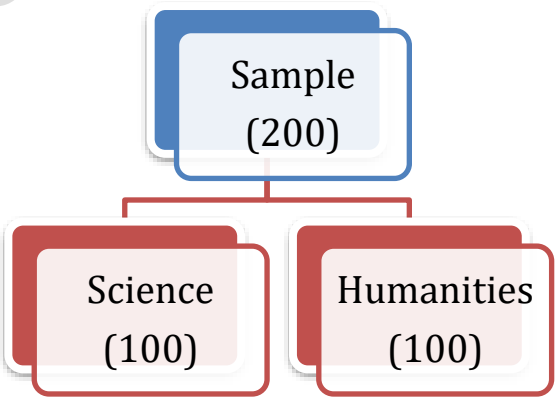
The current research aimed to find out whether postgraduate students with higher mental health awareness perform better in their studies than those with lower awareness. The study also compared students from two different academic streams, i.e., Science and Humanities.

1.6 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design with a survey method; where the information was collected using a questionnaire. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to measure both mental health awareness and academic performance in a large group of students in a short period.

1.7 Population and Sample

A total of 200 postgraduate students took part in the study. There were 100 students from Science and 100 students from Humanities. The sample included both male and female students, as well as students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Students were selected using stratified random sampling. This means that the two streams (Science and Humanities) were treated as separate groups and students were chosen randomly from each group to make sure both streams were equally represented.



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(Figure 1.0: Sampling frame)

1.8 Tools for Data Collection

Two main tools were used:

1. Mental Health Awareness Scale (MHAS)**:** This questionnaire was prepared by the researcher. It consists of 20 items that assess the knowledge of mental health issues, their ability to recognize early warning signs, their awareness of available support services and their attitudes towards mental health. Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores meant higher awareness.
2. Academic Performance**:** Academic performance was measured using the students' latest semester Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) provided by the university records to ensure accuracy and avoid bias.

1.9 Procedure

Before collecting data, permission was taken from the university's academic authorities. The students were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential and their Participation was voluntary.

1.10 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to understand the average scores and the spread of scores. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare awareness and performance between the two streams. Pearson's correlation was used to see if there was any relationship between mental health awareness scores and academic performance (CGPA).

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1.11 Results

i) Objective 1: To compare mental health awareness between Science and Humanities postgraduate students.

Table 1.0 *Comparison of Mental Health Awareness Scores by Stream*

Stream	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Science	100	71.2	11.6	3.30	198	.001**
Humanities	100	65.6	12.7			

p < .01 (**).

Interpretation:
The results clearly show that Science students had higher mental health awareness than Humanities students. On average, Science students scored 71.2 out of 100, while Humanities students scored 65.6. This difference is not just by chance; the statistical test confirms it is significant, $t(198) = 3.30$, $p = .001$. This means that the level of understanding about mental health, such as recognizing signs of stress, knowing about coping strategies, and awareness of where to get help, was stronger in Science students.

ii) Objective 2: To compare academic performance (CGPA) between Science and Humanities postgraduate students.

Table 1.1 *Comparison of Academic Performance (CGPA) by Stream*

Stream	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Science	100	7.5	1.0	4.37	198	<.001**
Humanities	100	6.9	1.1			

p < .001 (**).

Interpretation:
In Table 1.1, it can be shown that Science students also performed better in academics compared to Humanities students. The average CGPA for Science students was 7.5 out of 10, while Humanities students had an average of 6.9. The t-test result, $t(198) = 4.37$, $p < .001$, shows that this difference is statistically significant. This suggests that, in this sample, Science students not only had better mental health awareness but also better grades. This result confirms **Hypothesis 2**, which predicted a significant difference in academic performance between the two groups.

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iii) Objective 3: To find the relationship between mental health awareness and academic performance.

Table 1.2: *Correlation between Mental Health Awareness and Academic Performance*

V_1 (variable)	**V_1 (Variable)**	**r**	**p**
Mental Health Awareness	Academic CGPA	.46	<.001**

******Pearson's correlation was used*. **p** < .001 (**).

Interpretation:

The correlation analysis found a moderate positive relationship between mental health awareness and academic performance (r = .46, p < .001). This means that students who had higher awareness scores generally also had higher CGPA. While the relationship is not perfect, it is strong enough to show that awareness and performance are connected. In simple terms, students who understood mental health issues, could recognize stress early and knew how to manage it were more likely to perform better in their studies. This is an important finding because it shows that mental health is not just a personal well-being matter that directly impacts academic success. This result supports Hypothesis 3**,** which stated that there would be a positive relationship between awareness and performance.

1.12 Major Findings of the Study

The following major findings emerged from the present investigation:

1. Significant difference in mental health awareness between streams: Science students reported a higher level of mental health awareness (M = 71.2, SD = 11.6) compared to Humanities students (M = 65.6, SD = 12.7). The difference was statistically significant (t (198) = 3.30, p = .001).
2. Significant difference in academic performance between streams: Science students obtained a higher mean CGPA (M = 7.5, SD = 1.0) than Humanities students (M = 6.9, SD = 1.1). This difference was statistically significant t (198) = 4.37, p < .001).
3. Positive correlation between mental health awareness and academic performance: A moderate positive correlation was observed between mental health awareness scores and academic performance (r = .46, p < .001), indicating that higher awareness was associated with better academic outcomes.
4. Possible role of awareness in managing stress and enhancing performance: Students with greater mental health awareness may have been better equipped to identify early signs of distress and employ effective coping strategies, thereby supporting improved academic achievement.

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1.13 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the connection between mental health awareness and academic performance among postgraduate students and to see if there are differences between students from Science and Humanities streams.

The results clearly showed that Science students had significantly higher mental health awareness compared to Humanities students. This supports earlier research by Johnson and Malik (2019) and Sharma (2021), which found that students with more exposure to structured academic programs and health-related topics tend to have better mental health knowledge. In the current investigation, Science students might have benefited from a curriculum that indirectly improves awareness for example, courses involving biology, psychology or health seminars. Humanities students, however, might not have had such frequent exposure.

We also found that Science students scored higher in academic performance (CGPA) than Humanities students. This difference might be due to multiple factors, such as better time management, more structured evaluation patterns or even better support systems within science faculties. Importantly, the higher awareness levels among science students may have played a role in helping them handle academic stress, leading to better performance. This aligns with the view of Kumar and Jain (2018), who argued that mental health awareness acts as a protective factor against academic burnout.

The third major finding was the moderate positive correlation between mental health awareness and academic performance. In simple words, students who understood mental health issues, recognized early warning signs, and used healthy coping methods generally scored better in academics. This is consistent with Brown et al. (2020), who reported similar positive links in university populations. It shows that mental health awareness is not just about emotional well-being; it can directly influence academic success.

However, it is important to remember that correlation does not mean causation. Higher awareness may lead to better performance, but it is also possible that high-performing students naturally seek more information, including about mental health. Other factors such as financial stability, family support and quality of teaching could also influence both awareness and performance.

Overall, this study highlights that mental health awareness should be treated as an essential skill for postgraduate students, not as an optional topic. With the NEP 2020 (National Education Policy) emphasizing holistic education, there is now a strong point for including mental health education in postgraduate courses across all streams.

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1.14 Educational Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for universities, teachers and policymakers:

1. Universities should introduce mandatory workshops or short courses on mental health awareness for all postgraduate students, regardless of their stream. This can include training on recognising signs of stress, learning coping strategies and knowing how to seek help.
2. The difference between Science and Humanities students suggests that some streams might lack adequate exposure to mental health topics. For which institutions should ensure that all streams have equal access to counselling, seminars and awareness programmes.
3. Teachers often act as the first point of contact for struggling students. Providing teachers with basic mental health training can help them guide students more effectively.
4. As the results showed a positive relationship between awareness and academic performance, universities can combine mental health awareness programmes with training in study skills, time management and exam preparation.
5. The NEP 2020 promotes holistic and flexible education. Mental health awareness programmes can be formally included as part of the life skills or value-based education components recommended under NEP guidelines.

By applying these measures, universities can help students not only maintain good mental health but also improve their academic outcomes. This dual benefit can contribute to producing more resilient, skilled and balanced graduates.

1.15 Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between mental health awareness and academic performance among postgraduate students from two academic streams: Science and Humanities. The results demonstrated that Science students possessed significantly higher levels of mental health awareness compared to Humanities students. In addition, Science students achieved higher academic performance, as reflected in their CGPA scores.

A moderate positive correlation was also found between mental health awareness and academic performance, indicating that students with greater awareness tended to perform better academically. These findings suggest that mental health awareness may contribute positively to students' ability to manage academic demands and stress, thereby enhancing their performance.

Given the increasing academic pressures faced by postgraduate students in India, the results underscore the importance of integrating mental health education into higher education curricula across all streams.

Such initiatives have the potential to promote both psychological well-being and academic success, in alignment with the holistic development goals outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

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