

Mental Health: A study among Ph.D. Research Scholars

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Abstract:

The present study aimed to examine the mental health status of Ph.D. research scholars enrolled at Sardar Patel University. Utilizing a random sampling method, data were collected from doctoral students across various departments. The *Mental Health Scale* developed by Dr. D.J. Bhatt and G.R. Gida was employed to assess participants' mental health. The key independent variables considered in the study were gender, area of residence (urban/rural), and academic stream. An independent samples *t*-test was used to analyze the data. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in mental health based on gender, indicating that gender plays an important role in the mental well-being of doctoral students. However, no significant differences were observed with respect to area and academic stream. The findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive mental health support initiatives in higher education settings, especially for research scholars coping with academic stress and related challenges.

Keywords: Mental health, Locale, Well-being, Academic Stream, Doctoral Students

Introduction:

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and behave in daily life. In the academic realm, particularly among PhD research scholars, mental health has become an increasingly significant concern. The pursuit of a doctoral degree, while intellectually enriching, is often accompanied by high levels of stress, academic pressure, financial constraints, social isolation, and uncertainty about future career prospects. These factors can contribute to psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and burnout. Research scholars, by virtue of their demanding academic environment and the expectation of continuous productivity, are especially vulnerable to mental health challenges. The prolonged duration of doctoral studies, frequent deadlines, pressure to publish, and the often-solitary nature of research work can take a toll on emotional and psychological resilience. Despite their intellectual capabilities, many scholars may lack the coping mechanisms or support systems needed to manage these stressors effectively. Understanding the mental health status of PhD research scholars is crucial not only for their personal well-

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being but also for the overall quality and sustainability of academic research. Institutions have begun to recognize the importance of mental health services, yet stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate access to support systems remain barriers to effective intervention. This study aims to explore the mental health conditions of PhD scholars, identify the key stressors affecting their well-being, and examine the role of personal, academic, and environmental factors in shaping their psychological health. The findings can contribute to creating better support systems, policies, and practices to promote mental health awareness and foster a healthier academic culture for emerging scholars.

Several national and international studies have highlighted alarming rates of anxiety, depression, burnout, and other psychological issues among PhD students. In many academic institutions, mental health support services remain underdeveloped or underutilized, either due to stigma or lack of awareness. Moreover, cultural expectations, financial burdens, and personal responsibilities — especially for scholars from diverse or marginalized backgrounds — may further exacerbate mental health concerns. Despite growing awareness, the mental health of PhD scholars is still a relatively underexplored research area in many regions, especially in developing countries. There is a need for systematic investigation into the mental health status of these scholars, the factors influencing it, and the coping strategies employed by them.

This study seeks to explore the psychological health of PhD research scholars with the aim of understanding:

1. The prevalence of mental health issues in this population.
2. The academic, social, and personal stressors contributing to mental health problems.
3. The role of institutional support systems and social networks.
4. The coping mechanisms adopted by scholars to manage stress and emotional strain.

The findings of this research will be valuable for universities, policy-makers, academic supervisors, and mental health professionals to develop more responsive and supportive environments for doctoral students. By promoting awareness and implementing preventive and supportive measures, academic institutions can play a key role in enhancing the mental health and overall success of their research scholars.

Concept of Mental Health

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how individuals think, feel, and act, and it also influences how they handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness, but a positive state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as:

“A state of mental well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Objective

1. To study the Mental Health among Ph.D. Research Scholars
2. To study Mental Health among Male and Female Ph.D. Research Scholars
3. To study Mental Health among urban and rural areas Ph.D. Research Scholars
4. To study Mental Health among arts and science stream Ph.D. Research Scholars

Hypothesis

- Ho1. There will be no significant difference between Mental Health of Male and Female Ph.D. Research Scholars.
- Ho2. There will be no significant difference between Mental Health of urban and rural areas Ph.D. Research Scholars.
- Ho3. There will be no significant difference between Mental Health of arts and science stream Ph.D. Research Scholars.

Variables

1. Categorical Variable

1. Gender: Male/Female
2. Area: Urban/Rural
3. Stream: Arts/Science

2. Criterion Variable

1. Mental Health

Samples

A total of 120 students pursuing their doctoral studies at Sardar Patel University, located in Anand district of Gujarat, were selected using a random sampling technique.”

Tools

Mental Health Scale developed by Dr. D.J. Bhatt and Gida G.R. This scale consists of a total of 40 statements designed to measure five different dimensions of mental health. For each statement, the respondent is required to mark one of the three possible responses: Agree, Neutral, or Disagree. The scale yields a minimum score of 40 and a maximum score of 120.

Statistical Tools

1. 't' test

Research Design

Table No. 1. 2*2*2 Factorial design used in the present study

Variables↓→	Male		Female		Total
Stream	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
Arts	15	15	15	15	60
Science	15	15	15	15	60
Total	30	30	30	30	120

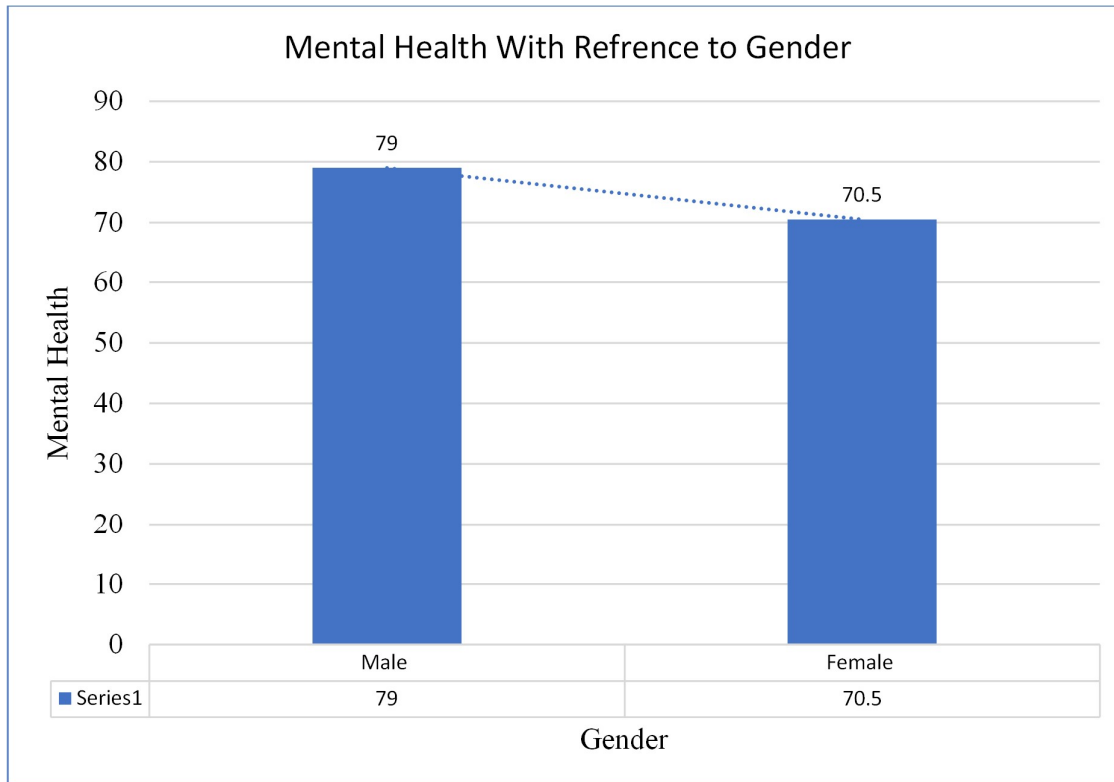
Result and Discussion

Table No. 2 Mental Health with respect to Gender

Sr.	Gender	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Level of Significant
1.	Male	60	79.0	6.21	9.22**	0.01
2.	Female	60	70.5	3.46		

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine the difference in mental health scores between male and female participants. The mean mental health score for males was 79.0 (SD = 6.21), while for females it was 70.5 (SD = 3.46). The t-value obtained was 9.22, which is significant at the 0.01 level. There is a statistically significant difference in mental health between male and female participants. Males scored significantly higher on mental health compared to females ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that gender has a meaningful impact on mental health in this sample. The observed difference in mental health between males and females may be attributed to several psychological, social, and biological factors. Traditionally, men are socially conditioned to appear emotionally strong and self-reliant, which may lead them to underreport psychological distress and present better mental health in self-assessments. On the other hand, women often face multiple social roles—such as managing academic or work responsibilities along with household or caregiving duties—which can increase their stress levels and negatively affect their mental well-being. Furthermore, women are generally more open and expressive about their emotions, making them more likely to acknowledge and report psychological difficulties. Biological and hormonal factors, including menstrual cycles and hormonal changes during different life stages, also contribute to emotional fluctuations in females, possibly influencing their mental health scores. Additionally, males may have greater access to social freedom,

recreational activities, and decision-making power, especially in traditional or patriarchal societies, all of which can contribute positively to their mental health. These combined factors may help explain why, in this study, males demonstrated significantly higher mental health scores compared to females.



This result implies that male students in the sample reported better mental health than female students, and the difference is unlikely due to chance. This significant difference may be attributed to various gender-related factors such as coping mechanisms, emotional expression, social expectations, or psychological resilience, which might influence how males and females experience and report mental health.

Table No. 3. Mental Health with respect to Locale

Sr.	Area	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Level of Significant
1.	Urban	60	74.0	6.09	1.40	0.05 (NS)
2.	Rural	60	75.6	6.97		

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine the difference in mental health scores between individuals from urban and rural areas. The mean mental health score for participants from urban areas was 74.0 (SD = 6.09), while the mean for rural participants was slightly higher at 75.6 (SD = 6.97). The computed t-value was 1.40, which was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there is no significant difference in mental health scores between urban and rural participants in this sample. Although

rural participants scored marginally higher, the difference is not large enough to be considered meaningful in statistical terms. Therefore, it can be concluded that area of residence does not have a significant impact on mental health in this particular study.

Table No. 4 Mental Health with respect to Stream of Study

Sr.	Stream	N	Mean	SD	't' value	Level of Significant
1.	Arts	60	73.8	6.43	1.68	0.05 (NS)
2.	Science	60	75.8	6.60		

The independent sample t-test was conducted to examine the difference in mental health scores between students of the Arts and Science streams. The results revealed that Science students ($M = 75.8$, $SD = 6.60$) had a slightly higher mean score than Arts students ($M = 73.8$, $SD = 6.43$). However, the calculated 't' value of 1.68 did not reach the level of statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant, indicating that the stream of study (Arts vs. Science) does not have a significant impact on the mental health of the students in this sample. This may suggest that factors other than academic stream could play a more critical role in influencing mental health.

Conclusion

1. There is significant difference between Mental Health of Male and Female Ph.D. Research Scholars.
2. There is no significant difference between Mental Health of urban and rural areas Ph.D. Research Scholars.
3. There is no significant difference between Mental Health of arts and science stream Ph.D. Research Scholars.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the present study, which revealed a significant difference in mental health between male and female PhD research scholars—with male scholars showing higher levels of mental well-being—it is essential to recommend targeted interventions. Universities and academic institutions should implement gender-sensitive mental health support programs that specifically address the psychological and emotional challenges faced by female research scholars. Regular psychological assessments and counseling services should be made available to monitor and support scholars' mental health throughout their academic journey. Furthermore, establishing a safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory academic environment can help reduce gender-based stressors. Institutions should also offer flexible academic policies, such as extended deadlines and maternity support, to ease the pressure on female scholars. Mentorship programs and sensitization workshops can promote a more understanding and empathetic research culture. Overall, these

recommendations aim to ensure equitable mental health support and enhance the overall well-being of all PhD scholars, especially women, in the academic system.

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