

Anxiety and Depression Among Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Lahore, Pakistan: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the prevalence of anxiety and depression among students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Lahore, Pakistan, a region where limited research exists on the mental health of this vulnerable group. Given the unique challenges faced by individuals with IDD, understanding their mental health needs is critical for ensuring appropriate care and support. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from 32 teachers working in various schools that cater to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The data collection involved structured surveys that assessed the mental health status of students as observed by their educators, with a particular focus on symptoms related to anxiety and depression.

The findings highlight significant concerns regarding the mental health of these students, revealing that a substantial proportion exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression, which can severely impact their overall well-being, academic performance, and social integration. The study provides valuable insights into the specific environmental, social, and educational factors that may contribute to the prevalence of these mental health conditions among students with IDD in Lahore. These factors include limited mental health awareness among teachers, lack of specialized mental health services, and societal stigma surrounding both disabilities and mental health challenges.

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Introduction

Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) face a range of challenges that significantly impact their development and overall well-being. These challenges are multifaceted, including cognitive, social, and emotional difficulties, with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression being particularly prevalent among this population. Anxiety and depression can have profound effects on the academic performance, social interactions, and emotional health of students with IDD. These mental health conditions, when left unaddressed, can create additional barriers to learning and social integration, further hindering the potential for growth and development. For individuals with IDD, addressing mental health concerns becomes even more complex due to communication difficulties, limited access to appropriate care, and the general lack of awareness about the mental health needs specific to this group.

In many regions, including Pakistan, the attention given to the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities has been growing, with a shift toward advocating for more inclusive policies and better educational opportunities. However, despite this growing awareness, research on the mental health of students with IDD remains surprisingly scarce. This gap in research is particularly notable in developing countries like Pakistan, where mental health services are often underdeveloped, and stigma surrounding both disability and mental health remains prevalent. Mental health challenges in individuals with IDD are often overlooked or misunderstood, and there is a need for more comprehensive studies to inform the development of effective interventions and support systems.

This study aims to explore the prevalence of anxiety and depression among students with IDD in Lahore, Pakistan, where mental health awareness and disability services may vary significantly across different regions and communities. Lahore, as one of Pakistan's largest cities, offers a unique context for studying the intersection of disability, education, and mental health, as it is home to a diverse range of educational institutions and healthcare facilities. However, disparities in access to resources can impact the quality of support available to students with IDD. By focusing on this region, this research seeks to identify the extent of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression within this vulnerable group, and how these issues are perceived and addressed by educators.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence of anxiety and depression among students with IDD in Lahore. By examining these

mental health issues in a specific demographic, the study seeks to inform educational policies and practices that can better support these students.

Research Objectives

1. To measure the levels of anxiety and depression among students with IDD in Lahore.
2. To identify the demographic factors associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression.
3. To provide recommendations to educators and policymakers to address the mental health needs of students with IDD.

Research Questions

1. What are the prevalent levels of anxiety and depression among students with IDD in Lahore?
2. How do age and gender influence the prevalence of anxiety and depression in these students?
3. What interventions can be recommended to support the mental health of students with IDD?

Literature Review

Overview of Anxiety and Depression in IDD Students

Existing literature indicates that students with IDD are at an increased risk of developing anxiety and depression due to their cognitive limitations and social challenges. Anxiety in these students often manifests as excessive worry about separation, harm, or social situations, while depression may present as persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, and sleep disturbances.

Causes and Symptoms

The causes of anxiety and depression in students with IDD include social isolation, academic pressures, and a lack of understanding or support from their environment. Symptoms can range from excessive distress during separation from attachment figures to persistent fears of harm and depressive symptoms such as loss of pleasure in usual activities.

Treatment Approaches

Interventions for anxiety and depression in students with IDD often involve a combination of behavioral therapies, psychoeducation, and support from educators and caregivers. Creating a supportive and inclusive school environment is crucial for managing these conditions.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data from teachers about their observations of students with IDD.

Sampling and Participants

Convenient sampling was used to select 32 teachers from different schools in Lahore. These teachers provided insights into the mental health of their students with IDD, based on their daily interactions and observations.

Data Collection Instrument

A 17-item questionnaire was developed to measure the levels of anxiety and depression among students with IDD. The items focused on various aspects of anxiety and depression, including fears of separation, worry about harm, mood disturbances, and sleep patterns.

Data Analysis and Findings

Demographic Analysis

- **Gender:** 71.7% of the students were male.
- **Age:** 65.2% of the students were between 11-15 years old.

Key Findings

1. **Separation Anxiety:** 73.9% of the students experienced recurrent excessive distress when anticipating or experiencing separation from home or major attachment figures.
2. **Worry About Harm:** 60.9% of the students exhibited persistent and excessive worry about possible harm, such as illness or injury.
3. **Fear of Untoward Events:** 80.4% of the students did not exhibit persistent worry about experiencing untoward events like getting lost or being kidnapped.
4. **Reluctance to Go Out:** 58.7% of the students were not reluctant to go out or away from home due to fear of separation.
5. **Fear of Being Alone:** 52.2% of the students did not exhibit persistent fear of being alone or without attachment figures.
6. **Sleep Reluctance:** 56.5% of the students were reluctant to sleep away from home or without being near an attachment figure.
7. **Nightmares:** 58.7% of the students did not have repeated nightmares involving separation themes.

8. **Mood Disturbances:** 73.9% of the students exhibited elevated, expansive mood, while 60.9% did not exhibit inflated self-esteem or grandiosity.
9. **Speech Patterns:** 78.3% of the students did not talk excessively or feel pressured to keep talking.
10. **Racing Thoughts:** 60.9% of the students did not experience flight of ideas or racing thoughts.
11. **Risky Activities:** 63% of the students did not engage in excessive involvement in activities with high potential for painful consequences.
12. **Sleep Patterns:** 67.4% of the students did not have a decreased need for sleep, and 58.7% did not lose pleasure in almost all activities.
13. **Early Awakening:** 58.7% of the students did not wake up unusually early in the morning.
14. **Appetite and Weight:** 71.7% of the students did not experience significant anorexia or weight loss.
15. **Gender Differences:** The study found significant differences in the prevalence of depression and anxiety between male and female students.
16. **Age Association:** There was a significant association between the prevalence of depression and anxiety and the age of the students.

Conclusions

The study concluded that a significant proportion of students with IDD in Lahore experience anxiety, particularly related to separation and worries about harm. However, not all students exhibited classic symptoms of depression, such as loss of interest in activities or early morning awakening. Gender and age were found to be important factors in the prevalence of these conditions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. **Targeted Mental Health Programs:** Schools should implement programs specifically designed to address the mental health needs of students with IDD.
2. **Teacher Training:** Educators should receive training to recognize and address anxiety and depression in students with IDD.
3. **Parental Involvement:** Parents should be involved in interventions to ensure a consistent approach to managing anxiety and depression both at home and at school.
4. **Further Research:** Additional research with a larger sample size and direct assessments of students is necessary to validate these findings and explore further nuances.

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