

Chapter 10

Surviving the Strains: Mental Health Challenges for Students and Faculty in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Modern campus stressors affect students' and staff's mental health. Academic stress, hard workloads, financial instability, and competition are major stressors in higher education. Overloaded curriculum, loneliness, and future uncertainty cause anxiety, despair, and burnout among students. Academics face research productivity stresses, tenure-track goals, and combining teaching with personal and professional duties. Recognizing these interrelated pressures is crucial to developing a mental health-friendly academic community. Not thinking about mental health may hurt individuals, institutions, and students. Resilience, mental health awareness, and structural change in academia are suggested in the chapter. These issues may be addressed to improve the academic environment for students and teachers, making the educational system more sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

People need to own their mental well-being by making use of resources available, respecting self-care, and acknowledging their mental health requirements. Creating personal stress coping strategies, like mindfulness exercises or time management strategies, can really enhance a person's well-being and act as a positive role model for others. Tackling mental health issues in education is not solely the responsibility of institutions but calls for a mutual commitment from everyone in the academy. Fighting for structural change, creating supporting environments, and encouraging ongoing debate on mental health (Manoharan et al., (September 2024) can go a long way toward the realization of better mental health outcomes for all. The importance of mental health in post-secondary education cannot be overem-

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phasized. Current research suggests that mental health problems are widespread among college students and faculty, having a major influence on academic performance, job satisfaction, and student retention. The American College Health Association (ACHA) found in a 2022 survey that nearly 29% of college students had incapacitating depression, and 41% reported being overwhelmed with anxiety (Lederer and Hoban, 2022). These figures highlight the need for greater awareness and preventive action to promote mental well-being within school settings.

Mental health issues are not just individual issues; they affect institutions too. Teachers play a critical role in the academic process, and their mental well-being has a direct effect on class quality, student participation, and institutional climate. (Kuadey et al., 2024) recently discovered that academic staff with high burnout and stress levels had lower productivity and efficiency, thereby negatively impacting student outcomes. This relationship highlights the necessity of improving teacher welfare to create a healthier learning environment. Student-professor dynamics form the basis of the learning experience. When professors experience mental health issues, the resulting stress will likely find its way into the student body, creating a culture of overwhelm and isolation. (Hosek, 2025) pointed out that this vicious cycle of stress undermines student retention, academic performance, and the institution's overall reputation. Hence, institutions need to recognize and address mental health issues in a holistic way. Prioritizing mental health in higher education also has benefits for institutions. Increased mental health awareness can result in enhanced policies, more effective resource allocation, and the creation of support mechanisms, promoting resilience across students and staff. Institutions prioritizing mental health establish places where students and staff feel valued and supported, allowing them to achieve to the best of their abilities both academically and personally (Campbell et al., 2022).

Statistics on Mental Health Issues in Higher Education Settings

The incidence of mental health in higher education needs immediate attention. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), a staggering number of almost one out of five adults in the United States suffers from some type of mental illness, a number that closely approximates the reality within campuses (County, 2023). In addition, a recent Center for Collegiate Mental Health (McCallie, 2024) report identifies a significant spike in the number of students seeking mental health services, with more than 1.8 million college students receiving counseling in one year. This is an indicator of increased awareness of the importance of mental health, coupled with an urgent need for improved support systems to address this demand. Mental health challenges ((Manoharan et al., (September 2024) have implications beyond numbers; they have real repercussions for both educators and learners (Chen, 2021) in a research show that, if left without treatment, mental health challenges have been linked with reduced motivation, poor concentration, and impaired intellectual functioning among children. Their impact on academia is no better—burnout results in rising absenteeism and dropout rates, ultimately affecting organizational effectiveness and pedagogical continuity (Lackritz, 2004).

This chapter will cover a number of experiences to bring out the complexity of mental health issues in academia. Through the combination of personal accounts and quantitative information, it hopes to improve the understanding of the widespread pressures in this area. This chapter is a call to action for institutions to make mental health a priority, creating a future where both students and lecturers can thrive in a supportive and caring academic environment.

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