Achievement at What Cost? A Cross-Sectional Study of Burnout, Anxiety, and Legal Silence Among Bangladeshi and Indian College Students

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Abstract

Background: College students of Bangladesh and India face immense levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout due to the competitive academic culture. Lack of awareness and legal negligence have made the situation problematic. This research studies the prevalence of stress, anxiety, burnout, and legal awareness as well as stressors among college students in both countries. According to the findings, it is evident that mental health issues are on the rise, making this study significant.

Method: This study used a quantitative survey among the students of Bangladesh and India, with a cross-sectional analysis using both open and closed-ended questions. It focused on cities such as Dhaka, Munshiganj, Kolkata, Jaipur, etc. The participants included adult students of both nations. The data was analyzed using statistical tools named SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Result: The outcome highlighted that a large number of students face moderate to high levels of mental pressure in college. Primary stressors such as academic pressure, peer pressure, and unsupportive faculty are identified with a lack of mental health support. There is a lack of awareness about the importance of mental health among students.

Limitations: As the study received only 52 responses, the findings may not fully represent the broader populations of Bangladesh and India. Therefore, future researchers may build upon the findings of this study by conducting further research with larger samples and across diverse contexts to explore whether similar patterns can be observed on a broader scale.

Conclusion: The study shows that the college academic structure negatively affects the mental health of students. Also, there is a significant gap in awareness about Legal Policies Regarding Mental Health.

Keywords

Academic Stress, Anxiety, Burnout, College and University Students, Mental Health Awareness, Competitive Academic Environment, Legal Silence, Depression, Social Stigma, Bangladesh and India

1. Introduction

Academic achievements are stressed upon by low and middle-income South Asian parents, especially hailing from Bangladesh and India, as it secures social mobility and financial security. Hence, parents force their children to excel academically. As a result, the children became mentally vulnerable to several mental breakdowns, including anxiety, depression, burnout, etc. (Gull et al., 2026). Burnout is a tired state of mind caused by overwork and stress. Anxiety, a psychological condition, is accompanied by nervous behavior, such as pacing, physical symptoms and excessive worries. Along with burnout and anxiety, depression is also a recurring concern among students (Al-Amin et al., 2025). Legal silence denotes negligent authority regarding the mental health of students. Students face social stigma, thus backing away from seeking support. Therefore, it is important to know about burnout, anxiety, and legal silence as it is closely related to students' mental and physical well-being.

Bangladesh and India share a similar education culture, the six-month semester pattern. Thus, it is relevant to conduct a cross-sectional study among students from these two countries. Previous studies about students' mental health were mostly focused on the gender and lifestyle perspectives. There exists a gap when it comes to relating mental health to the laws and policies.

Alongside, overwhelming peer pressure (social, professional, urban, rural) leads to non-conformity problems during college life. Although it is deemed invisible, it has a strong influence on individual behavior (Chen & Deng, 2022). Apart from peer pressure, an unsupportive faculty exacerbates the gap between education and student satisfaction (Hernandez & Posselt, 2024). These, in turn, lead to an acute identity crisis among college students (Sandrone, 2022).

The major aim of the study is to analyze the relation between burnout and anxiety by looking through the lens of policies. Furthermore, it tries to understand the loopholes prevalent in the laws of the Bangladeshi and Indian education systems. Subsequently, this study is significant to understand the psychological and emotional costs behind academic achievements. This will

help policymakers to review the education system, and it will also help teachers to be more student friendly. Furthermore, this research will aid the students by making them aware of their mental health.

1.1. Concept of Legal Silence

In this study, the term "legal silence" stands for the gap between the existing mental health laws and their implementation. There are not enough mental health laws in college and even if they exist the students don't even know about how they work. In simple term, legal silence includes the lack of awareness, accessibility and practical implementations of mental health laws and policies in educational institutions.

1.2. Legal Procedures and Mental Health Stigma

There is a mismatch between law and practice in the rights-based approaches adopted by India and Bangladesh. India's Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, recognizes affordable care, privacy, confidentiality, equality and legal assistance in line with UNCRPD (*Union of India - Section 115 in The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017*, n.d.). Similarly, Bangladesh's Mental Health Act (2018) replaced the Lunacy Act of 1912, which incorporates consent, confidentiality and monitoring measures (Raisa, 2023). However, these reforms do not prevent stigma from discouraging students from seeking help due to fear of labelling or exclusion. Moreover, involuntary admissions and police involvement may make mental healthcare appear punitive and reduce access.

1.2.1. Negligence & Liability – Does a University Have a Responsibility?

The duty of care implies institutional responsibility to prevent foreseeable harm. In India, UGC Guidelines on counselling and suicide prevention were non-binding. Recent rulings in Sukhdev Saha (2025) and Amit Kumar (2026) strengthened institutional accountability under Article 21 (Mehta, 2025). Bangladesh lacks a documented policy defining university responsibility. Although digital mental health tools and artificial intelligence improve access, they remain inadequately regulated.

1.2.2. Implementational Challenges: Policy Without Enforcement

Rights-based approaches often create a "compliance illusion" where laws exist but are not enforced. Lack of implementation prevents many HEIs from establishing mental health infrastructure. Proposed UGC guidelines permit superficial compliance, while limited

oversight weakens enforcement in Bangladesh. As a result, rights without remedies offer little protection to students whose rights are violated.

1.2.3. Right to Mental Healthcare vs Criminalization of Suicide

A major tension remains between recognizing mental healthcare as a right and retaining punitive responses to suicide. In India, Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act discourages prosecution under IPC Section 309 but does not remove police involvement. This can discourage help-seeking. In Bangladesh, individuals who attempt suicide continue to be treated as both "patients" and "offenders", undermining a therapeutic legal framework and perpetuating stigma.

2. Problem Statement

Research on mental health issues like anxiety, burnout, depression, and identity crisis among college students in India and Bangladesh has mainly been confined either to India or Bangladesh. Available research focuses on specific mental problems and suicide rates, along with a gendered research niche. Stressors like stigmas, lack of empathy from peer groups and unsupportive faculty, six-month semester culture and societal and parental expectations have not been studied in a cross-country survey.

This study aims to investigate the issues faced by urban college students in both India and Bangladesh through a cross-country survey to identify a pattern. It focuses on a general study of a gender niche. The above-mentioned stressors have to be evaluated through this study. With evidence-backed data, this study also aims to suggest ways to improve the existing status of mental health in students. The problems that have been reported have to be proven by the end of the survey to reach a conclusion which probes into the deeper legal policies in both countries when it comes to protecting students' mental health.

3. Research Question

Primary Question: What is the relationship between college stressors like academic pressure, peer culture, and unsupportive faculty and the prevalence of anxiety, stress, and burnout among urban college students in India and Bangladesh?

Secondary question: What is the level of awareness among students regarding the primary question, and how well aware are they of the legal practices relating to mental health?

4. Objectives

The primary research objective is to investigate whether or not students are aware of the mental health problems that they have been facing. Consequently, the research also aims to delve deeply into the specific mental health problems like stress, anxiety, and burnout in the last three months. It also tries to locate whether urban students in both India and Bangladesh are aware of the factors that are affecting their mental health in college- social expectations, peer pressure, unsupportive faculty, and whether that leads to an acute crisis of identity.

A secondary research objective is to probe whether there are specific mental health laws in both India and Bangladesh regarding a student's mental health. It aims to study whether students are aware of such provisions in their country, or if they would like to know more about them through various programs and consultations. Additionally, it also tries to deliver a framework where students' suggestions would help to navigate the stigma associated with mental health and what kind of administrative, legal, or academic procedures can be undertaken to solve these issues.

5. Methodology

This study involves a mixed-methods approach with the convergence of both quantitative and qualitative research. The cross-sectional and cross-country survey, which has been conducted to understand the factors of burnout, anxiety, and stress among urban college students, falls under quantitative research. It is significant in understanding the underlying causes of such mental health problems due to the semester culture, unsupportive faculty, peer pressure, and societal expectations. This is the core focus of the study, which helps to identify patterns in both countries, leading to similar mental health status and awareness. The quantitative part was presented as a closed-ended questionnaire.

A few suggestions were welcome from the students in an open-ended part of the questionnaire, and can be termed as qualitative data. The data, which is represented in a concoction of pie charts and bar diagrams, refers to definite facts. Moreover, the questionnaire, which was distributed as part of the survey, forms the primary understanding of awareness about subjective mental health conditions, legal procedures, and stigma associated with them. However, the study adopted an exploratory cross-sectional design because it was appropriate for examining the prevalence of stress, anxiety, burnout, and awareness regarding mental

health policies among college students at a single point in time. Finally, statistical analysis of the data provides specific examples within a sample of respondents.

5.1. Study Setting and Population

The study has been set among urban college-going students in both Bangladesh and India. Bangladeshi cities like Dhaka, Savar, Comilla, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, and Manikganj and Indian cities like Kolkata, Jaipur, Delhi, Ranchi, and Bangalore are chosen. An option for denoting other cities has also been given. The population chosen has been college-going students in both countries, and 52 responses have been received.

5.2. Materials & Instruments

A Google Form with both closed and open-ended questions has been used as the primary material for the survey. It consisted of 13 questions, which included the name of the country, the city, and anonymous responses from the surveillants. They had been circulated through the personal network of the researchers.

5.3. Data Collection Procedures

Primary data about anxiety, depression, burnout, and stress, along with the factors affecting them, have been collected from research papers that are based in Bangladesh and India and have carried out quantitative research in the recent past. Data has also been collected from the lived experience of students. A survey was conducted in May 2026 to find empirical data. Finally, for an empirical basis, a survey has been conducted through a Google form, which has led to the construction of pie graphs and bar diagrams to prove the objectives.

5.4. Data Analysis Methods

The data which was received in the survey has been first broken down into a mathematical construction. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been used to form pie charts and bar diagrams based on the responses received. These provide an empirical base for the formulation of the results and discussion.

The results have been found from the statistical data of the percentage and the number of respondents for each question. The discussion, on the other hand, has been evaluated from the number of responses received and by comparing the disparity between the highest and the lowest number of responses for a given question. Consequently, discussions have been based on the previously evaluated research and the newfound responses. Suggestions that have been

taken from students have also been included to compensate for a better legal framework in future.

5.5. Reliability Measurement

To do the reliability test, the SPSS software has been used. Particularly the questions 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11 were used to do the reliability test. The questionnaire includes few Likert scale questions. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the Likert-scale items were selected & these items were examined using Cronbach's Alpha. The calculated Cronbach's Alpha was 0.85 that indicates a good internal consistency. However, according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 is considered acceptable. The questionnaire was developed based on the necessity of information. But it was influenced by previous studies as the literature review has been conducted before formatting the questionnaire. Moreover, the main concern of the questionnaire was to measure stress, anxiety, burnout, identity crisis, and mental health awareness.

5.6. Ethical Considerations

For protecting the privacy of the participants, the responses were kept anonymous with no mention of either their names or their mail IDs being recorded in the survey sheets. The questionnaire also mentioned that the responses will remain anonymous and will be strictly used for research purposes only. Thus, the participants were informed beforehand about the structure of the pattern and how their data would be used, thus ensuring that there was no breach of privacy or consent.

5.7. Limitations

There are a few methodological limitations in the research process. The time limit for completing this project was one month. However, due to time and resource constraints, the sample size couldn’t be larger. As the sample size is too small to generate a generic answer for a large population that inhabits the college structure in both Bangladesh and India. The students have only been assessed on their particular problems in a close survey, giving them no options to choose their symptoms in any other situation. Also, there have been no provisions to underscore whether the students are from a UG, PG, or PhD course. Thus, the framework possesses a general estimation of students in college without a specific understanding of which courses affect them in what they do. The age group of the students has been undefined, as a college student can range from the age group of 18 and above, and there has been no definite

scale. That has not been taken into consideration. Alongside gender and socioeconomic factors have also been left out. It is important to mention that, even if this research gives useful and very important insights about stress, anxiety, and burnout among students, but due to smaller sample size, it may not fully represent the broader populations. Hence, future researchers should employ larger samples to get more generalizable outcome.

6. Literature Review

Research across colleges and universities in Bangladesh has reported university entrance exams as the underlying cause of mental stress among students. Science students have reported more cases of detrimental mental health conditions in comparison to Business Studies students.

Feng et al. (2026) conducted a quantitative study among 764 undergraduate students using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to o examine patterns of perceived stress, anxiety, and depression. The findings showed students with poor sleep quality were more stressed, anxious, and depressed. Yuan et al. (2026) conducted a two-wave longitudinal survey among 1,354 college students from six universities to examine the bidirectional relationship between subjective well-being and emotional distress and the results depicts emotional distress and subjective well-being has a correlation. If emotional distress increases then subjective well-being decreases and vice versa.

According to Olson et al. (2025), female university students are more stressed than male students & they found 73.2% students were overly stressful. Pérez-Jorge et al. (2025) tested the impact of academic stress on university students' by using mixed-method upon 256 students and the results shows students who fails in work-life balance leads a more stressful life. Moreover, Zhang et al. (2025) examined 428 undergraduate students from 3 institutions and the results showed that there is an optimistic relationship between stress and academic burn out that means if stress increases then academic burnout increases simultaneously. By conducting a quantitative analysis among 430 university students by using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), it is found that COVID-19 has increased the level of academic stress, anxiety, lack of belongingness, isolation, and loneliness amidst students (Dost, 2025). Empirical research working on prevalence and risk predictability has called for an improvement of accessibility with data-backed insights to fill the knowledge gap. Additionally, the huge shift in lifestyle due to college has been noted as a primary precursor to problems, along with the occurrence of physical symptoms among such students (Roy et al., 2025). Subsequently, studies across Bangladesh have pointed out the lack of awareness regarding

mental health services. Although there are provisions of mental healthcare and associations for policy making, negative attitudinal barriers (stigma and non-stigma) have hindered students from availing those services (Sifat et al., 2023). Female students have higher scores on the scale than male students (Ovi et al., 2024). Alongside socioeconomic pressures, such as tuition fees and a lack of a secure future, have affected students. Previous neurological disorders have also been linked to ongoing stress in college (Rabby et al., 2023).

In India, research has pointed out the prevalence of higher scores of mental health issues among female students in comparison to their male counterparts. Higher symptoms have consequently manifested as academic failure, substance use, sexual abuse, ADHD, etc. (TS et al., 2017). Though there are policies regarding such issues, the lack of awareness, knowledge, and data-backed evidence persists.

Studies from 2010 onwards have focused on evidence-based policy making (Ivory et al., 2024). Post Covid research has noted the fact that students often suppress their feelings and emotions due to stigma, leading to higher chances of stress. Adaptation to the new way of learning, fear of discontinuation of education, and financial difficulties have been listed as the main sources for this (Bhakat & Das, 2023). The highly competitive environment of NEET and JEE entrance examinations has also been studied to gauge the effect on students' minds. Cross-sectional studies have analyzed the causes of suicide among aspirants with demographic studies (Gupta et al., 2025). Researchers have also mapped out the ongoing surge of suicides, suicidal thoughts, self-injurious thoughts, etc. (Cherian et al., 2025).

7. Results and Interpretation

The results, along with the interpretation, that have been found from the survey done among students in Bangladesh and India, are as follows. It has shown quite positive results in terms of the research question. The findings provide an overview of the major psychological and academic challenges experienced by the surveyed students. The analysis focuses on key issues including burnout, anxiety, identity crisis, and sources of mental stress within the college environment. The results are presented using percentages and descriptive comparisons to identify the most prominent patterns among the respondents. These findings help illustrate how academic and social pressures may influence students' overall well-being. The interpretation of each result further connects the survey findings with the broader objectives of the study.

7.1. Participants' Country

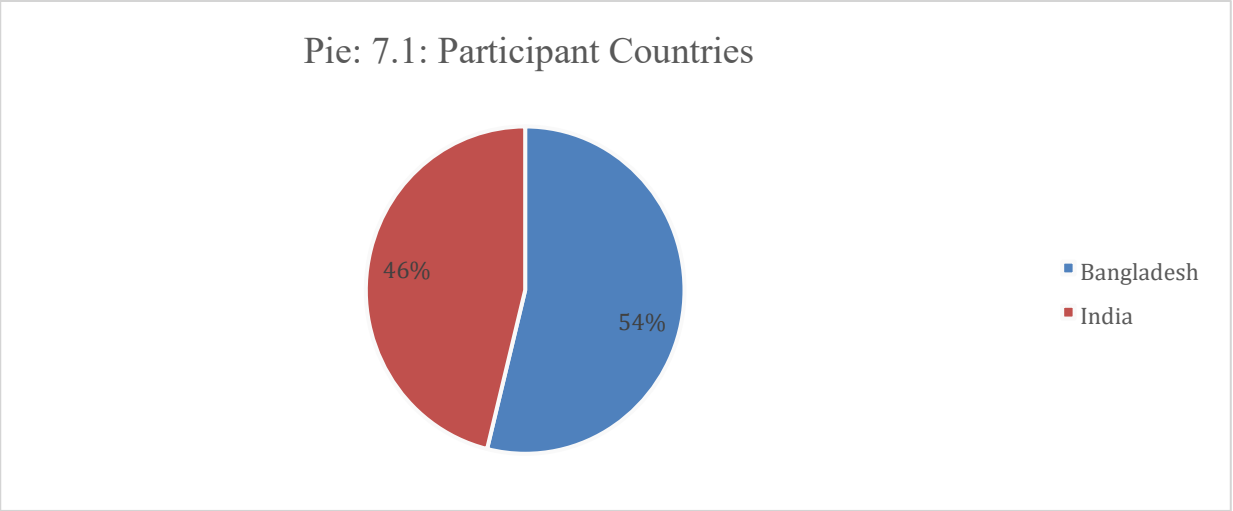


Fig. 7.1: Participants' Country

From a total of 52 participants in the survey, 46% belongs to India and 54% belongs to Bangladesh. There is a relatively even split of 8% between participation. Thus, the results are a reasonable representation of student experiences in both countries without over-representing the experiences of one. This minimizes the impact of any country's educational and/or cultural system on the results. Socio-culturally, there is some common demand from both countries in terms of educational success, but there is a difference in policy mechanisms, institutional support, etc. For both countries, the expectations in socio culture in terms of educational success are similar, while policy mechanisms and institutional support are different. This distribution thus enables a valid comparison of the process of competition in quite different but similarly competitive settings.

7.2. Participants' Cities

Dhaka	21
Kolkata	17
Jaipur	3
Bangalore	2
Munshiganj	2
Narayanganj	2
Comilla	1

Manikganj	1
Ranchi	1
Savar	1
Uttar Pradesh	1

Fig. 7.2: Participants' Cities

Most of the students belong to metropolitan cities like Dhaka (21 students) and Kolkata (17 students), and other important cities like Jaipur, Bangalore, Ranchi, Narayanganj, etc. Thus, urban students face greater academic competition, have tighter semester organization, and higher expectations of society. These cities are learning grounds on par with other cities where success is tangible, and comparisons are made all the time. This context increases the performance demands, making a negative impact on mental health that is more pronounced than in non-competitive and less rural environments. This results in a bias such that what may be reported for rural or smaller city students may not be representative.

7.3. Stressors before College begins

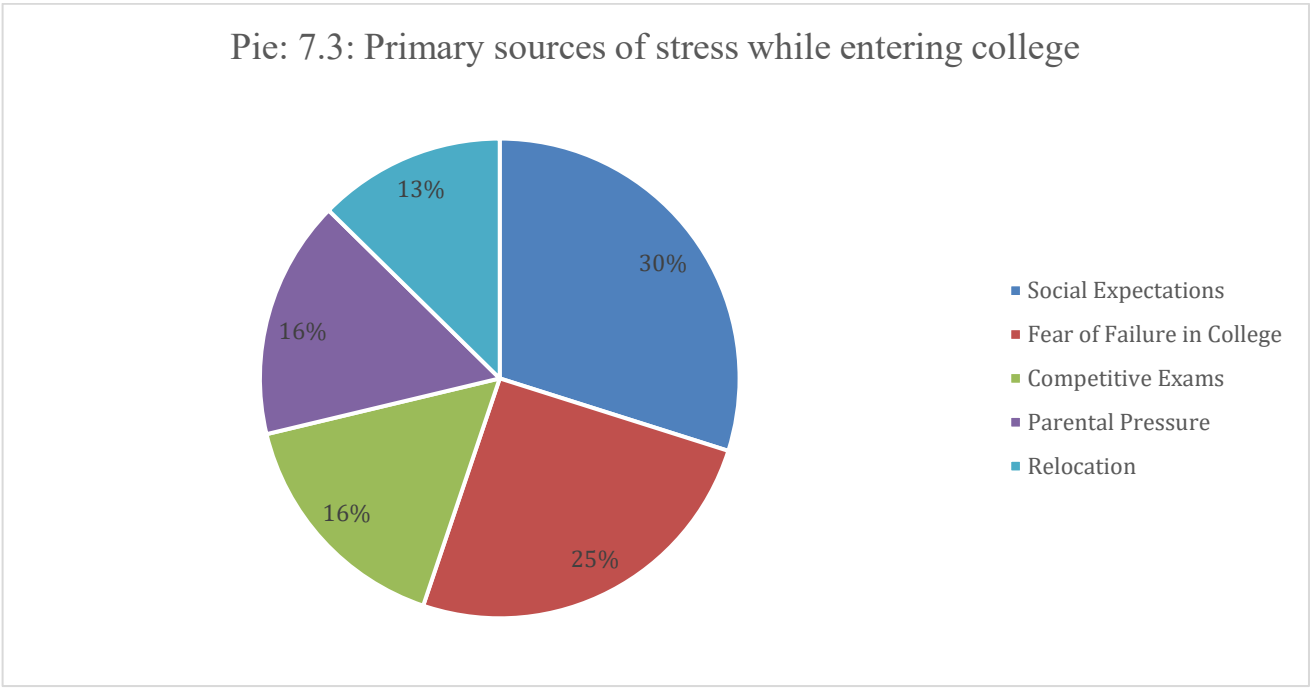


Fig. 7.3: Stressors before entering college

Since there was an option of choosing more than one stressor before college began, respondents selected an average of 1.67 stressors. This indicates that college entry stress is multi-dimensional rather than arising from a single source. Out of the 52 respondents, 26 students (30%) had pressure from social expectations, and 22 students (25%) had a fear of failure in college. An equal number of 14 students (32%) each had parental pressure and pressure from competitive examinations. Finally, 11 students (13%) face relocation problems.

The data indicate that stress is already experienced pre-college. There is a major influence of dominant social expectations because academic success is equated with parental pressure and performance-based validation. A sense of failure may stem from competitive admission tests and low chances of going to top universities.

7.4. Change in Stress Level in Entering College

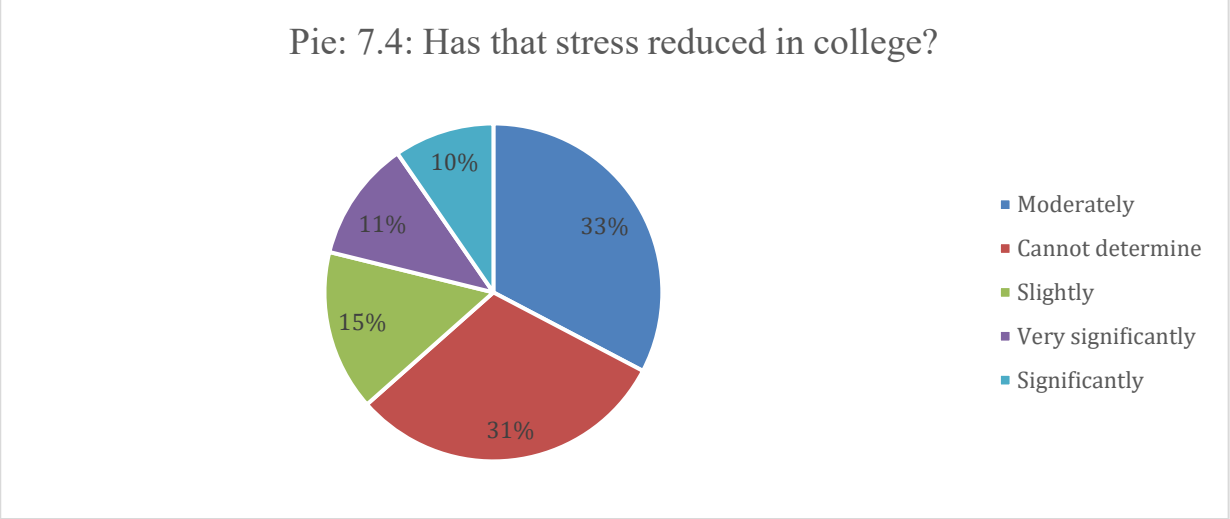


Fig. 7.4: Change of stress level while entering college

For 17 students (33%), stress levels have moderately reduced when they entered college. 16 students (31%) could not determine, and for 8 students (15%), stress has slightly reduced after entering college. 11 combined students have reported that their stress was significantly reduced after entering college. There is a disparity of almost 23% between the moderately reduced and significantly reduced students. This means that some students have had a bit of improvement, while some are seeing a significant improvement. Most pupils reported not seeing much change in their stress levels. This implies that college does not relieve prior stresses but instead creates new ones, such as classwork and comparisons with peers. Unable to determine whether stress levels improved or deteriorated over time.

7.5. Sense of Competitive College Climate

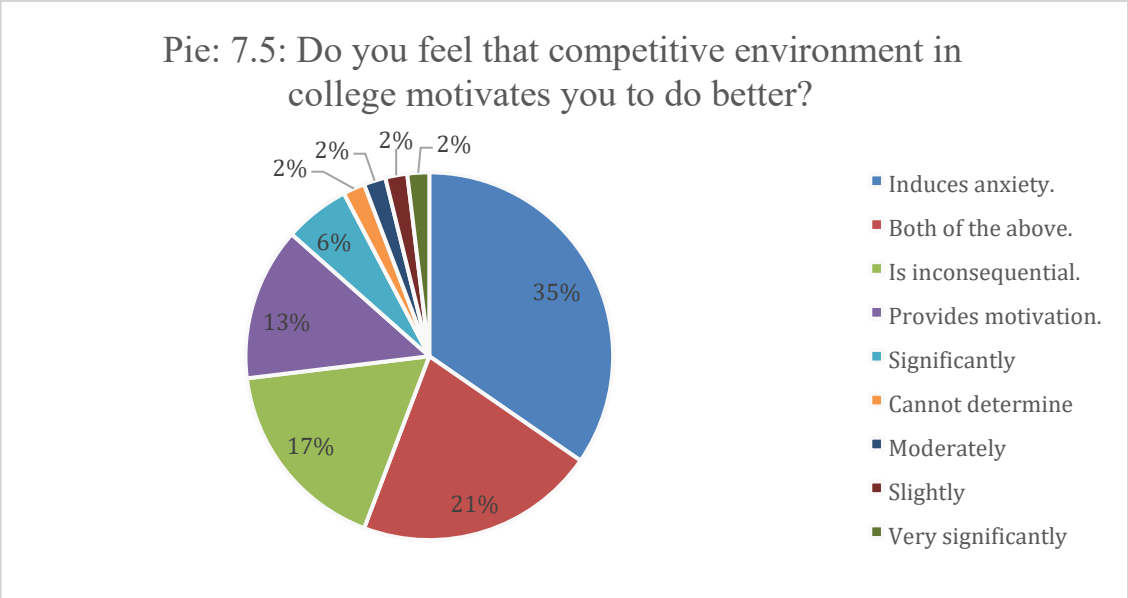


Fig. 7.5: Sense of competitive college climate

For 18 students (35%), college competition has induced anxiety. For 11 students (21%), college competition both motivates and stresses them at the same time. For 9 students (17%), it has been inconsequential. For 7 students (13%), it has completely motivated them.

There have been a few scattered responses of "slightly" or "whether they cannot determine" as well. There is a disparity of 33% between the highest that induces anxiety and the lowest that provides motivation, showing that negative perceptions of competition are stressful as compared with motivational experiences of students.

Competition can have a potential positive effect on performance, but the data reveal that it is more of an anxiety-inducing factor. This is due to the lack of emotional support and healthy coping within these contexts of competition. The dual response (“motivates and stresses”) suggests that competition is a complex phenomenon in the psychological realm and thus may be hurtful in the absence of regulation.

The findings indicate that competitive college environments can affect students' psychological well-being in different ways. The higher proportion of students experiencing anxiety suggests that competition may create pressure when students feel the need to meet high academic expectations. At the same time, some students experience competition as both motivating and stressful, showing that its effects are not entirely negative or positive. Overall, it suggests that

a balanced and supportive academic environment may help students experience competition in a healthier and more constructive way.

7.6. Stress Symptoms in the Last Three Months

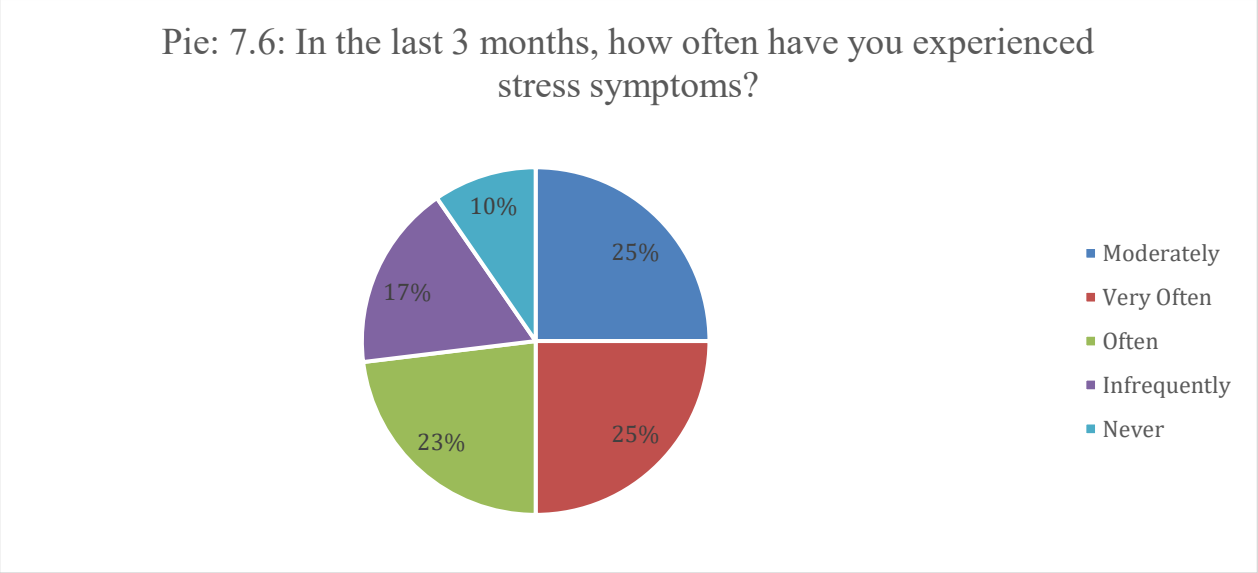


Fig. 7.6: Appearance of stress symptoms in the last three months

For an equal number of 13 students (25%), stress symptoms in the last three months have resurfaced “very often” and “moderately”. For 12 students (23%), it has occurred often. 9 students (17%) have reported infrequent occurrence of stress, and 5 students (10%) have concluded that they never had stress symptoms in the last 6 months.

More than 70% of the respondents say they suffer from stress symptoms regularly. These include having anxiety, panic attacks, sadness, body aches and pains, exhaustion, high blood pressure, headaches, digestive issues as a broad spectrum due to studies. Stress is not an on-off period; it is chronic. This pattern indicates trouble adapting to stress with little recovery and/or coping options.

The findings indicate that stress symptoms are a common experience among the respondents, with most students reporting symptoms at varying frequencies. The relatively small proportion who reported never experiencing stress symptoms suggests that stress is widespread within the sample. Frequent symptoms may reflect difficulties in managing continuous academic demands and maintaining adequate recovery time. Overall, it highlights the importance of effective stress-management and student support mechanisms within the academic environment.

7.7. Major Sources of Mental Stress at College

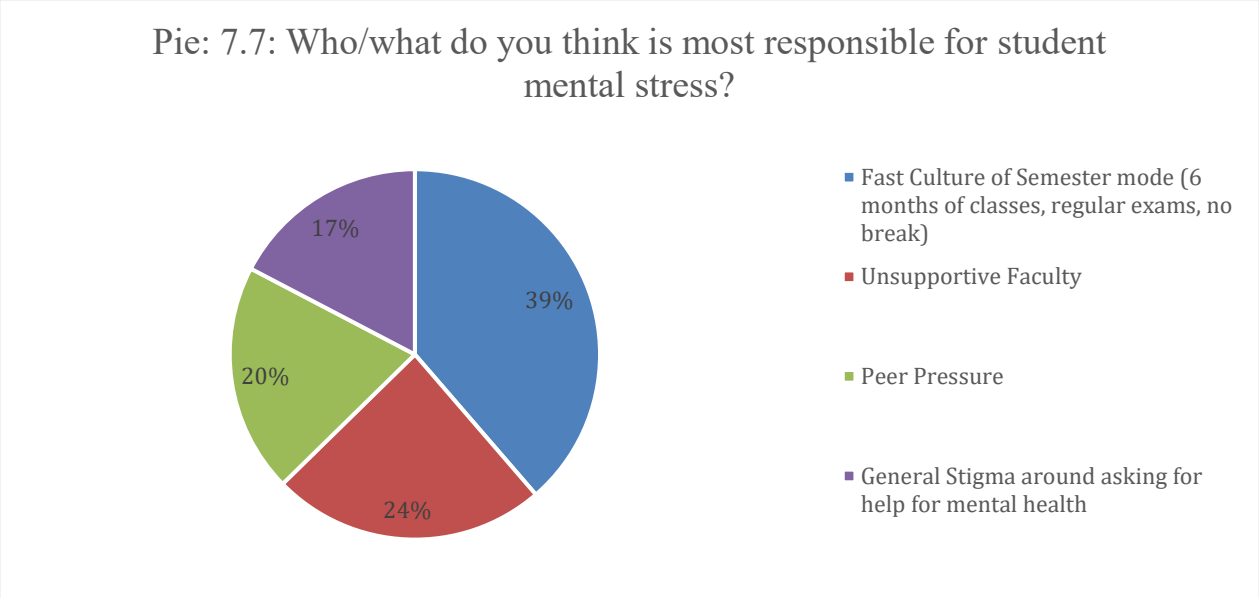


Fig. 7.7: Major sources of mental stress at college

This question allowed students to select more than one option. 39% responses have leaned towards a fast semester system and continuous exam, 24% responses towards an unsupportive faculty, 20% responses towards peer pressure, and 17% responses to stigma related to mental health as the primary stressors in college. The disparity of 22% between fast-semester culture and mental health stigma indicates that academic pressures are structurally more influential.

It is the structure of the academic system that comes as the stressor. Brief summer and winter breaks result in the pressure to learn and recuperate being limited. Powerless teachers aggravate this problem by not being available to offer emotional or academic support. Both peer pressure and stigma foster comparisons without resolution, and students avoiding help perpetuates the unaddressed stress cycle.

The results indicate that students' mental stress is influenced by multiple academic and social factors rather than by a single source. The higher percentage associated with a fast semester system and continuous examinations suggests that academic workload and limited recovery time may be major concerns for students. At the same time, the presence of peer pressure and mental-health-related stigma shows that students may also experience stress through their social environment. Overall, it highlights the importance of creating a more supportive academic environment that considers both students' academic demands and their mental well-being.

7.8. Anxiety Symptoms in the Last Three Months

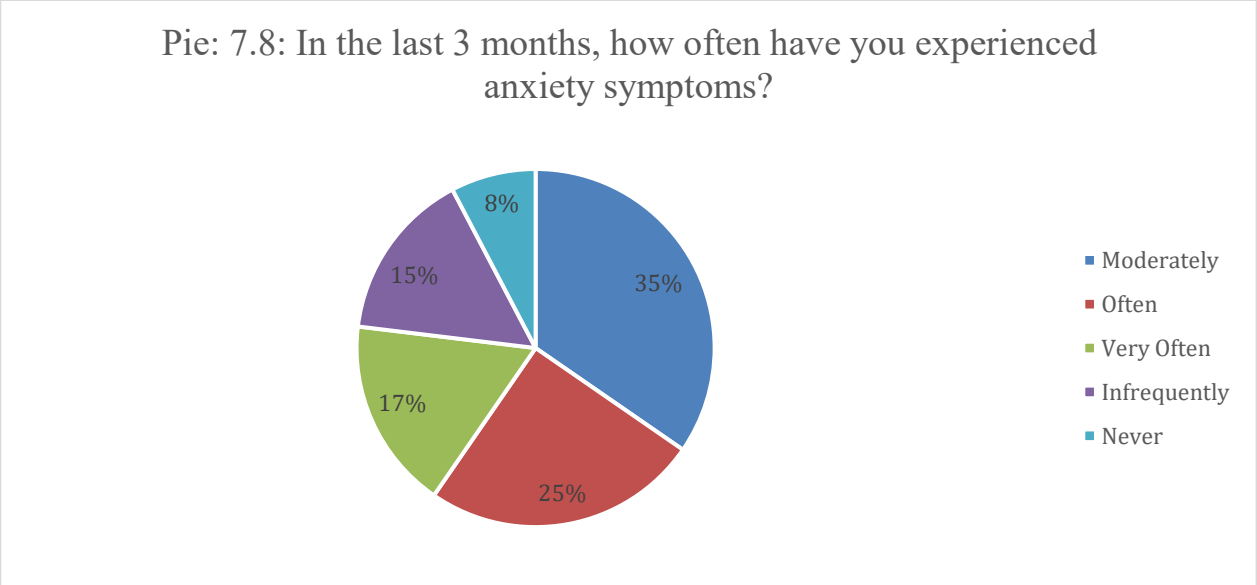


Fig. 7.8: Appearance of anxiety symptoms in the last three months

In the last three months, 18 students (35%) have had moderate anxiety symptoms, with 13 students (25%) exhibiting symptoms often. 9 students (17%) have faced anxiety symptoms very often, with 8 students (15%) reporting that they have infrequently faced it, and 4 students (8%) noting that they have never faced anxiety symptoms in the last 3 months.

Around 77% of the respondents experience noticeable anxiety symptoms caused by studies. The disparity of 27% between moderately and never being stressed indicates that a considerable proportion of students are worried about college structures, while a very few of them seem to be unaffected. The exhaustive list includes nervousness, restlessness, increased heart rate, hyperventilation, sweating, digestive issues, trouble concentrating for long hours, and panic attacks. Thus, the load of the teaching-learning process is related to mental health. Persistent anxiety is caused by the stressful times of deadlines, exams, and expectations.

The findings indicate that anxiety symptoms are relatively common among the students surveyed. The fact that 77% of respondents experienced anxiety symptoms at least to some extent suggests that anxiety may be an important concern within the student population. The 8% who reported never experiencing such symptoms represent only a small proportion of the respondents, highlighting the widespread nature of anxiety-related experiences. Frequent anxiety may affect students' concentration, academic performance, motivation, and overall well-being. Overall, it suggests that academic pressures such as deadlines, examinations, workload, and expectations may be associated with increased anxiety among students.

7.9. Burnout Assessment

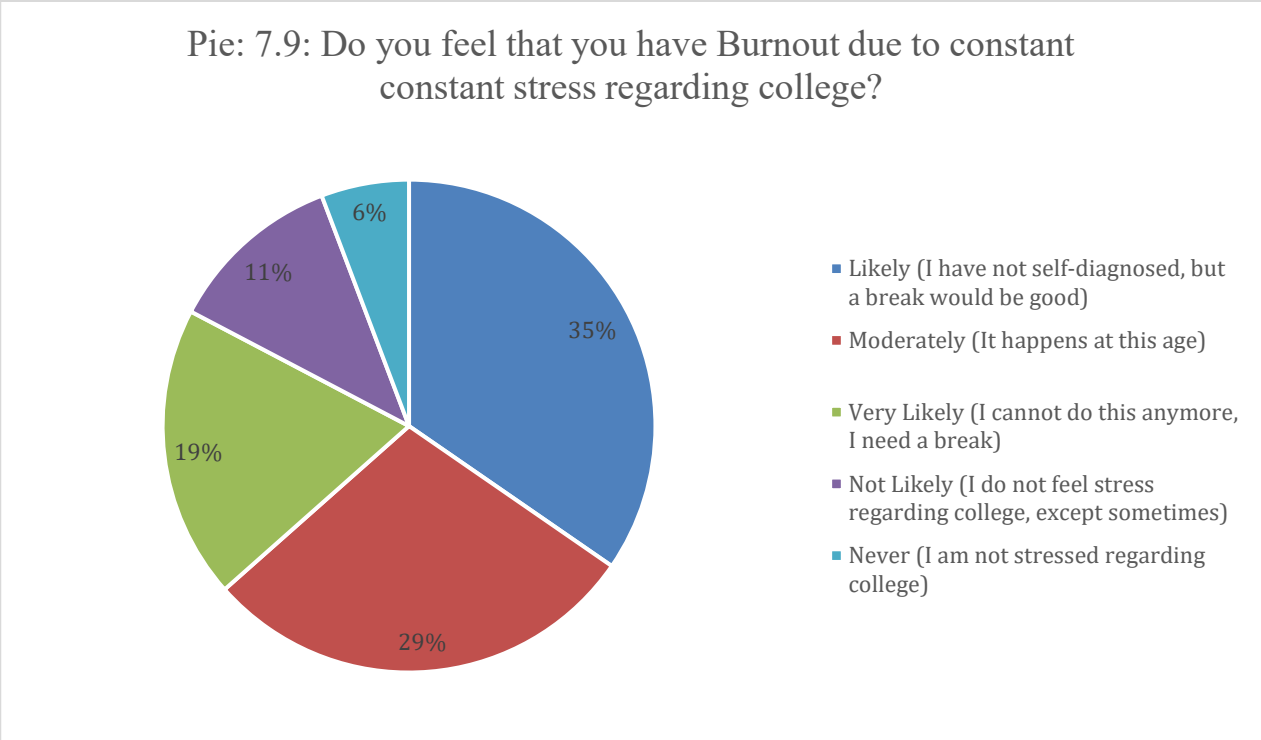


Fig. 7.9: Prevalence of burnout amongst students

18 students (35%) have reported burnout. 15 students (29%) are moderately burnt out.10 students (19%) are highly likely to be burnt out. 6 students (11%) are not likely to be burnt out. 3 students (6%) have reported being confident that they have never been stressed regarding college.

Over 80% of students exhibit symptoms of burnout. A significant disparity of 29% between the likely burnt-out students and never-stressed students means that a high number of students are likely to experience stress or burnout, and only a few are likely to remain completely stress-free. Burnout is caused by stress that goes without proper relief and can manifest as fatigue and diminished productivity. This only underscores a problem that exists on a systemic level with students being continually overworked.

The findings indicate that burnout is highly prevalent among the surveyed students, with more than four-fifths experiencing or being at risk of burnout. This suggests that prolonged academic pressure may be affecting students' energy, motivation, and academic productivity. Overall, it highlights the need for greater attention to students' workload, recovery time, and mental well-being.

7.10. Identity Crisis in Competitive Environments

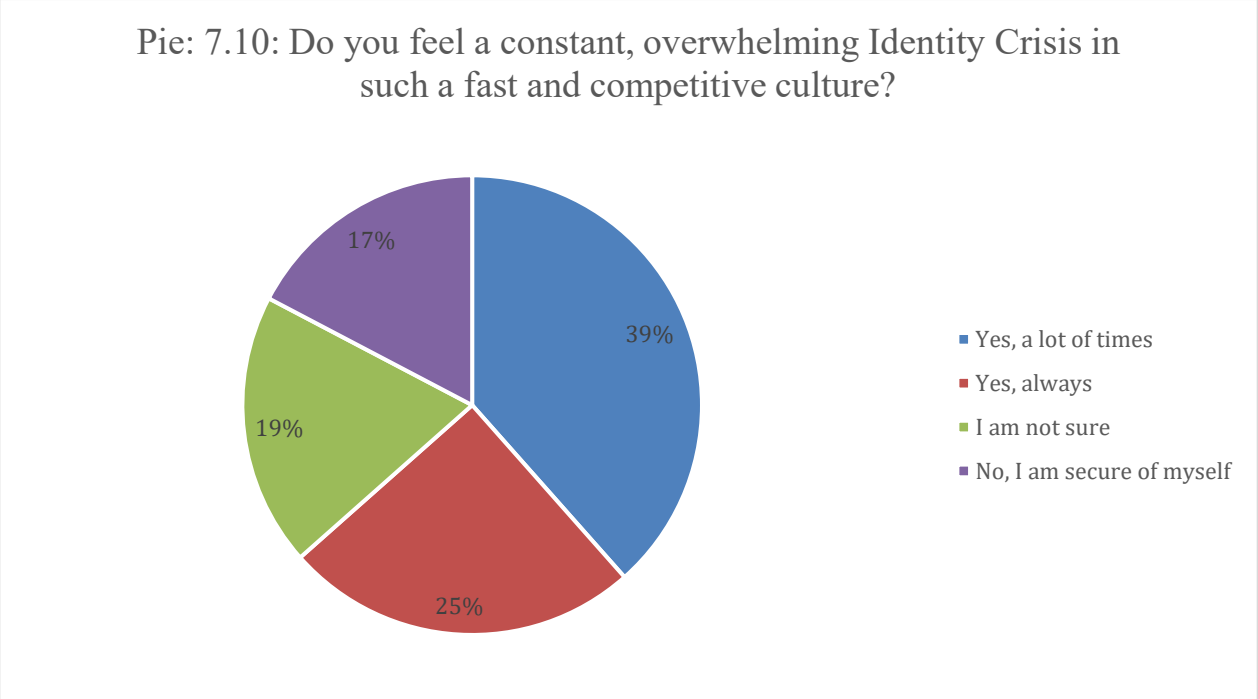


Fig. 7.10: Prevalence of Identity Crisis Among Students

20 students (39%) have reported facing an identity crisis a lot of times. 13 students (25%) have always felt an identity crisis. 10 students (19%) are not sure about what they have faced. 9 students (17%) are confident that they have never faced the issue.

64% of students have an identity issue have an identity issue. It indicates that they have a poor sense of themselves and the influence of the competitive environment to inflate that sense. In a competitive world, everyone compares their value to others, as they become self-conscious about how they perform. This can result in identity issues and a decrease in self-esteem.

The results show that identity-related concerns are experienced by a considerable proportion of students in the sample. The high percentage of students reporting frequent or constant identity crises suggests that many students may struggle with understanding their personal identity, abilities, or future direction. The 19% who were unsure about their experiences may also indicate uncertainty or difficulty recognizing identity-related challenges. In contrast, only 17% reported never facing the issue, showing that identity crisis is relatively common among the respondents. Overall, it highlights the need to pay greater attention to students' self-confidence, self-perception, and sense of personal identity.

7.11. Knowledge of Mental Health Laws and Policies

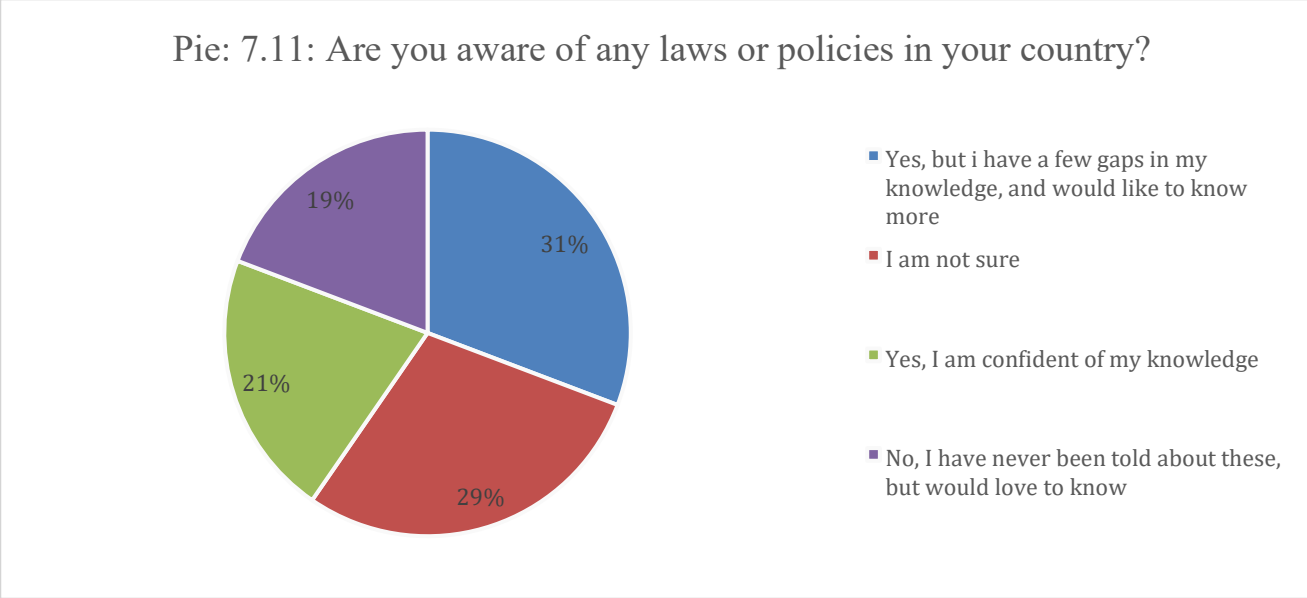


Fig. 7.11: Awareness regarding mental health policies

16 students (31%) feel that they have knowledge gaps in their understanding of laws and policies regarding mental health. 15 students (29%) are not sure of their knowledge. 11 students (21%) are confident of their knowledge, whilst 10 students (19%) of the population do not know about it.

A disparity of 12% has been noticed between knowledge gaps and no knowledge, which leads to the existence of mixed awareness among pupils. Essentially, there is low awareness regarding the law at the level of the respondents. Although there are laws in place concerning mental health, it is not known to the students, and therefore, they are unable to utilize these. This is an indication of the lack of accessibility and legal measures.

7.12. Access to Counselling Services

Stigma, lack of awareness, limited availability, and concerns about confidentiality were cited as the main reasons cited by most respondents for not using counselling services. It is not just a matter of availability; social and psychological barriers exist, hindering the utilization of counselling services. Lack of trust in confidentiality decreases the reliance on institutions, and stigma discourages help-seeking. The disparity is extremely qualitative in this sense, and a lot is going wrong in the provision of counselling services, primarily due to an elevated level of stigma and lack of availability.

Students recommended an increase in counsellors, awareness programs, peer support groups, minimum education pressure, and supportive faculty. Thus, students feel aware of their problems and suggest workable solutions. They focused on systemic changes instead of coping with mental illness, suggesting that mental health problems are structurally located in the context of education.

8. Discussions

The survey results align with the research question, which illustrates that the competitive education climate in India and Bangladesh has a significant impact on the psychological effects of students, such as increased anxiety, burnout, and identity issues. The difference between variables (for instance, 25% of people show signs of stress as compared to less than 10% showing signs of "no stress") shows mental health issues are systemic, not isolated.

Psychologically, these factors become salient stressors: lack of awareness, social expectations, a rapid school year, and fear of failure, which are shown to be dominant factors and validate performance over wellbeing within the academic setting. At the same time, there is a prevalence of services that are not used and a lack of understanding of the policies on mental health, which indicates that there is an enormous mismatch between policies and implementation at the level of service provision.

Therefore, although there are both mental health laws in force and institutional guidelines, there is no evidence that these safeguards take effect in practice, and they are implemented inadequately to prevent the negative impact of the competitive culture on students. This reiterates the study's overall finding that if there is no real enforcement or structural change, competitive systems can have a long-term negative effect in terms of the psychological trauma inflicted on the student, versus supporting them in terms of overall development.

The findings of this study correspond with a growing body of empirical research on student mental health conducted in recent years. Zhang et al. (2025) demonstrated that perceived stress significantly contributes to academic burnout, while Feng et al. (2026) reported strong associations between stress, anxiety, and poor psychological well-being among undergraduate students. Similarly, Yuan et al. (2026) found that emotional distress negatively affects students' subjective well-being over time. The consistency between these studies and the present findings suggests that psychological distress among college students is a widespread issue that

extends across different educational and cultural settings rather than being confined to a particular institution or country.

The findings also indicate that academic pressure alone may not fully explain students' psychological difficulties. Instead, multiple academic and psychosocial demands appear to interact simultaneously, increasing students' vulnerability to stress and burnout. Entering higher education often requires students to adapt to new academic expectations, unfamiliar social environments, and concerns regarding future career prospects. When these challenges occur together without sufficient institutional or emotional support, they may gradually reduce students' psychological resilience and increase the likelihood of emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and identity-related concerns. An important finding of the present study is that psychological distress appears to arise from the combined influence of multiple academic and social factors rather than from a single source of pressure. The coexistence of frequent stress symptoms, anxiety, burnout, and identity-related concerns suggests that these experiences are interconnected and may reinforce one another over time. This indicates that prolonged exposure to academic demands, together with limited emotional support and uncertainty about future outcomes, can gradually weaken students' psychological resilience. Consequently, mental health challenges should be understood as a multidimensional issue requiring comprehensive institutional attention rather than isolated individual experiences.

9. Conclusion

The study revealed the fact that a large number of urban college students in India and Bangladesh face stress, anxiety, and burnout due to constant competition. Yet, many students remain silent due to social stigma. The primary aim of the study was to understand the parameters of anxiety and burnout among the college-going students of Bangladesh and India. The study also considered the silence of law enforcers in this regard.

This study has identified the impact of a competitive college culture among students in targeted areas in both countries, such as Dhaka, Kolkata, Jaipur, Delhi, Ranchi, Bangalore, Bhagalpur, Savar, Comilla, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Manikganj, etc. The outcomes reveal the number of students who face stress, anxiety, and burnout due to a toxic competition culture. Moreover, students face an identity crisis due to social expectations.

Many students have reported that they feel anxiety and burnout very frequently. Additionally, respondents claimed that academic competition is tiring for their mental health, thus

interlinking the stressors and the stress. Most of the participants feel that they don't get enough attention and support regarding their mental health. Legal silence promotes mental pressure among students by discouraging them from seeking help.

Both Bangladeshi and Indian students face anxiety in college. However, both groups faced anxiety at different levels. The result shows how academic success is the result of emotional and mental sacrifices of the students. This study is significant as it highlights the necessity of prioritizing students' mental health. Institutions should develop a mental support system for students.

Future researchers may explore the long-term effects of academic competition. Most students hesitate to ask for mental health support, as most of them cannot diagnose their mental health issue due to a lack of medical support from the campus and a lack of awareness from policymakers. The scrutiny highlighted the fact that there is a huge gap in terms of mental health awareness among both Bangladeshi and Indian college goers. The findings also highlighted the necessity of mental health policies to protect future assets. It is important to prioritize mental health if we want to build a stable manpower for a better future. These findings have important implications for educational institutions and policymakers in both Bangladesh and India. Rather than focusing solely on academic achievement, universities should adopt a more holistic approach that prioritizes students' psychological well-being alongside educational success. Strengthening campus counselling services, integrating mental health awareness into student orientation programs, training faculty members to identify early signs of psychological distress, and encouraging peer-support initiatives could contribute to creating a healthier academic environment. Such measures may help reduce stigma surrounding mental health while improving both student well-being and academic engagement.

10. Suggestions

The study outlines the growing psychological pressure that urban students face in a competitive college culture in India and Bangladesh. The responses from both countries indicate that most respondents feel stressed, anxious, and burnt out from being constantly compared to others, having to perform and meet society's standards. The lack of healthy competition was also cited by many respondents as a cause of emotional struggles. Based on these observations, several suggestions for immediate action and policy come to mind. Stakeholder colleges/universities in India and Bangladesh should give greater emphasis to introducing mental health awareness

in the curriculum. Participants pointed to the need for ongoing counselling and stress management workshops, as well as peer-support systems. Creating mental health services that are easily accessible and not stigmatizing can help to significantly decrease psychological distress.

Moreover, there is a need to provide for a competitive balance. Institutions need to move from an outcome evaluation-based model towards an all-around development model. The people who responded suggested some flexibility in assessment, valuing a variety of talents, and less competition for individuals and more cooperation. This can go a long way towards creating a healthy setting with better inclusion.

Both countries should enhance their policy on mental health protection from a legal aspect of the matter. Currently, both India (under the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017) and Bangladesh (under the Mental Health Act, 2018) have made efforts to enact mental health laws, but there are implementation gaps. One of the main concerns expressed by the respondents was about the awareness and accessibility of these legal provisions. Therefore, the strengthening of these laws, improved funding, and awareness-raising campaigns are urgent to guarantee that these serve the purpose of protecting people who are facing mental health and social issues.

Finally, there is great awareness amongst students. Participants noted that societal expectations are likely to make "competition" that much more challenging, particularly in terms of learning and job selection. It is important to change society's attitude through public awareness campaigns and give importance to wellness along with accomplishment. An initiative from learning institutions, government policies, employers, and the community will be needed to address the negative impact of competitive culture. The recommendations above can help create a healthier environment in both countries, promoting both physical and mental health.

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