

# An Investigation of Mental Health and Its Relationship with Social Capital among the Students of Islamic Azad University - Khalkhal

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## A-R-T-I-C-L-E I-N-F-O

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## A-B-S-T-R-A-C-T

**Background & Aims of the Study:** Given the importance of mental health issues of students and the role of social capital in promoting mental health and improving academic performance, this study was designed to evaluate the mental health status of students of Islamic Azad University, Khalkhal Branch and its relationship with social capital.

**Materials & Methods:** This descriptive-analytical study was conducted on 435 the Islamic Azad University students, Khalkhal Branch at first half of the academic year 2013-14. Data were collected using Demographic, Mental Health and Social Capital questionnaires and then analyzed using SPSS software version 21, correlation test, chi-square and t-test.

**Results:** Results showed that 72.5 percent of students participating in the study suspected to have mental disorders. Males had better mental health. There was no significant correlation between mental health score, financial status, age and residency status ( $P > 0.05$ ). There was a significant relationship between mental health and all areas of social capital except the area of business communications.

**Conclusions:** Due to the unique conditions of students and findings of the study based on the positive effect of increased social capital on the improvement of mental health, much attention and effort should be paid by authorities to provide appropriate infrastructures to develop social capital in higher educational system and create opportunities for social interaction both in individual and group interactions.

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## Background

Health has been the subject from the inception of human but only its physical dimension is

generally considered and less attention has been paid on its other aspects especially mental health (1). At the present age mental health is one of the most important health and hygiene

indicators of a society and is deeply concerned by psychiatrists, psychologists and other behavioral and social science researchers (2). Mental health includes mental aptitude for welcome coordination, effective work and flexibility in difficult situations and the ability to recover your balance (3).

In order to be considered as an individual who has a high level of mental health an individual should be flexible in difficult situations and has the ability to get his mental balance at any situation (4).

Psychological stresses are important factors that can endanger people's mental health (5). Studies in the field of mental health status indicate that about 21% of the population suffers from mental disorders and women are more vulnerable than men (6). Studies conducted in recent years show that mental disorders are available among different levels of students and increased rate of students who refer to the student counseling sections is an indication of increase in mental health, social and educational problems (7).

The most common mental problems among students are depression, anxiety, hostility and aggression also obsessive, tendency to isolation and antisocial tendencies are seen in students (8). On the other hand, mental problems will have a negative effect on doing home assignments, motivation and will cause anxiety and fear so that students spend a significant part of their thought force on such problems (9). But relations and social bonds can cause emotional connection between people and make them to feel more secured, the and thereby improve their mental health (10).

Social capital is a network of interpersonal and intergroup relationships based on social trust and interactions between individuals, institutions, organizations and community groups which can cause social cohesion and social protection of people and social groups and in order to achieve personal and group

objectives provides required energy to facilitate actions (11).

In a research it has been shown that social capital reduces stress making factors and the risk of social capital. It can also reduce negative impact of life events such as job loss (12). Therefore the absence or weakness of social capital leads to individual isolation and negative individualism (11). The results of a study which investigated the relationship between social support and mental health of Korean students revealed that social capital is positively related to psychological capital of students and students who have a high level of social support, have less psychological pressure and stress (13).

**Aims of the study:** Considering the importance of mental health issues and the role of social capital in promoting mental health and ultimately the improvement of educational performance the aim of this study is determine the mental health status among the students of Islamic Azad University Khalkhal Branch, and its relationship with social capital.

## Materials & Methods

This study is a descriptive - analytic. The statistical population of this study was all the students of Islamic Azad University, Khalkhal Branch at first half of the academic year 2013-14 which 435 students were randomly enrolled by the use of Cochran formula. A random sampling method using appropriate allocation was used i.e., the estimated sample size was divided between 13 educational department of the university, based on the number of students. Data were collected through 3 questionnaires:

1. The demographic questionnaire, the questionnaire included demographic

characteristics (such as age, sex, entrance year, living place, marital status, etc.)

2. General Health Questionnaire 28 questions: General Health Questionnaire (GHQ28)

### Social capital Inventory

Social capital inventory of Bullen is a questionnaire consisting of 36 questions to measure social capital. The questionnaire was translated into Persian, its reliability and validity has been confirmed by numerous studies (14, 15). The questionnaire consisted of eight domains (the domain of participation in the local communities, pioneer in the field of social activities, trust and security, relation with neighboring areas, contact with friends and family, tolerance of differences, value of life and business communications), which includes certain questions, all questions were multiple-choice, and so the score was given to each question varied between 1 to 4.

**Data analysis:** The data were analyzed by the software of SPSS Version 21 and use of central statistical indices, independent T-test, chi-square tests and correlation test. Significance level of these tests in this study was considered lower than 0.05.

## Results

A total of 435 students participated in the study, 206 were male (47.5%) and 229 students were female (52.5%) with an average age of boys  $2.3 \pm 23.4$  and girls  $2.1 \pm 24.1$  respectively. 375 of the studied students were single (86.2%), 60 were married (13.8%), 319 were BA students (73.3%). Most of the students were non-local

(251) and based on the financial status 211 had moderate-income (48.5%).

The results of GHQ questionnaire revealed that 15% of students had physical and anxiety problems and insomnia, 17% have impaired physical function and 12% had severe depression. Also according to the cutoff point of 23, 72.5% of students participating in the study suspected to have mental disorders (Table 1).

**Table 1: the frequency of mental disorders in different areas among the students of Islamic Azad University, Khalkhal Branch**

| Health Dimention     | Suspected to have mental disorders |      | Healthy |      | Total |     |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|------|---------|------|-------|-----|
|                      | N                                  | %    | N       | %    | N     | %   |
| Physical problems    | 65                                 | 15   | 370     | 85   | 435   | 100 |
| Insomnia             | 66                                 | 15.2 | 369     | 84.8 | 435   | 100 |
| Physical dysfunction | 73                                 | 17   | 362     | 83   | 435   | 100 |
| Depression           | 51                                 | 12   | 384     | 88   | 435   | 100 |
| Mental health        | 315                                | 72.5 | 120     | 27.5 | 435   | 100 |

Among the demographic variables, there was a significant relationship between mental health and level of education ( $p = 0.04$ ) so that with an increase in the level of education mental health reduced. The mental health among male and female students was a statistically significant difference ( $P < 0.001$ ), as were males had better mental health. The mental health score had no significant correlation with financial status, age, residency status ( $P > 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2: the relationship between mental health and demographic variables among the students of Islamic Azad University, Khalkhal Branch**

| Variable           | Meantal Health Problems |     |     |     | P-value |          |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------|----------|
|                    | No                      |     | Yes |     |         |          |
|                    | N                       | %   | N   | %   |         |          |
| Age group          | > 20                    | 98  | 72  | 38  | 28      | NS       |
|                    | 21-25                   | 190 | 73  | 72  | 27      |          |
|                    | 26-30                   | 16  | 73  | 6   | 27      |          |
|                    | <30                     | 8   | 67  | 4   | 33      |          |
| Gender             | male                    | 127 | 62  | 79  | 38      | p<0.0001 |
|                    | female                  | 188 | 82  | 41  | 18      |          |
| Marriage status    | single                  | 272 | 72  | 310 | 27      | NS       |
|                    | married                 | 42  | 70  | 18  | 30      |          |
| level of education | BA students             | 85  | 81  | 20  | 19      | 0.04     |
|                    | BS students             | 221 | 69  | 98  | 31      |          |
|                    | MA students             | 8   | 80  | 2   | 20      |          |
| Residency          | Native                  | 138 | 76  | 45  | 24      | NS       |
|                    | Dormitory               | 176 | 70  | 75  | 30      |          |
| Financial status   | Very Good               | 50  | 71  | 20  | 29      | NS       |
|                    | Good                    | 86  | 78  | 25  | 22      |          |
|                    | Moderate                | 150 | 71  | 61  | 29      |          |
|                    | Weak                    | 21  | 64  | 12  | 36      |          |
|                    | Very Low                | 8   | 80  | 2   | 20      |          |

The mean score of students' social capital was  $14.7 \pm 79$ ; the highest score was 132 and the lowest score was 45. There was a significant correlation between mental health and all areas of social capital except the area of business communications, ( $P = 0.09$ ) (Table 3).

There was a significant correlation between social capital and mental health scores ( $P=0.001$ ), means that a person with high social capital has high mental health.

**Table 3: the relationship between mental health and different areas of social capital among the students of Islamic Azad University, Khalkhal Branch**

| Social capital           | Mean(SD)   | Correlation | P      |
|--------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|
| Participation            | 15.2 (3.8) | 0.15        | 0.001  |
| social interaction       | 15.5 (4.1) | 0.28        | <0.001 |
| Trust and security       | 12(3.3)    | 0.19        | <0.001 |
| Neighborhood             | 10.7(3.1)  | 0.24        | <0.001 |
| Friends and family       | 6(2.3)     | 0.28        | <0.001 |
| Tolerance of differences | 4.3 (1.5)  | 0.2         | <0.001 |
| value of lifeV           | 4.7(1.5)   | 0.21        | <0.001 |
| Business communications  | 7(1.9)     | 0.08        | 0.08   |

## Discussion

Social capital based on shared values and norms facilitates sense of security, trust and mutual commitment to civic responsibilities, participation and cooperation of the community members in order to achieve mutual benefits which psychological health is one of them. Social capital also makes mental health achievable (16, 17). The results of present study show that there is a significant relationship between the total score of social capital and mental health so that a person with higher social capital has better mental health as well.

There was a significant relationship between mental health and all areas of social capital except the area of business communications. The more an individual has social capitals, i.e. valuable set of social supports, psychological, financial, sense of belonging and solidarity and participation in various aspects of social life, he has a more favorable status of mental health. On the other hand, people with better mental health are more qualified to take responsibilities and social roles.

This indicates that the bilateral relationship between mental health and social capital. In fact, the promotion of each of these categories can have an effect on the other (18).

Research findings indicate that 72.5% of students participating in the study suspected to have mental disorders. This may be due to educational, cultural, socio - economic, welfare and such cases. Mental disorder leads to negative progress in school assignments, loss of motivation, fear and cause students to spend a considerable part of their intellectual powers on such problems. This high level indicates that the authorities must take the necessary measures to provide and improve the mental health of their students (19).

Also, 17% of participants suspected to have physical function disorders, 15.2% suspected to have anxiety and insomnia, 15% physical problems and 12% were suspected to have depression. These results indicate that students due to limited experience need to consult and enjoy social skills training and coping strategies to deal with various problems in their educational and living environment (20). The results of the study confirm the sex differences in mental health based on which the mental health of male students was better than female students.

Our findings concerning sex differences in mental health, confirm some previous study in this regard (21). The results of the study showed a correlation between mental health and level of education. Thus, in the case of higher level of education, mental health reduced but to confirm this result no review of literature was found, so much research is needed to be conducted in this regard. This finding may be due to various reasons such as having a purpose, worry about future career, planning, self-esteem, motivation, anxiety, getting older, physical factors, emotional and psychological conditions.

## Conclusion

In this study, a high percentage of students in terms of mental health were not in a favorable and this indicates the importance of addressing

health issues among students. On the other hand due to the especial situation of students and the findings of this study i.e. the improvement of mental health with high social capital much attention should be paid on providing appropriate infrastructure for the growth of social capital in higher educational system and create opportunities for social interaction both in individual and group interactions.

Also, paying attention to social work and voluntary services, including making spaces for active participation can lead to increased participation in social activities. According to the results of study, it is recommended that policy makers and executives in the field of mental health (especially among students), design practical policies to increase the level of social capital and strengthen the religious beliefs of students and consequently reduce their stress and promote their mental health.

Also, special attention needs to be paid to the issue of mental health among female students to equip them with valuable resources such as self-esteem, knowledge and awareness, life skills to help them to improve and promote mental health. Creating social trust, social participation, trust, honesty, social interaction, personal interaction, social and religious rituals among multi-million student populations is difficult work, but not impossible.

## Footnotes

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### Conflict of Interest:

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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