

Mental Health Of Post-Graduate Students: Demographic Profile Analysis From Nagaland

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Abstract

Northeast India is a residence to multi-cultural tribal population which comprises eight Indian states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim. Nagaland, one of the states in India has been considered as a sample to represent the Northeastern states as students from many of these states migrate here to pursue their higher education. The University life of an individual is more mentally and academically challenging than any other educational period. Psychological disorders and other issues might therefore be more prevalent among students during this stage. The study's main objective was to examine the mental health status of postgraduate students studying in one of the Northeastern States of India, Nagaland. The study has gone through the demographic analysis of the sample, and the data were collected through a descriptive method using a survey technique. The Positive Mental Health Inventory developed by Agashe & Helode (2002) was administered to 300 students from various northeastern states studying in Nagaland University, which is a Central University under the Government of India. Findings of the study revealed that 46 percent of postgraduate students had very low positive mental health, and 34 percent reported low positive mental health. Findings also further indicated that male University students showed higher positive mental health than female students. Regarding stream of study, the Department of Psychology and Management had the highest level of positive mental health. The study concluded by providing suggestions to boost the mental well-being of students.

Keywords: Postgraduate students, Positive mental health, Nagaland

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I. Introduction

North East, a home to the tribes residing in the Northeastern part of India. It comprises eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, each having its distinct cultural traditions and historical backdrop. The distinct cultural groups, language and religion display the beauty of its multiculturalism. Each of the states has contributed largely to shaping the socio-cultural, spiritual and historical aspects of our country (Sarma and Kalita, 2024). Nagaland, one of the states of India, lies in the extreme northeast region of India. The state has an area of 16,579 sq. Km with a population of 19,78,502. The state comprises 16 districts and is a residence to 17 ethnic tribes with other sub tribes. It is bordered by Myanmar to the East, Assam to the West, the state of Arunachal Pradesh to the North and by the state of Manipur in the South. Nagaland has been selected as a sample to represent the different North Eastern states, as students from various states migrate here to secure higher education.

The prevalence of mental health concerns in higher education students is severe (Brown, 2018; Lipson and Eisenberg, 2018). University students are vulnerable during this period and face more mental health issues when compared to the general population (Nsereko, 2018; Muhia and Nanji, 2021; Dessauvague *et al.*, 2022) with common stresses like living separately, balancing between work and life, more academic requirements, adapting to changing family and societal connections and encountering new friends (Kantaros, 2018; Duffy, 2023). When students leave their homes to pursue higher education, they require interacting and befriending new people and building bonds, which can be quite distressing (Deb *et al.*, 2016). Besides that, the competitive atmosphere and the urge to do better than their peers allow them to engage in self-doubt and compare themselves with others (Olivera *et al.*, 2023), which can create more anxiety and stress. It is vital to identify and study the problems these youngsters encounter to provide early intervention to help them acknowledge their capabilities (Kirsh *et al.*, 2014; Bhattarai *et al.*, 2023).

In India, psychiatric issues have been steadily increasing in recent years. There are more issues in the North Eastern part of the country considering the social, cultural and topographical elements (Alee *et al.*, 2018;

Ghosh, 2023). A survey conducted by UNICEF and the National Service Scheme (NSS) revealed that 95% of youth suffering mental health problems resulted from online bullying and physical punishment. The majority of the students surveyed reported that it affected their interpersonal relationships and are experiencing stress, anxiety, fear and even physical harm for a few. According to Sreeraj *et al.*, (2015), cultural factors have an influence on substance misuse by the ethnic tribes. Alcohol use is not prohibited within the tribal population, which influences their pattern of alcohol consumption. Studies also indicated substance abuse being the most prevalent in adolescent boys, and stress disorder most commonly diagnosed in female adolescents in the Northeastern states of India. School-going adolescents in the state of Kohima, Nagaland also exhibited students experiencing mental health problems like emotional problems, hyperactivity, and conduct problems at 17%, 16% and 15% respectively (Keyho *et al.*, 2019). Another similar study by Ali and Eqbal (2016) in adolescents of Jharkhand also demonstrated emotional problems at 5%, conduct problems at 9% and hyperactivity at 4%. Although mental health problems are common in these states, the people continue to encounter stigma and misconceptions, which not only bring negative attitudes but also create more adversity and disgrace to the victim (Longkumer and Borooah, 2013; Saikia *et al.*, 2024).

II. Literature Review

Many studies and surveys show a high prevalence of mental health problems among these age groups. In a study conducted by Cody *et al.*, (2022), depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts were more common in higher education students when compared with the overall population. Another study also suggested 12-50% of higher education students fulfill the criteria for at least one mental health problem (Grasdalsmoen *et al.*, 2020). Students were also at risk of eating disorders, substance abuse and sleeping disturbances (Ayalew *et al.*, 2018; Buboltz *et al.*, 2001; Samy *et al.*, 2020; Shegute *et al.*, 2021), with the average age of onset of mental health issues being 22 years according to a National mental health survey in Singapore. In another study conducted by Dessauvaggie *et al.*, (2022), they found that there was an alarming rise in the mental health of university students with most commonly faced issues such as depression and anxiety. The students are however reluctant to seek medical help despite the significantly high rate of mental health problems. Agteren *et al.*, (2019), in their study discovered high prevalence of depression and anxiety among higher education students while having very low mental well being and resilience. Hawbam (2022) also conducted a study on North eastern students studying in Delhi. The result indicated North Eastern students showing more symptoms of stress than the students from the host culture. However, with regard to psychological well being, students from North East India demonstrated similar level with the other students. Another similar study by Gunasekaran *et al.*, (2022) revealed, about a quarter of youngsters was found to be at possible risk for mental health disorders. The study suggested spreading awareness on the importance of mental health and early intervention from teachers as well as family members to improve the status of mental health among the students.

Research Questions

- What would be the mental health of postgraduate students studying in the various Departments of the University in Nagaland?
- How does the level of mental health among postgraduate students vary with respect to their Gender (Male/Female)?
- How would the level of mental health of postgraduate students vary in relation to their Stream of study

Design Of The Study

The data for the present research study were collected through a descriptive method using a survey technique. The Sample of the study consists of 300 postgraduate students representing the different North-East States of India studying in Nagaland Central University. The investigator applied the research tool among the students and collected the data to explore the mental health of the University students. The data has been analysed with reference to their Gender (Male/Female); Stream of study (Management/Science/Social Science/Humanities and Education). For the present research study, the investigator used an inventory developed by Agashe & Helode (2002), published by Psycho Scan, India. The tool title "Positive Mental Health Inventory" (PMHI) consists of 36 items covering the various Mental Health aspects such as Self-acceptance, Ego-strength and philosophies of life. The reliability coefficient of the tool was 0.723. The highest possible score on the inventory was 36, while the lowest possible score was zero. As per the standardized tool used, there are 5 levels of positive mental health. A score of 26 and above indicates very high positive mental health, 24 and above indicates high positive mental health, 20 and above suggests moderate positive mental health, 16 and above suggests low positive mental health, and the remaining 16 and below suggests very low positive mental health. In the present study, percentage analysis is used to derive the findings.

III. Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed on different demographic profiles to derive the findings of the study. The analysis of the study is described below

Analysis of the Data based on the Mental Health of Post Graduate Students in the total Sample

Table I: Mental Health of Post Graduate students in the total Sample

Category	Score obtained	No. of students (N=300)	Percentage (%)	Level of Mental Health (M.H)
Total Sample N (300)	26 and above	2	1%	Very high positive M.H
	24-25	12	4%	High positive M.H
	20-23	45	15%	Moderate positive M.H
	16-19	103	34%	Low positive M.H
	15 and below	138	46%	Very low positive M.H

Data based on Table I reveals that majority of the Post Graduate students fall under (N= 138, Percentage = 46%) very low category of positive mental health, a considerable number of students as having (N=103, percentage 34%) low positive mental health, followed by 15% (N=45) and 4% (N=12) of students under moderate positive mental health and high positive mental health, respectively. Only one percentage of students (N=2) reported very high positive mental health. Thus, it is evident that the mental health of postgraduate students in Nagaland is very low, which requires an urgent need for intervention and measures of rehabilitation. The graphical representation of the data is shown in the figure below:

Figure I

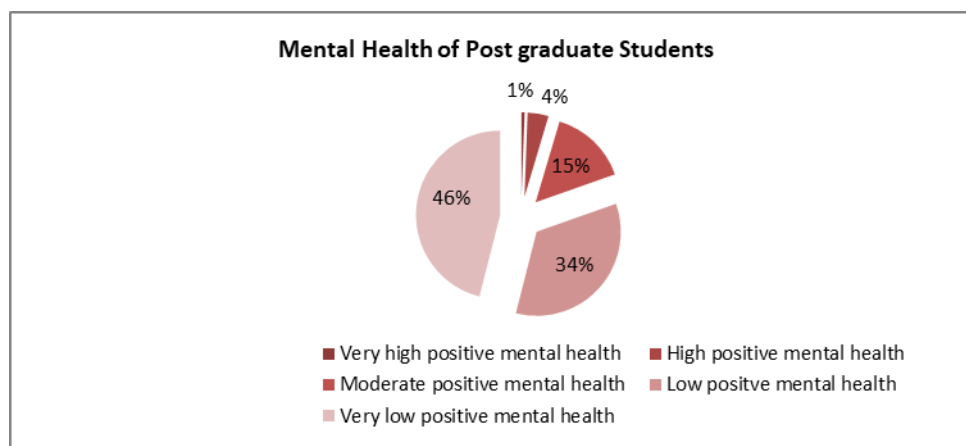


Fig. I Mental Health of Postgraduate Students

Analysis of the Data based on the Mental Health of Post Graduate students with respect to their Gender

Table II: Mental Health of PG students with respect to their Gender

Table II. Mental Health of PG students with respect to their Gender					
Category of Mental Health	Gender				Level of Mental Health (M.H)
	Male		Female		
	No. of students (N=128)	Percentage of students (%)	No. of students (N=172)	Percentage of students (%)	

26 and above	2	2%	0	0%	Very high positive M.H
24-25	10	8%	2	1%	High positive M.H
20-23	27	21%	18	10%	Moderate positive M.H
16-19	44	34 %	59	34%	Low positive M.H
15 and below	45	35%	93	54%	Very low positive M.H

The above table indicates that male and female university students differ in their level of mental health. Male students showed higher level of positive mental health than female students, with 2 % (N=2) categorized as having very high positive mental health and 8% (N=10) falling under high positive mental health. Another 21% (N=27) of students showed moderate positive mental health, while 34% (N=44) and 35% (N=45) revealed having low positive mental health and very low positive mental health, respectively. Female postgraduate students demonstrated lower levels of positive mental health than their counterparts, with over 50% falling under very low positive mental health, 34% (N=59) as having low positive mental health and only about 1% of the female students under high positive mental health (N=2, percentage= 1%). Additionally, the data shows that none of the female students measured very high positive mental health, which is a cause of concern and requires attention. The graphical representation of the data is shown in the figure below:

Figure II

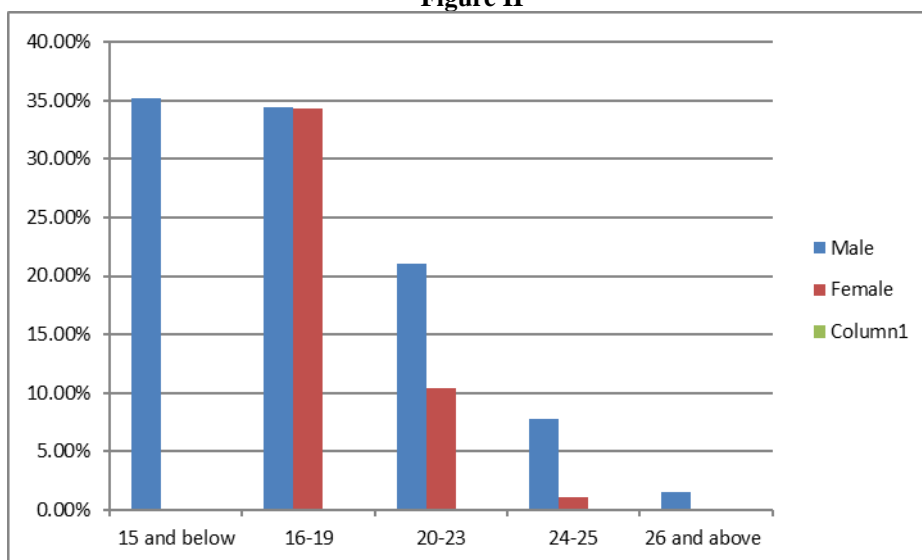


Fig. II Mental Health of Postgraduate Students w.r.t Gender

Analysis of the data based on the Mental Health of Post Graduate students with respect to their Stream of Study

Table III: Mental Health of Post Graduate students with respect to their Stream of Study

Table 111. Mental Health of Post Graduate students with respect to their Stream of Study																
Ment al Healt h Score	Stream of study															Level of Mental Health (M.H)
	Education		English		Geology		History		Management		Psychology		Tenyidie			
	N=77)	%	N=59)	%	N=34)	%	N=40)	%	N=40)	%	N=37)	%	N=13)	%		

26 and above	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		1	2	1	3	0	0	Very high positive M.H
24-25	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	2	3	8	2	5	1	8	High positive M.H
20-23	17	22	8	14	1	3	6	15	4	10	5	14	4	31	Moderate positive M.H
16-19	28	36	17	29	10	29	11	28	20	50	12	32	5	38	Low positive M.H
15 and below	30	39	32	54	22	65	22	55	12	30	17	46	3	23	Very low positive M.H

The above table indicates that the Department of Psychology and Management has the highest level of positive mental health, with 3% (N=1) and 2% (N=1) of students belonging to very high positive mental health. Department of Geology has demonstrated the lowest level of positive mental health with 65% (N=22) students having very low positive mental health followed by the department of History with 55% (N=22) of students under very low positive mental health. The graphical representation of the data is shown in the figure below:

Figure III

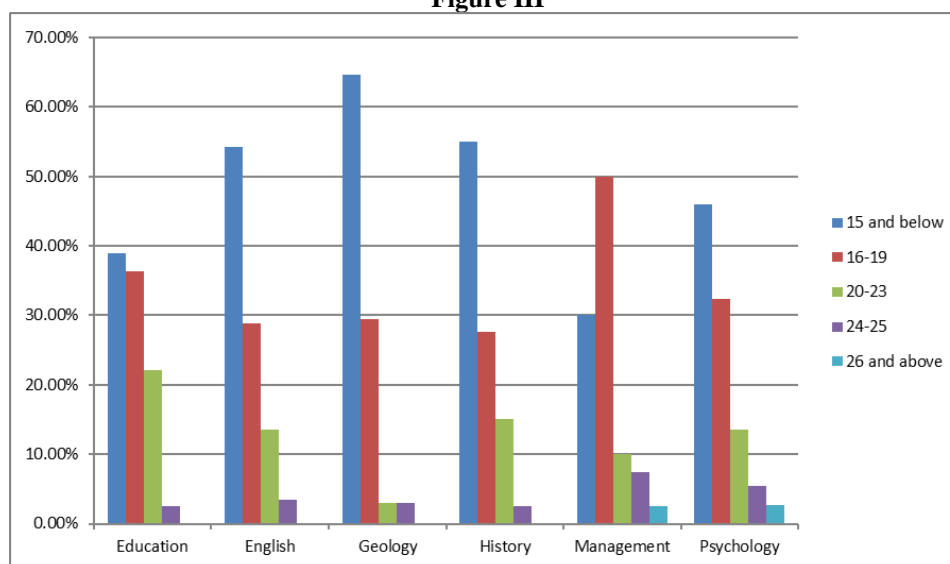


Fig. III Mental Health of Postgraduate Students w.r.t Stream of Study

IV. Discussions Based On Findings

The study findings identified majority of the postgraduate students fall under very low positive mental health (N=138, percentage 46%), a considerable number of students as having (N=103, percentage 34%) low positive mental health, followed by 15% (N=45) and 4% (N=12) of students under moderate positive mental health and high positive mental health, respectively. Only one percentage of students (N=2) reported very high positive mental health. These findings were consistent with the findings of (Meyetsolo 2022). In his study, he found that about 50% of college students have poor (27.5%) and very poor (23.75%) mental health. Similar results by Nami. *et al.*, (2013) show the prevalence of high rate of mental disorders among University students which support the findings of the current study.

As far as gender is concerned, male University students showed higher levels of positive mental health than their counterparts with 2 % (N=2) categorized as having very high positive mental health and 35% (N=45) falling under very low positive mental health. On the contrary, female students showed lower levels of positive mental health with over 50% under very low positive mental health which is consistent with prior studies. Studies conducted by Liu *et al.*,(2022) and Pandit (2024), found male students having considerably higher mental health than their peers. In another study, Female university students reported more symptoms of psychological disorders (Nami *et al.*, 2013) and were more prone to anxiety and other problems (Saleem, 2013).

The findings of the current study reported Department of Psychology having the highest level of positive mental health, with 3 % (N=1) of students falling under very high positive mental health, followed by the department of Management with 2% (N=1) of students under very high positive mental health. This study's findings are similar to other previous research where depression, anxiety & stress were all significantly higher in students of arts and commerce as compared to those of science students (Baviskar *et al.*, 2013). Another study by Siddique and Nishad) in the year 2021 also revealed students of clinical psychology having better mental health than students from other background. Additionally, students from the department of Geology reportedly showed having very low level of positive mental health (65%) which is followed by students from the department of History with 55% falling under very low positive mental health.

V. Suggestions Of The Study

The findings of the study proposed the following suggestions to enhance the mental health of postgraduate students to excel in their academic and personal life. They are listed below.

- Mental health services should be made available at universities in blended mode so that students can get support when required. It should be sufficient to meet the needs of every student.
- Students should be made aware of mental health problems and symptoms by organizing relevant programs at the University
- Career counselling should be provided so students can make informed decisions about their future careers.
- Organize training programs for faculty to improve mental health knowledge, recognise symptoms of mentally unstable students, provide counselling and refer cases to specialist mental health professionals if required.
- Universities should take initiatives to develop stigma-free campus for students.
- Mental health education should be introduced as a separate subject in the school curriculum
- Universities must also ensure the mental and physical well-being of the teaching and non-teaching faculty who are responsible for educating, promoting and developing positive well-being among the students.

VI. Conclusion

This study is one of the very few to examine the mental health of postgraduate students in the state of Nagaland. The study identified that the vast majority of postgraduate students fall under very low positive mental health, and only a few percentage of students under high positive mental health. With regard to gender, male university students had higher positive mental health than female university students. Furthermore, the study also revealed Department of Psychology having the highest level of positive mental health, followed by the Department of Management. On the contrary, the department of Geology reported lowest level of positive mental health, followed by the department of History. By observing the present psychological condition of students in the state, it is critically necessary to implement precautionary measures and interventions to help students achieve positive mental health. Furthermore, it is also crucial to raise consciousness about mental health and its related issues. It is high time that priority be given to mental health education, including awareness. Mental health education is more than just understanding and learning about the various mental health problems. It also includes teaching individuals in managing their mental health, recognising early signs of mental illness and seeking appropriate support they may need. This is only possible when mental health is openly discussed. It will not only lessen stigmatisation and stereotyping of mental disorders but also help individuals to be self-aware and live a healthy life. For the students at University, mental health determines not just their mental and physical well-being, but their academic achievement also depends on it (Vltavska *et al.*, 2024). As such, students need to be both psychologically and physically healthy to be able to learn and achieve high grades. Prevention and early identification of mental health problems during this crucial juncture will be beneficial that go way beyond graduation (Duffy 2023). Universities should make every effort to create a stigma-free environment where students feel welcomed, accepted and appreciated. This will encourage students to seek assistance when needed and make informed decision instead of withdrawing from society.

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