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Review article

Relevance of the Mental Health Problem of Higher education Students: analysis and Prospects of Solution for Kazakhstan

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Abstract

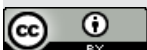
The analysis revealed that the problem of mental health is relevant at the global level, with a marked trend of increasing psychological stress, depression, and anxiety, especially among young people. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, there is an insufficient study of awareness of mental health among students; the lack of comprehensive preventive measures to improve their mental health, as well as a high level of suicide, exacerbate this problem.

Creating an educational space that provides favorable conditions for students' mental health is a priority task for educational institutions at all levels. It is due to the need to form an environment that promotes the free and harmonious development of personality and the satisfaction of social and cognitive needs, as well as increasing the body's adaptive capabilities to improve students' quality of life and overall health.

Key words. student, mental health, psychological stress, depression, anxiety, prophylaxis, higher education, Kazakhstan.

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Introduction

One of the most important tasks of Public Health is to ensure students' health, which is the essential labor potential of the country, without which it is difficult to count on Kazakhstan's economic growth and stability. Full-time education allows students to acquire the professional skills laid down in the educational program and life skills, which concern health promotion attitudes.

Improving the quality of young people's lives is a critical element in effectively developing the country's intellectual potential. Currently, there are more than 600.000 students in Kazakhstan [1]. The unsatisfactory state of the mental health of students in higher education institutions is becoming an increasingly urgent problem for public health and social policy. In recent years, scientists, physicians, and educators have shown increased attention to this problem, which is explained by the high morbidity among students and a complex of factors that force students to adapt, including constant psycho-emotional

Methodology

A retrospective empirical study of the prevalence of mental health disorders among students in the world and methods of their prevention for the period 2018-2022 was conducted using databases such

Psychological stress, depression, and anxiety

Everyday stressors affecting students' well-being and life satisfaction include depression, anxiety, and stress [3,4]. Studies conducted on various samples of university students around the world have found a moderate to high prevalence of stress, depression, and anxiety in this demographic [5-8].

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant increase in levels of depression and anxiety in the global population, including college and university students [9-15]. These emotional reactions may set the stage for possible psychological and emotional traumas that may have a long-term impact on the mental health of young people throughout their lives.

In an article on medico-social assessment of students' health and improving the health care provided, [16] emphasizes that students should represent the healthiest part of society. However, they are not due to the lack of public attention to student health, the reduction in preventive examinations, the lack of a holistic medical surveillance system, the increase in functional disorders and chronic diseases, and the deterioration of physical development indicators.

Due to the stress associated with independent living and study, depression is mainly experienced by tertiary students [17]. According to Zuo et al. [18], traumatic life experiences have a direct and favorable effect on the development of depression. Worse quality of life, higher morbidity, and mortality rates are generally associated with depression. In addition, depression can affect both mental and physical health, as it is associated with acute infectious diseases, suicidal ideation, and suicide.

In the annual Healthy Minds survey of U.S. students on 133 college campuses from 2021-2022, 44% of respondents said they had experienced depressive

tension, information stress, and frequent violations of work, rest, and nutrition. More risky behavior among young people is increasingly noted due to the pace of civilizational development and the availability of many bad habits, which, combined, have a more deleterious effect [2].

In Kazakhstan, as well as globally, the focus of research is on the health of medical students, where long study hours and strict requirements can significantly impact students' mental health. However, it is worth noting that comparatively less research focuses on the mental health of students at multidisciplinary universities.

The review aims to analyze mental health among students globally, identify the main problems, and propose promising approaches and solutions to improve the overall well-being of students in Kazakhstan.

as Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science CC with keywords such as "student", "mental health", "psychological stress", "depression", and others. The review used observational research methods.

symptoms, and 15% said they had thought about suicide in the previous year [19]. The American College Health Association's (ACHA) National College Health Assessment [20] surveyed over 54.000 undergraduate students, and the results showed that approximately 77% of them experienced psychological distress that ranged from moderate to severe.

According to a study conducted in Russia in 2020 [21], the prevalence of anxiety disorders among Russian medical university students emphasizes the importance of both primary and secondary prevention. Especially first-year students have a hard time adjusting to new living conditions and the demands of higher education. The results showed that anxiety disorders were found in 65.8% of first-year students and more than half of fourth-year students, with women suffering from anxiety disorders 1.5 times more often. Depressive conditions were found in one in five students, regardless of their level of study. More than 50% of junior students and every third of senior students suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorders of varying degrees of severity. The severity of these disorders in first-year students was twice as common as in fourth-year students. Depression and anxiety disorders are among the most severe diseases and have a significant socioeconomic impact [22,23].

According to a study among students at Semey Medical University, the incidence of depression was 33.2%, and the incidence of suicidal thoughts was 10.5% [24]. Considering that half of all suicide attempts, whether lethal or not, account for a significant percentage of those who express suicidal thoughts, this rate can still be considered high [25]. In addition, under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, medical students have altered learning behaviors and increased stress levels.

Thus, in Semey Medical University, the proportion of medical students experiencing anxiety and depression was 17% and 40.6% [26]; in the Pavlodar branch of Semey Medical University, 26.1% and 30% [27], and in Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University, 39% and 40.6%, respectively [28].

Suicide is the fourth-leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds. According to WHO data, more than 77% of suicides in the world in 2019 occurred in low- and middle-income countries [29]. Even though Kazakhstan has an above-average income, the country is also characterized by a high suicide mortality rate,

Strengthening mental health and stress prevention

The analysis of current youth health issues in the modern economy highlights the relevance of this topic due to the age-specifics of the period during which there is intensive physical and psychological growth, personality formation, morphological and psychological processes, and the development of vital body systems [16]. This period makes the body more vulnerable to favorable and adverse environmental factors and catalysts. The relationship between somatic diseases and stress levels has been established, but recent studies show that causal relationships may represent the disease's root cause.

Preserving the health of upcoming generations requires addressing stress as a link between health and illness, which involves interventions in healthcare, psychological counseling, and psychotherapy. It will provide the theoretical and practical basis necessary to address the problem of students coping with stress. Thus, from the point of view of medicine, only the healthcare system can solve the multifaceted problem of students' health protection. A comprehensive approach is necessary from the standpoint of the recently formed scientific specialty "stress medicine" [32].

For effective correction of the psycho-emotional state, it is necessary to make a preliminary, complex

The main psychological approaches to preserving and correcting students' mental health

In cases of violations of the mental health of students, methods of correction of their psycho-emotional state are of particular importance since psychological factors play a crucial role in the emergence and manifestation of various kinds of somatic and psychosomatic disorders. Analyzing the currently available world and Kazakhstani literature allows us to identify several approaches to designing programs to correct students' mental health.

For example, Russian researchers adhere to three approaches. Within the framework of the adaptation approach, the main task of mental health correction is to diagnose the adaptation potential of an individual student and the student group as a whole and to correct the identified signs of maladaptation [34]. The developmental approach implies that students' mental health can be corrected by developing learning qualities and skills and maintaining optimal performance and motivation through training [35]. The acmeological direction focuses the attention of researchers on self-development, autonomy, and self-actualization, while correction has the character of mentoring and coaching [36].

The analysis of Kazakhstani psychological and pedagogical literature allows us to identify several

ranking fourth in the world in the number of suicides per capita (40.1 suicides per 100,000 people per year) [30]. The government of Kazakhstan recognizes suicide, including suicide among minors, as a public health problem. According to the UNICEF 2014 report [31], the risk of suicidal behavior among adolescents in Kazakhstan is three times higher than in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. In terms of suicide rates among young people, Kazakhstan ranks first in the CIS, or Eastern and Central Europe.

assessment of the current level of neurohumoral regulation of the organism, the degree of tension in regulatory systems, and the adaptation reserves of functional systems. The analysis of integral indices of heart rate variability allows us to estimate different levels of regulation: central, vegetative, humoral, and based on a complex approach to characterize the vegetative balance of the organism, to estimate the level of stress and the possibilities of compensatory-adaptive mechanisms. A promising direction is the study of these integral health indicators in dynamics, depending on the educational load and dynamics, to assess the effectiveness of health-improving measures.

The basis of many human diseases is the violation of the organism's compensatory (regulatory) functions, as they are responsible for maintaining homeostasis and physiological processes. The inability of the body to quickly adapt in the case of disease often leads to severe and even tragic consequences. For this reason, continuous dynamic monitoring of the body's regulatory systems' state opens up new opportunities for analysis and diagnosis, which may allow disease prevention [33].

works covering various aspects of supporting students' mental health. For example, Eliseeva, Ersarina I.G. (2019) [37], and Movkebayeva Z.A. (2016) [38] suggest that in the process of corrective action, they rely on the needs and capabilities of students based on their available resources. Toktobaeva K.A. (2014), analyzing how to preserve subjective well-being, writes that mental health is at particular risk during crisis periods of life and study [39]. L. Sarsenbaeva's model (2010) includes developmental, educational, and corrective measures realized through training in personality orientation, considering age and socio-cultural characteristics, orientation to self-development, and responsibility [40].

Battybaeva K.S. (2008) [41] considers various risk factors for mental health and proposes to build the correction process depending on different essences and natural factors. For example, medical and biological correction is associated with the educational process's organization according to students' psychophysiological state. The social-psychological correction of a student implies his inclusion in social activities. Psychological and pedagogical correction is associated with developing personality characteristics that effectively overcome stressful or conflict situations.

The analysis of English-language literature reveals that one of the ways to preserve mental health is through social support provided by the student community and a contingent of employees of colleges and universities. Several authors argue that the student's social environment is a buffer against negative stress influences, including emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance [42].

Corrective programs of institutional support can be built along the orientation direction (auxiliary programs introducing first-year students to the peculiarities of university life) [43], academic direction

(based on the diagnosis of current opportunities, expectations, and needs of the student and the construction of an educational route taking into account the identified features and problems) [44]; facilitating direction (includes work with dysfunctional personal characteristics of the student and with social-psychological processes in the student group) [45]; health promotion (programs that work with both healthy students and those with somatic well-being problems) [46].

The role of public health in promoting the mental health of student youth

Promoting healthy lifestyles in the student population is a vital aspect recognized by health, education, and community professionals. Recognizing the role of educational institutions, including universities, in maintaining the health of students, faculty, and the community is integral to effective strategies. Consequently, there is a need to consider how the student environment can promote healthy lifestyles and what changes in university rules and conditions can be made to create a favorable social and physical environment conducive to health promotion. Rethinking these aspects represents an important step towards ensuring the integral health and well-being of participants in the university community. Meanwhile, there are the risks mentioned above factors that qualified professionals and specially designed programs can help young people manage.

One of the effective methods of addressing these issues is the WHO's project "Healthy Universities", which is based on the principles of the WHO strategy "Health for All," the philosophy of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, and the UN program on the transition to sustainable development, "Agenda 21" [47]. At the moment, the project has been successfully implemented in several universities. It is one of the

Conclusions

The analysis has shown that the problem of mental health is urgent all over the world, and the tendency to increase psychological stress, depression, and anxiety, in particular among young people, is determined. It is revealed that the Republic of Kazakhstan has insufficiently studied the issues of awareness of mental health among student youth and the lack of comprehensive preventive measures to strengthen their mental health. In addition, this problem is exacerbated by the high rate of suicide in the country. In this regard, conducting a more in-depth study of this problem and developing effective measures to increase stress resistance among students and improve the quality of their lives is necessary.

Intersectoral collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the above issues can serve as the basis for the development of targeted support and prevention programs in educational institutions, which will improve the quality of health among students and contribute to the growth of the country's intellectual potential. It should also be noted that an informed environment will combat stigmatization and improve the ability to get help for people suffering from mental health problems.

Creating an educational space safe for the mental health of students is one of the priority tasks

most effective levers for creating a health-saving environment for students, including promoting mental health.

Meanwhile, there are Youth Health Centers (after this YHC), which provide medical, therapeutic, and preventive care, psychosocial, and legal services to minors aged 10 to 18 and young people aged 18 to 29 on reproductive and mental health issues.

According to data from the Health Department of 17 oblasts and the cities of Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent, by the end of 2022, there will be 191 YHCs in Kazakhstan providing comprehensive medical and psychosocial services for adolescents and young people [48].

Ensuring comprehensive psychological support to prevent health issues among student youth necessitates intersectoral interaction between universities and such organizations as the Research Center "Youth", the National Center for Public Health, and, respectively, their subordinate organizations: youth resource centers, youth health centers, health centers, and health rooms at polyclinics. The YHC is at the forefront of offering technologies to stop mental health losses in young students.

of educational organizations of any level because it is here that conditions for the free and harmonious development of personality, satisfaction of social and cognitive needs of students, as well as increasing the adaptive capabilities of the organism to improve their quality of life and general health improvement should be formed.

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Жоғары оқу орындары студенттерінің менталды денсаулығы мәселесінің өзектілігі: талдау және Қазақстан үшін шешу перспективалары

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Түйіндеме

Талдау психикалық денсаулық мәселесінің жаһандық деңгейде өзекті екенін анықтады, әсіресе жастар арасында психологиялық стресс, депрессия және мазасыздықтың жоғарылау тенденциясы бар. Қазақстан Республикасында студенттер арасында психикалық денсаулық туралы хабардарлықтың жеткіліксіз зерттелуі, олардың психикалық денсаулығын нығайту үшін кешенді профилактикалық іс-шаралардың болмауы, сондай-ақ осы мәселені ушықтыратын суицидтің жоғары деңгейі байқалады.

Студенттердің психикалық денсаулығы үшін қолайлы жағдайларды қамтамасыз ететін білім беру кеңістігін құру барлық деңгейдегі білім беру мекемелерінің басым міндеті болып табылады. Бұл жеке тұлғаның еркін және үйлесімді дамуына, олардың әлеуметтік және танымдық қажеттіліктерін қанағаттандыруға, сондай-ақ студенттердің өмір сүру сапасы мен жалпы денсаулығын жақсарту үшін ағзаның бейімделу мүмкіндіктерін арттыруға ықпал ететін ортаны қалыптастыру қажеттілігімен байланысты.

Түйін сөздер: студент, менталды денсаулық, психологиялық стресс, депрессия, мазасыздық, профилактика, жоғары білім, Қазақстан.

Актуальность проблемы ментального здоровья студентов высших учебных заведений: анализ и перспективы решения для Казахстана

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Резюме

Анализ выявил, что проблема ментального здоровья является актуальной на глобальном уровне, с отмеченной тенденцией увеличения психологического стресса, депрессии и тревоги, особенно среди молодежи. В Республике Казахстан отмечается недостаточное исследование осведомленности о ментальном здоровье среди студентов, отсутствие комплексных профилактических мероприятий для укрепления их ментального здоровья, а также высокий уровень суицидов, усугубляющий данную проблему.

Создание образовательного пространства, обеспечивающего благоприятные условия для ментального здоровья студентов, является приоритетной задачей образовательных учреждений на всех уровнях. Это связано с необходимостью формирования окружения, способствующего свободному и гармоничному развитию личности, удовлетворению их социальных и познавательных потребностей, а также повышению адаптивных возможностей организма для улучшения качества жизни и общего оздоровления студентов.

Ключевые слова: студент, ментальное здоровье, психологический стресс, депрессия, тревожность, профилактика, высшее образование, Казахстан.