

Relationship between Emotionality and Psychological Distress in University Students

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Abstract

Objectives: To study the role of positive and negative emotionality in predicting psychological distress like depression anxiety and stress in university students.

Study design, settings and duration: A cross sectional research conducted in different universities from November 2016 to January 2017.

Subjects and Methods: The present research participants were selected by using purposive sampling technique from different universities of Islamabad. Depression anxiety stress scale-21 (DASS) and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) were administered on sample. After scoring, analysis of data was done on SPSS version 19.

Results: The results of present study showed that positive and negative emotionality is significantly related to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) in university students.

Conclusion: It is concluded that university students who have been facing more negative emotions are more prone to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) where as students having more positive emotions are less vulnerable to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress).

Key words: Positive and negative emotionality, psychological distress (depression, anxiety & stress), university students.

Introduction

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Authors Contribution

SRB conceptualized the project and did collection and analysis of data. FS did the literature search. Drafting, revision and writing of the manuscript were done by FS & AR.

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between positive and negative emotionality and psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) among university students. University life is a very critical time period in one's life. University students experience various emotions categorized as positive and negative emotions which have a great impact on their mental well-being. Emotions are the protrusions of feelings that are reliable or artificial. Emotions are sometimes a look of our inner condition. Sometimes they are unnatural and used to accomplish prospect of the society.¹ The difference in positive and

negative emotions is always considered in terms of various theories of emotions.²

Positive emotions involve pleasing and advantageous acts based on situations, including attention, gratification, affection and delight but they are different from sensations that are joyful and positive. Emotions make up pleasure and contentment. They boost future development and achievement. Positive emotions happen in secure and convenient situations. They guide us to novel possessions and joining achievements.³

Everyone practices emotions that are can be positive and negative; negative emotions including rage, anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, despair, deprivation, frustration and gloom. These negative emotions increase heart rate and blood pressure and increasing the stress in individuals. However positive emotions (joy, hope, happiness, gratitude, kindness, cheerful etc.) undo to effect of negative emotions and regulated the normal behavior.⁴⁻⁵

Emotions are a cause of distress for people in a psychological way. Depression, stress and anxiety can slant ones view of the world and make him isolated. The emotions of sadness, emptiness, hopelessness and numbness are with them most of the day. There is also a loss of interest in his enjoyable activities, significant irritability, anxiety,

and stress, feelings of guilt and worthlessness and trouble in making decisions.⁶

According to Goldberg for spotting emotions to treat depression and associated issues like anxiety and stress which supports the arbitrating role of emotional parameters and its relation with depression and stress. Several approaches stress that emotions lead to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) and physical disorders.⁷ Emotional reactions are powerful when they are harmonious with an existing mood.⁸

Further it was that positive emotional experiences are strongly related to life satisfaction whereas negative emotions are negatively related to it. Emotions that are positive in nature and stress on the expression of self other than survival are very positively related to satisfaction in life.⁹ The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between positive and negative emotionality and psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) among university students.

Subjects and Methods

Data was collected from various universities by purposive sampling which consisted of male and female participants. Demographic information included age and gender. Sample comprised of 100 male and 100 female students. Mean age and standard deviation were computed by procedures of descriptive statistics. Correlation was also calculated in order to calculate relation between psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) and positive and negative emotionality. Data was analyzed via SPSS 21.

Participants were asked to give their written consent. Afterwards, research instruments including Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Depression Anxiety Stress scale (DASS-21) were administered. Then, participant's responses on these questionnaires were analyzed. Statistical analysis for calculation of results was done by SPSS 21.

Co relational research design was used. Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) was assessed by using Depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21)¹⁰ constructed by Lovibond & Lovibond 1995. It is subdivided in three domains i.e, depression, anxiety, and stress. The items of this scale are scored according to Lickert scale. English version of the scale has been used, because university students don't have any issue regarding comprehension of this scale phrases. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are 0.75, 0.74 and 0.79 respectively for depression, anxiety and stress.¹¹

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)¹² was used to measure positive and negative emotionality. It was constructed by Watson et al. It has 20 items. All items are rated on 5 point scale. This scale test-retest reliability average coefficient is 0.68 for positive affect and 0.71 for negative affect for an 8-week test-retest period. English version of both scales were used to collect data from for university students.

Results

In the present research, participants were 200 university students including 100 male and 100 females. Their mean age was 21.79 and standard deviation was 2.970.

Table 1: Pearson correlation of positive emotions and psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress).

Variables	N	r	Sig
Depression	200	-.251	.002**
Anxiety	200	-.301	.000**
Stress	200	-.209	.000**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2: Pearson correlation of negative emotions and psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress)

Variables	N	r	Sig
Depression	200	.326	.000**
Anxiety	200	.250	.000**
Stress	200	.208	.003**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

Emotionality (positive and negative emotions) has close relationship with psychological distress. When an individual has experienced negative emotions then he become more prone toward psychological distress. Because in psychological distress individual remain in negative state and he/she has negative view to self, others and future. Hence there is a positive connection between negative emotions and psychological distress.¹³ However, when an individual experienced positive emotions then he is less prone toward psychological distress. Due to positive emotionality individuals can handle their negative affect and they have less chance to experiencing psychological distress. Therefore, there is negative association between positive emotion and psychological distress.¹⁴

Whether life satisfaction is equally related to the presence of positive emotions and the absence

of negative emotions? The answer of this question is given by Suh and his colleagues.¹⁵ who studied the direct relationship between positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. Using the World Values Survey data from 41 countries, they also found that across nations, positive affect was, on average, as it significantly correlated with life satisfaction as negative affect (r_s .29 and -.29 for positive and negative affect, respectively); in their second study, however, the responses of college students from 40 countries revealed that positive affect was more strongly related to life satisfaction as compared to negative affect. Lucas et al¹⁶ found that the correlations among life satisfaction and positive affect were continuously higher than correlations between life satisfaction and negative affect.

Further, It has been found that positive emotionality is negatively related to psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) which means that students experiencing more positive emotions are less prone to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress). It is also explored that Negative emotionality is positively correlated with psychological distress as indicated by the results. It means that students who experience more negative emotions are more vulnerable to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress).

According to Goldberg for specking emotions to treat psychological issues and associated issues like depression, anxiety and stress which sustain the judging role of emotional constraints and its relation with depression, anxiety and stress. Several approaches stress that emotions lead to psychological and physical disorders.⁷ Emotional reactions are influential when they are in agreement with an existing mood.⁸

Brian and Christopher investigated the relationship between negative emotionality and psychopathology. It was concluded that the negative emotional experiences are strongly associated to psychopathology. Emotions that are negative in nature and stress on the pessimism are very positively related to psychological distress.⁹

It is concluded that emotionality is significantly related with psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) in university students. University students experience higher level of psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) because in this age they are very prone to emotional issues. The findings of this research help us in the improvement of appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions. It can be beneficial in providing counseling services at university campus for the dealing emotional and psychological

issues of university students' and giving awareness about these issues to local people.

The present study is very helpful for mental health professionals so that university students can be accessed via psychological assessment tools and they can be taught coping strategies and further treatment of their issues can be carried out. An inclusive plan for mental issues can also be developed in order to tackle out issues that are related to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) so that these issues can be minimized for ensuring mental health among university students.

It is cross-sectional research to investigate to change in emotionally day by day while in future longitudinal research is recommended.

Conflict of interest: None declared by any co-authors.

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