

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS OF JIMMA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, SOUTH WEST ETHIOPIA****Moges Ayele^{1*} BEd, MA, Amare Mengistu², MD, MSc****ABSTRACT**

BACKGROUND: *Jimma University is one of the newly established higher institutions in Ethiopia. In recent years, the university is highly expanding in both student intake and number of fields of studies and the student population is becoming huge. Various research works elsewhere revealed that students of higher institutions pass through a number of difficulties. The aim of the present study was to determine the magnitude of psychological and social problems facing students of Jimma University.*

METHODS: *This cross sectional study was conducted in Jimma University during May to June 2002. The study population encompassed all regular students (excluding post basic students) of Jimma University from which 200 students were randomly selected. A questionnaire that consisted of 55 questions was developed to gather data on students' problems. It was distributed to the selected students and filled with the help of assigned dormitory service workers.*

RESULTS: *The results showed that students face many kinds of problems. The most prevalent problem was found to be psychological problem, which includes attention problem 69(49.0%), anxiety 58(41.0%) and depression 32(23.0%). Besides, the students did face academic, social and economic problems.*

CONCLUSION: *To alleviate the problems identified in this survey certain measures should be taken by the concerned bodies of the university. As such efforts should be made to place students in fields of their interest; in strengthening certain clubs such as arts clubs; and in securing adequate funds to support economically disadvantaged students. Finally, the university's guidance and counseling unit is should work hard to resolve the concerns of students with the mentioned problems.*

Key Words: Economic problems, Social problems, Psychological problems, Academic problems, students.

INTRODUCTION

Students who join higher institutions differ in various aspects. Some are academically outstanding while others are average or below average. Some are well adjusted socially, emotionally and psychologically where as others do face difficulties in this regard. Some can adjust to new academic

and social environment easily while others cannot do it easily.

Certain students even may be admitted to the universities with marked physical or psychological problems since there is no way of checking students' physical or psychological well-being before admission. Thus it is this diverse body of students that

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lives and learns together in higher institutions. Hence we need to know our students and the problems they face to facilitate the personal and professional development.

Few studies were conducted on students' academic, psychological and other related problems (1). A study conducted in Addis Ababa University revealed that freshman students encounter all kinds of psychological and psychiatric problems (2). Studies conducted on student's academic and psychological problems, causes and cures of students' attrition, education and problems of females in higher institutions showed that students do face different types of academic, social, psychological and related problems (1, 2, 3-5).

A study carried out at former Jimma Institute of Health Sciences has revealed that about 13.3% of the students were found to have serious problems on their academic, social and psychological spheres of life. Depression - the psychological problem emanating from inability to deal with stressful situation effectively whose symptoms include difficulty in making decisions, appearing miserable, showing poor or in some cases too much appetite, feeling of hopelessness, looking oneself as inferior or inadequate, loneliness, losing interest in activities which used to be pleasurable and so on- was the commonest psychological problem that was strongly related to lack of financial support, which in turn was associated to anxiety (6).

A study showed that mental disorder is one of the major causes of student's failure in higher institution. Although most of psychological problems can be managed through adequate therapeutic and counseling services, students with various kinds of problems did not seek help because of lack of information (7).

Personal experience showed that the number of JU students has been increasing since its foundation. And the students do

face various academic, social, economical, psychological and psychiatric problems. No study was conducted to assess the magnitude of the aforementioned problems. The aim of this study was to assess the rate of academic, social, economic and psychological problems that do face students of JU and obtain baseline data for further investigation on students' mental or psychological well being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted in Jimma University on regular students during May-June 2002. The students were selected from a total number of 3306 in six faculties. The Post Basic students were excluded from the study. The assumptions made for sample size calculation were: 95% confidence interval, the prevalence of psychosocial problem once assessed at former Jimma Institute of Health Sciences, which was 13.3% (6) and 4.7% of margin of error to be tolerated. As such, a total of 200 students were randomly selected by taking the name list from the dormitory service and by using table of random numbers.

Workers of dormitory services collected the data and the study subjects filled the questionnaire. Data collectors were instructed about how and when to distribute and collect the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisting of 55 questions, which were both open and close ended was used for data collection. It was pertaining to students' social, economic, academic and psychological problems.

Permission was obtained from the Students Dean Office before conducting the study. Concerning the subjects of the study students who were willing to participate involved in the study and they were briefed about the study and the confidentiality of their responses.

SPSS for Windows version 7.5 was used to analyze frequency distribution that would indicate the prevalence of different problems facing Jimma University students. Descriptive statistics was used to get the mean age of the subjects.

Operational Definition of Terms used in the study: *Attention/Concentration problem:* Is difficulty to keep ones thought focused on important things like studying that may arise from fantasy, tension, stress etc.

Substance abuse: Shows using Khat (*Catha edulis*), alcohol, cigarette, etc continuously and facing trouble of functioning effectively without those substances or being addicted.

Care Givers: Show individuals who were providing care for the subjects and who had the major role in bringing up the students such as parents, relatives, guardians and the like.

RESULTS

Of the 200 students, 143 responded to the questionnaire, making a response rate of 71.5%. The age of respondents ranged from 17-25 years with the mean age of 20.5 years. Sixty- percent (87) of the subjects were below the age of 20.

Socio-demographic data: The distribution of sex, care givers, birth order of the students, state of the parents, residence, region and religion are shown in table 1.

Table 1. The distribution of socio demographic variables among respondents at Jimma University, June 2002

Category		Number (%)
Sex	Male	103 (72)
	Female	40 (28)
Caregivers	Parents	120 (84)
	Others*	23 (16)
Birth order	First	49 (34)
	Middle	70 (49)
	Last	24 (17)
Parents alive	Both	105 (73)
	One	28 (20)
	None	10 (7)
Residence	Cities**	44 (31)
	Towns	56 (39)
	Rural	43 (30)
Region	Oromia	44 (31)
	Amhara	41 (29)
	Addis Ababa	34 (24)
Religion	Others	24 (17)
	Orthodox	98 (69)
	Protestant	23 (16)
	Muslim	11 (8)
	Others	11 (8)

*others include relatives, foster parents and guardians.

**Cities major urban areas existing in the country such as Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Dire Dawa, Awassa, Harar, Bahir Dar and Makelle.

Academic Problems: Performance at high school and JU was showed that 53 (37.1%) of the students scored between 3.80 and 4.00 in ESLCE, and 107 (75.0 %) of them

did well in their high schools. However, only 6 (4.2%) scored above 3.60 at JU. Sixty percent (86) had scored between 2.00 to 2.80 and 16 (11.2%) scored below 2.00.

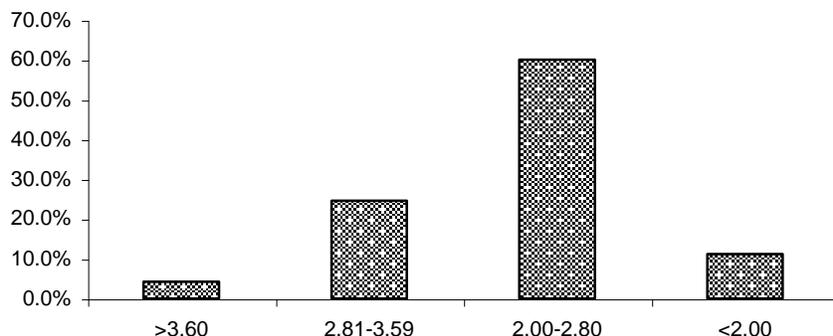


Fig. Academic Performance of Study Subjects at Jimma University, May-June 2002

Sixty nine percent (98) showed their dissatisfaction in their performance and the

reasons the subjects rose for their poor achievements are showed in table 2.

Table 2. Reasons given by students for poor academic performance, Jimma University, June 2002

Reasons	N ^o of Students (%)
Not liking the field of study	8 (9)
Not working well or lacking skill	14 (16)
Problems with Instructors	9 (10)
Economic and health problems	20 (23)
Social and environmental difficulties	26 (30)
Others	11 (12)
Total	88 (100)

Psychological Problems: Different psychological problems were identified in the following sequence attention problem in 69 (49.0%), anxiety disorder - the state of individuals being fearful as if something might happen and accompanied by irritability, dizziness, looking tense or frightened, inability to concentrate, looking around now and again, and having poor sleep and other similar conditions - in 58 (41.0%), memory problem in 56 (40.0%), mood oscillations - indicates the difficulty

of keeping ones emotion stable, i.e., feeling excited and happy for sometime and immediately getting depressed and worried or frequent change of mood (8) - in 27 (36.5%), learned helplessness - implies that individuals stop trying to resolve the challenges when seemingly not resolvable difficulties face them (9) - in 34 (24.0%), stress in 32 (23.0 %), paranoid thought - constantly thinking that someone is trying to harm oneself - in 26 (18.6%), and substance/drug abuse reported in 17 (12.0%) of the students.

Table 3. Psychological Problems of Study Subjects at Jimma University, June 2002

Problems	No. of Students (%)
Attention Problem	69 (49.0)
Anxiety	58 (41.0)
Memory Problem	56 (40.0)
Mood Oscillations	27 (36.5)
Learned Helplessness	34 (24.0)
Depression	32 (23.0)
Paranoid Thought	26 (18.6)
Drug /substance abuse	17 (12.0)

Social Problems: Concerning relation with dorm-mates 131 (93.0 %) reported that their relation with the dorm-mates was generally good. Seven percent (10) of the study group indicated that their relation was not as such good. Lack of mutual understanding, crowded room, quarreling, and dislikes on ethnic basis were some of the reasons for poor relation among students.

Regarding relation with the opposite sex, 34 (24.0 %) of the students don't have any boy or girl friend; where as 14 (10.0 %) have boy or girl friend. Thirty nine percent (55) of the respondents reported that they were freely playing and talking in relaxed manner with members of the opposite sex, 15 (11.0 %) mentioned that they are shy and frightened to talk with the opposite sex and 17 (12.0%) of the respondents exposed that they have a person whom they love but could not express it to that person.

Ninety one percent (126) of the subjects pointed that their relation with family members was generally all right, 13 (9.0%) showed that their relation was indifferent, the reason being lack of good communication, not getting support from their family and their family being not considerate.

Economic matters: Thirty one percent (43) of the students come from peasant family, 36 (26.0%), 45 (32.0%), and 10 (7.0%) of the students family were merchants,

governmental and non-governmental organization employees respectively. Nine percent (13) of the study subjects claimed that they did not get parental or relative support.

DISCUSSION

This survey revealed it clearly that Jimma University students do face all kinds of problems such as psychological, academic, social and economic problems. This finding was consistent to the results obtained by other studies such as studies on Addis Ababa University (AAU) students that showed students face various types of academic, social, psychological and related problems (1, 3-5).

The academic problems were manifested by performing less at the university. Hence as it was shown above 11.2% of the subjects were at risk. Because they scored below 2.00, that is the minimum requirement for successful completion of the university education. Besides, the substantial number of respondents showed their dissatisfaction in their achievement and most of them thought that they would have performed better in their education. To put it in a nutshell, the subjects involved in this study did not perform well as their earlier achievements would indicate.

The most prevalent problem identified in this investigation was psychological

problem from which attention problem was by far the most dominant one followed by anxiety disorder. This finding was a bit different from the result obtained by an earlier research conducted at former Jimma Institute of Health Sciences, which revealed that the predominant problem was depression (7). However, that research also showed other psychological difficulties such as anxiety disorder among students of the institute. Concerning depression about 23% of the respondents were found to be liable to depression of which some answered positively to questions pertaining to chronic depression disorder. In addition to these other psychological problems were identified like paranoid thinking, learned helplessness, drug addiction, mood disorder and the like. This was a bit related to the finding, which showed that students might fail in their higher institution education due to mental disorder (7).

The other less serious problem observed was social problem. Social problem at present study was seen by difficulties in social relation among dorm mates, family members, members of the opposite sex, and university staff and in expressing oneself clearly. Some of the subjects pointed that they do have problems on these matters but their number is few. However, some of the respondents complained that the university staffs mistreat them. If this thing was actually happened it requires improvement.

Finally the least prevalent problem assessed in this survey was economic problem. It seems that students get at least some support either from their family or from relatives. Nevertheless, 13 (9.0%) respondents said that they did not get any support either from family or from relatives. Of course the university was working to alleviate the problem of this sort of students through the social committee organized under the dean of students' office.

Based on the results of the survey the following recommendations were made.

1. Efforts should be made to place students in their fields of interest as much as possible so that they may be successful in their academic endeavors.
2. Although the university attempted its best to address some of the problems like economic problem further efforts should be made in securing additional sources of fund to support needy students.
3. From the investigation it was observed that the predominant problem was psychological problem. Thus the guidance and counseling unit of the university is required to work hard in alleviating the psychological difficulties of students.
4. It seems that strengthening certain clubs existing in the university such as arts club would contribute its part in reducing social problems prevailing in the university. This is to say that students who have difficulties in interaction with other students may benefit from this club in learning more about social interactions since the club prepares certain social occasions. The club would also help in reframing the attitude of students who come from different parts of Ethiopia to view one another positively.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material and financial support for this survey was secured from the Offices of the vice-president for administration and development and the Dean of students. Besides we extend our heart felt gratitude to persons who co-operated with us during data collection and data entry.

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