MENTAL HEALTH IN ACADEMIA

Concerns about mental health in the academic community have been growing in recent years. It is no surprise that mental health concerns are very common among university populations, including undergraduate, graduate students, and faculty staff. Studies that investigate mental health problems in academia show that subjects suffer from depression, anxiety, insomnia, and suicidal thoughts. Since talking about mental health is still considered a stigma, we can say the problem is much bigger than we think. These past two years with the COVID-19 pandemic have also caused a surge in these mental health problems. Distant education, offline classes, social distancing rules, and other pandemic measures have affected the level of anxiety and depression that the students and staff experience. Unfortunately, it seems that we are in the midst of an extensive mental health crisis. Although marginalized groups and minorities can be more vulnerable, anyone can experience these issues throughout academia.

Today, university students face challenges, unlike any other generation that came before them. The education costs are rapidly rising, and the competition for a limited quota is tough. The pandemic also poses a big uncertainty in terms of the economic, political, and social climate. The students are not only responsible for managing their academic programs, but also have to take care of their well-being amid all their responsibilities. Financial difficulties can also be a huge burden for the students and aggravate their mental health issues. Unfortunately, many students do not have job security after graduation. Therefore, financial hardships and fear of future unemployment may contribute to mental health concerns such as anxiety. The phrase "publish or perish" draws attention to the importance of making as many publications as possible to increase the scientific reputation of researchers in academia. This idiom expresses the off-the-record pressure that academics are subjected to. Early signs and symptoms of mental health issues can easily be masked by the established cultures of academia, such as overworking, productivity, and perfectionism. Signs of emotional distress are often seen as weakness or deemed irrelevant. People with mental health issues can be cast aside from academic circles and can be seen as not suitable to be in an academic position. Furthermore, students and staff may put their well-being aside and push their limits for the sake of being productive.

Everyone in the academic community has a responsibility to protect the mental health of themselves and the people around them. We need to take action to abandon the toxic cultures and traditions that we have been taught as much as we can and create a healthier work environment for future generations. We must protect and nurture enthusiastic students who are just starting in academia. We should try to educate ourselves to recognize the early signs of emotional stress in advance.

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