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# MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS AMONG POST GRADUATE CYPRIOT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL DESCRIPTIVE CORRELATIONAL STUDY



## Abstract

**Background:** Previous findings suggest that stressful life events are linked with mental health status of university students. The aim of this study was to investigate the mental health status and its association with the number and the severity of self-reported stressful life events among post graduate university students in Cyprus.

**Methods:** A descriptive correlational design with cross sectional comparison was used. The General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) for the assessment of mental health status and the Life Events scale for Students (LESS) for stressful life events were applied. Both scales were completed anonymously and voluntarily by 90 post graduate students.

**Results:** The mean( $\pm$  SD) age of participants was 25.03( $\pm$ 2.64) years. The frequency of clinical symptoms of mental distress (GHQ total score $\geq$ 24) was 36.7% of participants. Statistically significant associations were noted between GHQ-28 subscales and gender. Specifically, males reported higher scores in depressive symptoms subscale ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, higher scores on both the intensity and number of stressful events were associated with clinical symptoms of mental distress (GHQ total score $\geq$ 24) ( $p = 0.01$ ;  $p = 0.001$ , respectively).

**Conclusions:** The high frequency of clinical symptoms of mental distress among post graduate university students, as well as the association with stressful life events, highlights the need for psychological empowerment strategies towards students by institutional counselling services.

# Analysis of main results

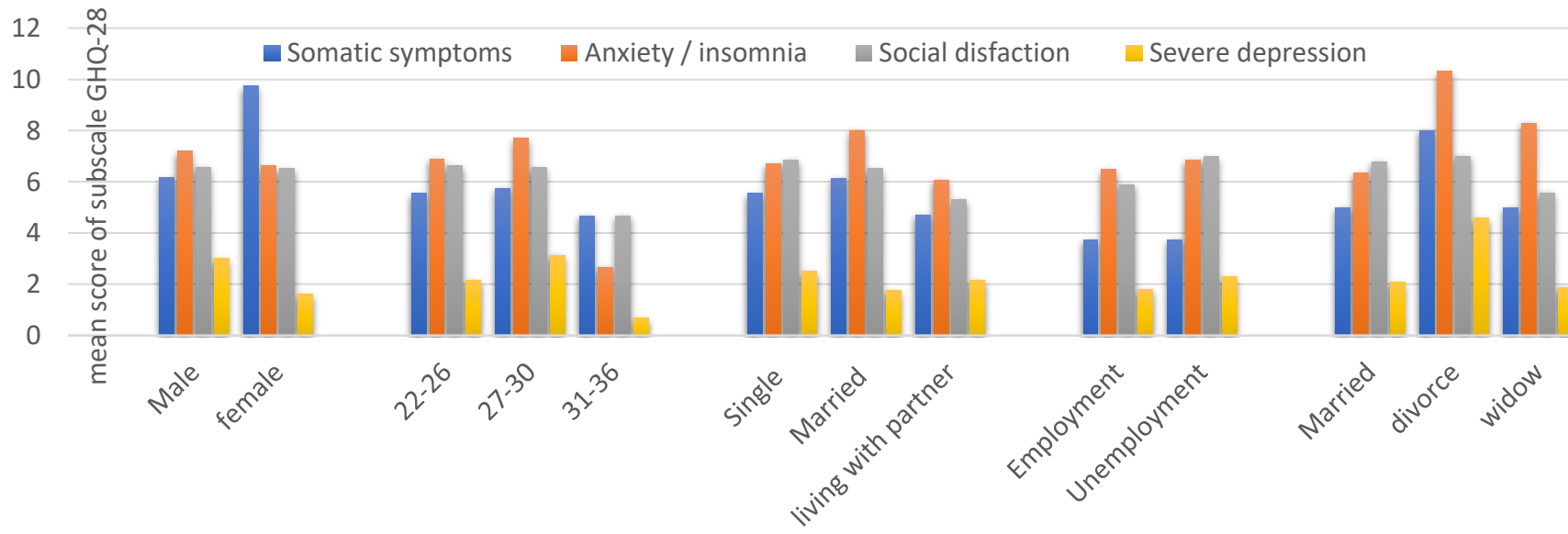


## The association between GHQ-28 and Sociodemographic characteristics

Table1 :The mean score of GHQ-28 in participants by Sociodemographic Characteristics

Sociodemographic Characteristics	N	(%)	GHQscore, mean±SD	P
<b>Employment</b>				0.014
<i>yes</i>	49	53.8	21.3±12.34	
<i>no</i>	38	41.8	19.89±8.31	
<b>Parental status</b>				0.023
<i>Married</i>	63	69.2	20.22±10.71	
<i>divorce</i>	12	13.2	29.92±10.62	
<i>widow</i>	7	7.7	20.71±13.889	

## The mean score of subscales GHQ-28 in participants by Sociodemographic Characteristics



## Statistically significant differences

### Somatic Symptoms

- Married participant (n=21) 23%, M=6.14±3.87, p<0.01.

### Social disaffection

- Unemployment (n=38) 41.8%, M=6.98±2.89, P<0.05.

### Severe depression

- Male (n=43) 47.8%, M=3.0±3.69, P<0.05
- Age group 27-30 years, M=3.13±4.77, P<0.01.
- Students who had divorced parents (n=14) 16.7%, M= 4.58±4.56, P<0.05.

# Analysis of main results

Frequency of reported stressful life events	N	%
1.Death of parent	4	4.4
2.Death of your best friend	17	18.9
3. Jail term (self)	1	1.1
4. Break-up of parent's marriage/divorce	2	2.2
5.Getting kicked out of college	0	0
6.Major car accident (car wrecked, people injured)	3	3.3
7. Pregnancy (either yourself or being the father)	10	11.1
8.Failing in a number of course	13	14.4
9. Parent losing his/her job	7	7.8
10.Major personal injury or illness	10	11.1
11.Losing contact/ breaking up with a close friend	18	20
12.Major change of health status in a close family member	27	30
13.Breaing up with boy/girlfriend	8	8.9
14.Major and/or chronic financial problems	19	21.1
15.Moving out of town with parents	2	2.2
16. Seriously thinking about dropping college problems	9	10
17.Getting an unjustified low mark in a test	8	8.1
18. Moving away from home	12	13.1
19. Failing in one course	6	6.7
20.Beginning an undergraduate program in the university	52	57.8
21 Seeking psychological or psychiatric consultation	6	6.7
22.Major argument with parents	15	16.7
23.Major argument with boy/girlfriend	11	12.2
24. Sex difficulties with boy/girlfriend	6	6.7
25.Establishing a new steady relationship with a partner	6	6.7
26.Minor car accident	17	17.9
27.Minor financial	37	41.1
28 Losing a part-time job Change of job	10	11.1
29.Getting your own car	14	15.6
30.Finding a part-time job	11	12.2
31.Change of job	13	14.4
32.Minor violation of the law (e.g. speeding ticket)	21	23.3
33.Switch in a program within the same college or university	6	6.7
34.Family getting together	39	43.3
35.Vacation with parents	22	22.4
36.Vacation alone/with friends	52	57.8

## The association between LESS(number of events) and Sociodemographic characteristics

- Females reported on average more LESS than men( $m=6.35 \pm 2.91$  Vs  $5.07 \pm 2.91$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).
- Participants who lived with their partner had noted higher score ( $m=6.86 \pm 3.13$ ,  $P=0.05$ ).
- Finally, in terms of number of events in relation with Sociodemographic characteristics, more LESS had noted the students who that they had loss of parent(s) ( $m=7.1 \pm 3.84$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).



# Analysis of main results

Prevalence of clinical symptoms of mental distress (GHQ-28 $\geq$ 24) by classification of participants in terms of the number of stressful life events and total score on the LESS scale

Life Events Scale for Students (LESS) (N = 90)	Total	Classification of participants according to reported life events on LESS		Prevalence of Psychiatric		X <sup>2</sup>	DF	P value
		N	%	N	%			
<b>Number of events in LESS</b>						36.09	3	0.001
	0-2	13	14.4	4	12.1			
	3-6	43	47.8	16	48.5			
	7-10	26	28.9	9	27.3			
	11-15	6	6.7	4	12.1			
<b>Total Score in LESS</b>						12.22	4	0.016
	0-49	5	85.6	0	0			
	50-149	11	21.1	8	24.2			
	150-241	15	25.6	8	24.2			
	242-350	14	23.3	7	21.2			
	351-770	12	24.4	10	30.3			

Higher scores on the LESS scale and number of events were associated with clinical symptoms of mental distress (GHQ  $\geq$ 24) with  $\chi^2 = 12.22$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $P=0.01$  and  $\chi^2=36.09$ ,  $df=3$  and  $P=0.001$ , respectively.

# Conclusions

The high score of clinical symptoms of mental distress among post graduate university students, as well as the strong association with stressful life events, highlights the need for psychological empowerment strategies towards students by institutional counselling services.

# Keywords

Life events scale for students (LESS), Stressful life events, Cypriot university students, General health Questionary(GHQ-28)

# References

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