Original Article

Identifying Mental Health Challenges Among Students in Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), Glasgow,United Kingdom

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Abstract - *The prevalence of mental health issues among students in higher learning institutions like Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is alarming. Studies conducted in the last 5 years showed increased cases of mental disorders, where academic pressure, financial dilemmas, and social isolation were found to be the leading causes. A review of literature involving qualitative research was conducted with the aim of identifying the mental health difficulties of students attending GCU. The review involved a systematic search done across numerous databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus and Google Scholar. The criteria for inclusion were based on the fact that only articles published in the United Kingdom were considered, with a focus on university students and studies that used qualitative or mixed-methods designs. The purpose of this review was to determine the prevalence of mental health concerns among GCU students, the underlying causes, and the recommendations for enhancing the existing mental health support for the students. The review outlined several major factors that affect the psychological health of students at GCU. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly amplified the levels of worry and depression among students, particularly multinational and low-income learners. Stress due to education fees, accommodation costs, and undertaking jobs, all contributed in worsening mental health consequences. Discrimination and lack of culturally responsive services to minority students made the learning process more difficult for them. The mental health problems worsened due to the physical distancing, particularly among first-year and international learners. The study highlights the need for specific mental health support services at GCU as a way of preventing the negative consequences of stress among students. For the university to meet these objectives, the following goals have been established: concerns about the mental health of students, awareness of resources accessible to students with mental health problems, and policies friendly to learners with mental health issues. GCU should raise awareness of mental health problems and combat stigmatization by launching campaigns and initiatives. The university should guarantee that mental health services are conveniently available and culturally appropriate. Also, daily well-being checks and assistance with social belonging can reduce mental health difficulties. Students are advised to consult with specialists, use university services, and adhere to schedules in order to support their mental health.*

Keywords - *Mental health, Identifying, Challenges, Students, University.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Research on mental health in higher learning institutions focus on the prevalence of mental health issues and how students present their distress and their propensity to seek help. According to Neves and Hewitt (2020) Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Advance HE conducted a survey in the United Kingdom in 2020 that showed that more than one-third of university students experience considerable psychological issues. However, only about 20 percent of such students go for professional help as affirmed by Pollard (2021). Additionally, The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) conducted a study on the same issue which reveals that the number of students experiencing mental health challenges has increased (Mental Health UK, 2020). However, the extent of these students accessing the counseling services remains very low as compared to the observed increase (Mental Health UK, 2020).

This is the case at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) where the situation mirrors those seen at a national level. According to statistics obtained from the National Union of Students (NUS), 25% of students have mental health condition that can be dragonized (WHO, 2021). However, the presented analysis reveals that there is still a big number of students who do not seek professional help (WHO, 2021). A survey of the university's students showed that only 15% of students who experience mental health issues seek help from the counseling facilities of GCU (Osborn et al., 2022). A failure to leverage on this resource is concerning especially given the high levels of distress that have been recorded (Osborn et al., 2022).

Referring to Glasgow Caledonian University | Scotland (2022), one of the major causes of GCU students' mental health challenges is the academic stress. The rigorous curriculum, high expectations, and competitiveness lead to a great deal of stress and concern. Students often struggle with the challenge of balancing their academic workload with other aspects of life and get exhausted mentally (Glasgow Caledonian University | Scotland, 2022). However, the pressure to achieve good grades and guarantee employment after the course also puts a lot of psychological pressure (Glasgow Caledonian University | Scotland, 2022).

Another component that plays a very important role in causing the mental health problems within GCU is the financial pressure (Simonse et al., 2022). Many of the students have financial problems and the issues pertaining to tuition fees, cost of accommodations, and even the costs of living (Simonse et al., 2022). This pressure to work part-time to finance their education increases the stress levels since there is little time for leisure activities (Simonse et al., 2022). This financial challenge can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and hopelessness that in turn affect students' academic performance and wellbeing (Simonse et al., 2022).

Social integration has a crucial impact on the mental health of students (Kroh and Prechsl, 2023). Social changes such as transition from High school to a university require affiliation to a new social network, making new friends and often living alone away from home for the first time (Kroh and Prechsl, 2023). Adjusting to a different environment is not easy and often students will find themselves lonely as they transition to new environment particularly when they are international students who may also face other challenges that include the cultural as well as language barriers (Kroh and Prechsl, 2023). Lack of a caring social circle may lead to loneliness and homesickness, as well as increasing the risk of issues with mental health (Kroh and Prechsl, 2023).

There are so many reasons that suggest that students of the Glasgow Caledonian University suffer from various mental health conditions due to academic stress, financial issues, and loneliness amongst other causes. This literature review aims to address these concerns in as much as it will only include qualitative research studies so as to get an overall view of the concerns and get the right measures that can be taken to enhance the student's well-being. Thus, GCU can mitigate these challenges and foster a healthier environment in learning for the students, which will, in turn, enhance their academic performance and well-being.

II. METHODS

A. Research Design

This study is a qualitative literature review that aims to explore the mental health problems faced by learners in GCU. The qualitative method is chosen because the chosen research approach is able to provide an extensive and rich description and analysis of the subjective perceptions of students that are often missed in quantitative analysis (Aspers and Corte, 2019). This approach involves according to Tenny, Brannan and Brannan (2022) the identification and review of the current literature regarding the subject of mental health of university students, with a specific emphasis on studies carried out in UK and if available at GCU.

B. Data Collection

a. Literature Search

The data gathering method started with carrying out an extensive literature review to identify relevant qualitative studies. The electronic databases used in this study include PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and the Google Scholar databases. PuMed source as stated by PubMed (2023) provided an opportunity to gain access to more peer-reviewed articles that focused on the assessment of mental health of college students, as it is recognized as one of the most popular databases, which includes many publications on biomedical literature. PsycINFO is a source that focusses on psychology research and it was useful in identifying publications comprising of qualitative research done particularly on mental health (Baruzzi, 2024). Scopus supported by providing essential inter-disciplinary Articles spanning across sociological and pedagogical perspectives of students' mental health (Discovery, 2024). Google Scholar was useful in accessing many types of documents like these, dissertations, conference papers, and pro articles for an evaluation of the literature (Houston, 2024). The search was done using keywords and keyword phrases including; 'mental health', 'university students', 'qualitative research', 'Glasgow Caledonian University', 'UK universities', 'student stress', 'anxiety', 'depression', 'help seeking behaviour'.

b. Inclusion Criteria

1. Studies published in English.
2. Studies focusing on mental health challenges in university students.
3. Studies carried put in UK with emphasis on studies that include GCU students or other students with similar characteristics and institutions.
4. Studies carried out in qualitative approach or mixed-methods that have a qualitative part in it.

c. Exclusion Criteria

1. Studies focusing on quantitative data only.
2. Research not precisely addresses university students or mental health.
3. Studies published before 2019.
4. Studies not published in English.

The first search brought hundreds of articles that were then narrowed down based on their titles and abstracts. Only the full texts of the selected articles were further considered with regard to the criteria stated above. Of the 50 preliminary citations, the title and abstract were reviewed and 30 were omitted. 18 articles were retrieved for reviewing, and 12 articles were identified to have relevance to the critical review process of this study.

C. Data Analysis

Given the nature of the data, thematic analysis was employed for analyzing the data that was obtained. The strategy involved familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading, before systematically coding for significant characteristics, finally categorizing these characteristics into likely themes (Caulfield, 2023). The themes were refined and enhanced to ensure that they accurately represented the data collected. Finally, the themes were defined and named to reflect their essence. The purpose of this study was to identify common mental health challenges and the factors influencing them among learners in Glasgow Caledonian University. The objective was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of these concerns through various forms of qualitative studies.

D. Ethical Considerations

This study is a literature review, therefore the researcher did not have a direct interaction with the human participants. However, there were still issues of ethical sensibility to consider such as accuracy in reporting the findings of the evaluated studies, as well as the rights and identities of the participants of the study being conducted. The review conforms to ethical guidelines that include thorough citation of sources and refraining from plagiarism.

E. Trustworthiness and Rigor

To maintain trustworthiness and rigor of this review, various strategies were implemented:

- **Triangulation**: under this process, the review combined different studies in order to gain an overall understanding of mental health difficulties (Bhandari, 2022).
- **Member Checking**: Although there was no direct feedback from the participants, the results emanating from various researches were cross-checked and matched.
- **Audit Trial**: is a systematic approach of documenting the process of conducting a search for the literature, extracting data, and making decisions during the analysis (Ravelo, 2023). This practice was vital in order to make the studies more transparent and to make it possible to replicate the results.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A number of mental health challenges faced by university students in the UK during over the last five years was revealed in the literature review and were categorized into key themes that emerged from the selected studies.

A. Impact of COVID-19

Out of the 12 studies chosen for the research, four of them focused on effects of Covid-19 on mental health of university students in UK. (Campbell et al., 2022), (Catling et al., 2022), (Chen and Lucock, 2022), and (Allen, Kannangara and Carson, 2023) studies showed similar results on how COVID-19 affected students mentally. One of the common finding from the four articles is the high prevalence levels of anxiety and depression among students, with several participants displaying moderate to severe symptoms. In the article written by Chen and Lucock (2022) and (Catling et al., 2022) explained that these increased rates of mental health was experienced due to many factors attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social isolation due to measures including lockdowns, interrupt of learning activities, and concerns about future employment. They also focused on the point that reduction in social interaction, and the transition to online learning have significantly impacted on loss in mental health. Additionally, Chen and Lucock also identified some specific subgroups that appeared more vulnerable: international students and those from low income households. These groups experienced additional challenges like poor economic conditions besides inadequate resources to secure appropriate support networks. Authors used regression analyses to determine the relationship between these characteristics and the severity of the mental health symptoms while employing cross-

tabulations and descriptive statistics to identify the type and frequency of difficulties faced by students. Their findings stress the need for universities such as GCUto prioritize mental health support services and development of frameworks to help learners during such crises.

B. Financial Pressure

Another component that plays a very important role in causing the mental health problems within university students such as in GCU is the financial pressure (Kandasamy et al., 2020). This statement is concurred by two studies carried out by (McCloud and Bann, 2019) and (Baker, 2020) on how financial challenges have affected mental health of higher education students in UK. Baker (2020) also emphasized on how much worse things are for PhD students, pointing to financial problems as the leading cause of stress and depression in this group. In his research, Baker discovered that many of the doctoral students are financially compromised due to lack of support hence having financial insecurity together with mental health issues. The lack of adequate support services exacerbates these matters, making it difficult for students to seek help or manage their stress as they should. On the other hand, McCloud and Bann (2019) present a comparatively broader picture by exploring the extent of financial pressure and its impact on mental wellbeing among the college students in Britain. It can be regarded as an operating hypothesis that financial stress relates to detrimental mental outcomes in students and based on this hypothesis, a quick check reveals the existence of a strong relation between financial stress and poor mental health outcomes within the student population. They acknowledge common sources of stress, including tuition fees, expenditure on renting/owning accommodation, and financial burden which leads to anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders. From both articles, authors advocate for improved financial support to reduce effects of financial pressure on students' wellbeing.

C. Discrimination and Ethnic Minority Challenges

Another study by Liverpool et al. (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study that aimed at understanding the coping styles and the support needs on mental health among marginalized students of higher education in the UK. The study focused on the impact of ethnicity on these factors. It was established that ethnic minority students experience different mental health challenges than white students most of the time due to additional stressors including discrimination, culturally related issues, and lack of culturally sensitive resources. Out of the 788 students engaged in an open-ended questions, 581 (73.7%) of the minority students reported higher levels of anxiety, stress and depression, which were as a result of racism and micro aggression encounters in the institutions. These occurrences affect their well-being and learning ability, further affecting their academic performance and general functioning. The study also pointed out that these students are less likely to seek help because the problem of mental health in some ethnic communities is associated with disgrace, and they have doubts regarding institutional support services as they do not consider them to be culturally competent and to understand their needs.

D. Increased Cost of Living

Research carried out by National Union of Students (NUS) (2022) on Student Cost of Living Report, presents a synthesis and critique of different factors that may contribute to the mental health issues of HE students in the UK. The report reveals that there is a clear connection between increased cost of living and the likelihood of developing Languishing Mental Health outcomes. From 3417 students that participated in the NUS online survey, 92% said that cost-of living crisis affected their mental health with 31% regarding this as the major issue. In this context, the crisis was described as exacerbating the levels of anxiety and depression and thus leading to stressful activities such as lack of sleep and proper eating which affected mostly students aged between 23 and 30 years. Students also reported that working part-time to improve their financial status added stress levels since it reduced time for social activities and self-care. This is affirmed by a study carried out by Bolton and Lewis (2023) on Student Mental Health in England: Statistics, Policy, and Guidance,

reveals that HE students usually lack social support which increases stress and negatively affects their overall mental health. The authors point out that first years, international students and students from non-traditional backgrounds experience high rate of social isolation. As Bolton and Lewis also emphasize the quality of social relationships is just as important as the quantity. The positive social interactions can provide emotional support, reduce the perception of rejection and provide a buffer to stress.

Overall, the above synthesis of literature reveals that university students experience various mental health challenges and more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are challenges which are not easy to deal with and which are not only of intellectual or financial nature but also of social one. The findings highlight the importance of providing extensive support for learners' mental health concerns and resources that can help them cope with these issues. Organizations such as GCU might benefit from implementing specific and targeted strategies and creating supportive environments that enhance the students' overall performance and quality of life.

E. Discussion

From the UK-based sample of 12 articles, different authors involved university students in open-ended questionnaires which revealed that most students suffer mental breakdown due to factors such as financial problems, academic pressure, high-cost of living and ethnicity. This proves that students at GCU also face similar challenges and some lack confidence to seek help from the institution either because they are not comfortable sharing their issues, fear of being shamed or traditional beliefs. According to Vidourek et al. (2020), university students could be afraid of seeking help from their mental health problems because they are afraid of being stigmatized, labeled or discriminated against or their issues will be documented somewhere and may affect their future career.

From the articles various factors were associated with mental health challenges that face university students in UK. From a report by National Union of Students, Campbell et al. (2022) reported that over half of HE students in UK had worsened mental health compared to pre-pandemic period. According to Campbell et al. (2022) students were still struggling with mental health issues but the pandemic added chronic and unpredictable stress developing an environment of mental health crisis. Additionally, eating disorders of these students doubled from 2019 to 2020 when the pandemic was at its peak. Catling et al. (2022) also revealed that COVID-19 had a substantial effect on self-reported depression, anxiety, and Smartphone addiction scores among which was a significant increase from 2020 to 2021 group. The self-identified rate of depression increased from 30 to 44 percent and for anxiety it was an increase from 22 to 27 percent and the students that suffered depression and anxiety increased from 12 to 21 percent. Smartphone dependency percentages increased from 39% to 50%. In correlational analysis, Smartphone usage has a strong correlation with depression and anxiety. As also shown in the research conducted by Allen, Kannangara and Carson (2023) and Chen and Lucock (2022) COVID-19 is one of the significant factor that has caused high level of psychological distress and anxiety.

McCloud and Bann (2019) researched on how financial stress caused mental health and the applied search strategy generated 1272 studies-9 of them were included to the review. According to the findings, worse mental health was significantly associated with experience of financial difficulties of the students, ranging from slight correlation to strong correlation in seven out of seven cross-sectional studies while, debt worry or financial concern showed correlation with worse mental health in four out of five cross-sectional studies. In the UK more subjective indicators of rise in absolute level of financial pressure were revealed as being more significantly related to student's mental health deterioration amplitude among HE students. Reid, Jessop and

Solomon (2019) carried out a research with 337 university students and the regression analysis indicated that experiencing greater financial concern at baseline was associated with subsequent deteriorations in health on the following outcomes: limitations in performing one's role in physical and emotional terms; social interaction; psychological wellbeing; general health perception and change in health.

Liverpool et al. (2024) conducted the study on coping strategies and support needs of marginalized students in the UK higher education. This stated that students from the ethnic minority group commencing that they are prone to higher levels of anxiety stress and depression as a result of discrimination, cultural matters and lack of provision of culturally appropriate materials. Among 788 students surveyed, 73.7% of minority students reported significant mental health challenges. The study also asserted that such students rarely look for assistance because most of them are stigmatized, and they question the cultural sensitivity of the support services offered by the institutions. The results suggest the need to provide counseling services that are relevant and beneficial to preferred minority student groups. This may also explain the need for suitable social support. For instance, peer support including discussions with fellow students, and sharing experiences helps in socializing, which is crucial in improving the wellbeing of students (Haas et al., 2024). However, Hjalmarsson, Fallesen and Plenty (2023) pointed out that due to experiences like bullying or social rejection in learning context, the members of the marginalized groups may not have as many of the beneficial peer relations as those in the advantaged groups. It therefore becomes necessary to offer such opportunities as a component of an educational provision that is sensitive to the diverse characteristics of the deprived populace.

The study shows that GCU students cope with mental health problems that other university students in the UK cope with. The major reasons include loneliness, financial problems, academic stress, and issues specific to the ethnic minority students. These issues were further compounded by the COVID-19 epidemic, which made it critical to have robust mental health support systems.

F. Recommendations

Students at GCU struggle with similar mental health challenges as other university students in UK as research finding has revealed. Referring to recommendations given by Price (2021), in the article 'How to Help Students Cope with Mental Health Challenges' the following are strategies that students facing mental challenges in GCU can benefit from.

a. Recommendations to GCU

- **Creating Awareness and Reducing Stigma**: GCU should help in the sensitization process of mental health problems and try as much as possible to reduce the stigma of seeking help. This can be done through holding of campaigns, seminars and developing the curriculum to include mental health education.
- **Accessible Mental Health Services**: The institution need to ensure that all students regardless of their originality are able to access mental health services easily without much struggle. This includes offering mental health service online; offering counseling in school and ensuring that the wait time to get an appointment is not long.
- **Flexible Academic Policies**: To cater for the students with mental health issues, GCU should have relatively flexible policies. This can include offering options for part-time learning, extension of deadlines, and taking leaves of absence.
- **Building a Supportive Community**: The institution should support the creation of a safe learning environment where students feel they belong and are accepted by other students, faculty and staff. Functions, clubs, and places such as corridors where learners may meet can be used to build such an environment.

- **Regular Mental Health Check-Ins**: the management of GCU should conduct regular mental check-ins to know how students are feeling and identify those who could use additional assistance in order to create a healthier and more supportive educational environment.

b. Recommendations to Students at GCU

- **Seek Professional Help**: Students should make efforts to contact other mental health care providers like a psychologist or a counsellor and which can be either through outside contacts or through the health services of the campus.
- **Connect with Support Networks**: Students should create a support system comprising of trusted friends, relatives, and peers to share their problems. Sharing problems could reduce loneliness and help find an emotional companion.
- **Utilize Campus Resources**: It is important for students to take advantage of some of the services offered by the institution such as support groups, mental health initiatives and Counseling. This will help them get solutions to their mental challenges or even get ideas of how to avoid these challenges.
- **Maintain a Routine**: Students should create a daily schedule that includes balanced meals, sleep patterns and regular study sessions as having a stable and well planned day will help reduce anxiety and depression.
- **Practice Self-Care**: students should practice self-care by engaging in activities such as meditation, physical exercise and taking nature walks to help ease their minds.

G. Limitations of the Study

This study faced several limitations such as the method used for data collection in this study was scholarly articles, which may not have captured the current state of mental health at GCU fully. This makes it rather challenging to give a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis that would be relevant to GCU in their decision-making process. Secondly, it was difficult to combine and compare findings from research with different designs and methods. The approach, plan, and methods applied to conduct qualitative research vary significantly, and therefore trends cannot be easily compared and standardized. Further, the examined qualitative studies were carried out in other environments and conditions that are not typical for GCU. This affected the probability of the findings based on elements such as institution policies, cultural variations and regional differences in mental health support services.

IV. CONCLUSION

This systematic review of the published literature points to various psychological challenges among the GCU students, as presented other UK institutions. The fundamental sources of stress include academic pressures, economic issues, and social integration troubles, further compounded by the presence of COVID-19. The review also places a strong focus on the relatively high prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress among learners, particularly the disadvantaged ones. In order to overcome these challenges, there is a need for GCU to prioritise creating a supportive and inclusive culture, increasing access to mental health care resources, and implementing flexible academic frameworks. All these steps are important for health and academic success of the students.

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