

The Role of Acupressure in Managing Anxiety and Stress Among University Students

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Abstract

Anxiety and stress are common mental health concerns among university students due to academic pressures, social challenges, financial responsibilities, and lifestyle changes. Persistent stress and anxiety can negatively affect students' academic performance, physical health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. Consequently, there is growing interest in non-pharmacological and complementary therapies that can help students effectively manage these conditions. A review of relevant literature was conducted using electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, and other academic sources. Studies investigating the effects of acupressure on anxiety, stress levels, and related psychological outcomes among university students and young adults were analyzed. Data regarding study design, intervention methods, duration of treatment, and outcome measures were reviewed and synthesized. acupressure may significantly reduce anxiety and stress levels among university students. Stimulation of specific acupoints was associated with improved relaxation, reduced psychological distress, enhanced mood, and better sleep quality. Several studies reported positive effects on physiological indicators of stress, including heart rate and perceived stress scores. The intervention was generally safe, non-invasive, inexpensive, and easy to administer, making it a practical option for student populations. Acupressure appears to be a promising complementary therapy for managing anxiety and stress among university students. Its ability to promote relaxation and psychological well-being, combined with its safety and accessibility, makes it a valuable non-pharmacological intervention. However, further high-quality research with larger sample sizes and standardized treatment protocols is needed to establish stronger evidence regarding its effectiveness and long-term benefits.

Keywords: Acupressure, Anxiety, Stress, University Students, Mental Health, Complementary Therapy

Introduction

Anxiety and stress have become increasingly prevalent among university students and are recognized as significant public health concerns worldwide. The transition to university life often exposes students to numerous academic, social, financial, and personal challenges that can adversely affect their mental health and well-being. Academic workload, examinations, deadlines, competition, career uncertainty, and adjustment to a new environment are among the common stressors experienced by students. When stress becomes excessive or prolonged, it can contribute to anxiety, emotional distress, reduced academic performance, and impaired quality of life. Anxiety is a psychological condition characterized by feelings of worry,

nervousness, fear, and tension that may interfere with daily functioning. While a moderate level of stress can motivate students to perform effectively, chronic stress and anxiety can negatively impact concentration, memory, decision-making, sleep quality, and interpersonal relationships. Research has shown that university students are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems due to the demands associated with higher education and the developmental challenges of young adulthood. Various approaches have been used to manage anxiety and stress among students, including counseling, cognitive-behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, mindfulness practices, physical exercise, and pharmacological interventions. Although these methods can be effective, some students may face barriers such as cost, limited accessibility, stigma, or concerns about medication-related side effects. Therefore, there is growing interest in complementary and alternative therapies that are safe, affordable, and easy to implement. Acupressure is a traditional healing technique derived from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) that involves applying pressure to specific points on the body, known as acupoints. According to TCM principles, stimulation of these points helps restore the balance and flow of vital energy, or Qi, throughout the body. From a modern scientific perspective, acupressure may influence the nervous system, promote relaxation, improve blood circulation, and stimulate the release of endorphins and other neurotransmitters associated with stress reduction and emotional well-being. acupressure has gained attention as a non-invasive and self-administered intervention for managing various physical and psychological symptoms, including pain, fatigue, anxiety, and stress. Several studies have reported positive effects of acupressure on reducing anxiety levels, improving mood, enhancing sleep quality, and promoting relaxation among students and other populations. Its simplicity, safety, and low cost make it an attractive option for university settings where accessible mental health interventions are needed.

Prevalence of Anxiety and Stress in University Students

Anxiety and stress are among the most common mental health challenges faced by university students worldwide. The transition from school to university often involves significant academic, social, financial, and personal adjustments, making students particularly vulnerable to psychological distress. The demanding nature of higher education, combined with concerns about academic performance, career prospects, and personal relationships, contributes to increased levels of stress and anxiety within this population.

Studies conducted across different countries have consistently reported high rates of anxiety and stress among university students. Research indicates that a substantial proportion of students experience moderate to severe levels of stress during their academic years. Examination periods, assignment deadlines, heavy coursework, and competition among peers are frequently identified as major sources of stress. Additionally, factors such as financial difficulties, homesickness, family expectations, and uncertainty about future employment can further increase anxiety levels.

The prevalence of anxiety among university students has shown an upward trend in recent years. Increased academic pressure, rapid technological changes, social media influence, and global events have contributed to growing mental health concerns. Many students report symptoms such as excessive worry, nervousness, difficulty concentrating, irritability, fatigue,

sleep disturbances, and feelings of overwhelm. If left unaddressed, these symptoms can negatively affect academic achievement, physical health, and overall quality of life.

Stress and anxiety not only impact students' emotional well-being but also influence their academic performance and social functioning. High levels of psychological distress may lead to poor concentration, reduced motivation, absenteeism, decreased productivity, and impaired decision-making abilities. Furthermore, chronic stress can increase the risk of developing more serious mental health disorders, including depression and burnout.

Certain groups of students may be at greater risk of experiencing anxiety and stress. First-year students often face challenges related to adaptation and independence, while final-year students may experience heightened anxiety due to examinations, project work, and career-related concerns. Female students, international students, and students with limited social support have also been reported to experience higher levels of psychological distress in some studies.

Causes and Risk Factors of Student Stress and Anxiety

University students encounter a variety of challenges that can contribute to the development of stress and anxiety. These challenges arise from academic, social, financial, and personal factors that often occur simultaneously during the transition to higher education. When students are unable to cope effectively with these demands, they may experience significant psychological distress that affects their mental health and overall well-being.

One of the primary causes of stress and anxiety among university students is **academic pressure**. Students are expected to manage demanding coursework, examinations, assignments, presentations, and deadlines while maintaining satisfactory academic performance. Fear of failure, competition with peers, and high expectations from family members and educators can further increase stress levels and contribute to anxiety.

Financial difficulties are another important risk factor. Many students face concerns related to tuition fees, educational expenses, accommodation costs, and daily living expenses. Financial insecurity can create persistent worry and emotional strain, particularly among students who rely on scholarships, loans, or part-time employment to support their education. The **transition to university life** can also be stressful. Students often experience significant lifestyle changes, including living away from home, adapting to a new environment, and developing independence. Feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and difficulty adjusting to new social and academic settings may increase vulnerability to anxiety and stress.

Social and interpersonal factors play a crucial role in student mental health. Difficulties in forming friendships, relationship problems, peer pressure, social isolation, and lack of social support can contribute to emotional distress. Students who feel disconnected from their peers or community may experience greater levels of anxiety and reduced psychological well-being.

Career-related concerns are another common source of stress. Uncertainty about future employment opportunities, career planning, and achieving professional goals can create significant anxiety, particularly among students nearing graduation. Concerns about job market competition and economic instability may further intensify these worries.

Several **individual factors** can increase susceptibility to stress and anxiety. These include poor time-management skills, low self-esteem, perfectionism, lack of coping strategies, previous mental health problems, and inadequate sleep. Students who struggle to balance academic

responsibilities with personal and social commitments are often at greater risk of experiencing psychological distress.

Additionally, **health-related and lifestyle factors** such as physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary habits, excessive use of social media, substance use, and poor sleep quality can negatively affect mental health. These factors may reduce resilience and make it more difficult for students to cope with everyday stressors.

Effects of Anxiety and Stress on Academic Performance

Anxiety and stress can have a significant impact on the academic performance of university students. While a moderate level of stress may motivate students to study and meet academic deadlines, excessive or prolonged stress can negatively affect cognitive functioning, learning ability, and overall academic achievement. High levels of anxiety may interfere with students' capacity to concentrate, process information, and perform effectively in educational settings.

One of the most common effects of anxiety and stress is a decline in **concentration and attention**. Students experiencing psychological distress often find it difficult to focus during lectures, study sessions, and examinations. Persistent worry and intrusive thoughts can distract attention from academic tasks, resulting in reduced learning efficiency and lower academic performance.

Stress and anxiety can also impair **memory and information retention**. Effective learning requires the ability to encode, store, and recall information. Elevated stress levels may disrupt these cognitive processes, making it harder for students to remember important concepts and retrieve information during examinations. As a result, students may perform below their actual academic potential.

Another important consequence is **reduced motivation and productivity**. Students experiencing chronic stress may feel overwhelmed, exhausted, and less interested in academic activities. This can lead to procrastination, missed deadlines, incomplete assignments, and decreased participation in classroom discussions and extracurricular activities. Over time, reduced academic engagement may negatively influence grades and educational outcomes.

Test anxiety is a specific form of anxiety commonly experienced by students during examinations and assessments. Symptoms such as nervousness, fear of failure, rapid heartbeat, sweating, and difficulty thinking clearly can interfere with test performance. Even well-prepared students may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge effectively when experiencing high levels of examination-related anxiety.

Anxiety and stress are also associated with **poor sleep quality**, which can further affect academic functioning. Sleep disturbances, including difficulty falling asleep and inadequate rest, can lead to fatigue, reduced alertness, impaired decision-making, and decreased concentration during classes and study sessions. Poor sleep can create a cycle in which academic difficulties increase stress, which in turn further disrupts sleep patterns.

Conclusion

Anxiety and stress are common mental health concerns among university students and can significantly affect their academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. Academic demands, financial pressures, social challenges, and concerns about future careers contribute to increased levels of psychological distress in this population. If left

unmanaged, chronic stress and anxiety can impair concentration, memory, motivation, sleep quality, and academic achievement. Acupressure has emerged as a promising complementary therapy for managing anxiety and stress among university students. By stimulating specific acupoints, acupressure may promote relaxation, reduce psychological tension, improve mood, and enhance overall mental well-being. Its non-invasive nature, low cost, ease of application, and minimal risk of adverse effects make it an accessible intervention for students seeking alternative methods of stress management. The evidence reviewed suggests that acupressure has the potential to reduce anxiety and stress levels and support students in coping with the challenges of university life. However, variations in study designs and intervention protocols indicate the need for further well-designed research to establish stronger evidence regarding its effectiveness and long-term benefits. acupressure represents a valuable and practical approach to promoting mental health among university students. Incorporating acupressure into student wellness programs and mental health initiatives may contribute to improved psychological resilience, better academic performance, and enhanced quality of life.

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