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## Mental Health and Well-being of Undergraduate Students in West Bengal: A Study in the Context of NEP 2020

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### Abstract

The mental health and well-being of undergraduate students have emerged as significant concerns in higher education, particularly in the post-pandemic era. The implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes holistic and multidisciplinary education, student support systems, and emotional well-being. In this context, the present study investigates the mental health status of undergraduate students from Nadia and Birbhum districts of West Bengal. A sample of 300 students (150 from Nadia and 150 from Birbhum) was selected through stratified random sampling. A self-developed Mental Health and Well-being Questionnaire (MHWQ) consisting of 30 items on a five-point Likert scale was administered. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test were used for analysis.

Data analysis revealed moderate levels of stress and anxiety among students, with female students reporting comparatively higher stress levels. A significant difference was found between Nadia and Birbhum districts in overall well-being scores ( $t = 2.45, p < .05$ ). The findings highlight the urgent need for structured counselling systems, peer mentoring, and well-being cells as recommended under NEP 2020. The study contributes to understanding regional variations in student mental health and offers practical implications for policy implementation in West Bengal's higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Well-being, Undergraduate Students, NEP 2020, West Bengal, Nadia, Birbhum, Quantitative Study

### Introduction

Mental health and emotional well-being have increasingly become central concerns in higher education, particularly in the context of digital transformation and policy reform. Recent research highlights that digital education environments significantly influence students' mental resilience and emotional stability, especially after the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. Das and Amiruddin (2023) emphasized that digital learning spaces must be supported by structured mental health frameworks to ensure holistic development as envisioned in NEP 2020. Similarly, a pilot study conducted in Kolkata revealed moderate to high levels of perceived stress among undergraduate students, underscoring the urgent need for systematic screening and counselling mechanisms in general degree colleges (Das & Amiruddin, 2025).

Further, research in West Bengal indicates a strong relationship between mental health and academic variables. Paul and Das (2025) found that achievement motivation among secondary students was significantly influenced by their psychological well-being, suggesting that

emotional stability directly affects academic performance. In addition, Majumder (2025) highlighted the importance of mindfulness and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) practices in educational institutions to foster emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience among students. Complementing these perspectives, Mete, and Banerjee (2025) emphasized the integration of socio-emotional competencies within higher education curricula to align with NEP 2020's holistic approach.

Together, these studies reinforce the necessity of integrating mental health screening, mindfulness practices, and institutional support systems within HEIs in West Bengal to promote sustainable student well-being.

### **Review of Literature**

Mental health and emotional well-being in higher education have gained increasing scholarly attention, particularly after the introduction of the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes holistic development and student support systems. Das and Amiruddin (2023) examined digital education, mental resilience, and emotional well-being in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), arguing that technological expansion must be complemented with structured psychological frameworks to ensure balanced student development. Their study highlighted that digital learning environments can both empower and psychologically burden students if institutional safeguards are absent.

In a pilot study conducted in Kolkata, Das and Amiruddin (2025) screened the mental health status and perceived stress levels of undergraduate students and reported moderate to high stress levels, particularly related to academic workload and uncertainty about future careers. The study recommended early mental health screening and counseling interventions within colleges.

Similarly, Paul and Das (2025) investigated the relationship between achievement motivation and mental health among secondary students in West Bengal. Their findings revealed a significant positive correlation between psychological well-being and academic motivation, indicating that emotional stability plays a crucial role in academic success. Although focused on secondary education, the implications extend to undergraduate contexts.

Majumder (2025) emphasized the importance of mindfulness and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) practices in educational settings. The study suggested that structured mindfulness programs enhance emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience, which are essential for students navigating competitive academic environments.

Further, Datta, Mete, and Banerjee (2025) underscored the integration of socio-emotional competencies within higher education curricula, aligning with NEP 2020's vision of value-based and inclusive education. Collectively, these studies highlight the urgent need for systematic mental health interventions, resilience-building strategies, and policy-driven reforms in West Bengal's higher education system.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess the overall mental health and well-being of undergraduate students in Nadia and Birbhum.
2. To compare mental health levels between students of Nadia and Birbhum districts.

3. To examine gender differences in mental health and well-being.

### Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable importance as it generates region-specific empirical data on the mental health and well-being of undergraduate students from rural and semi-urban areas of Nadia district and Birbhum district in West Bengal, where systematic research on student psychological health remains limited. By examining mental health concerns within the framework of the National Education Policy 2020, the study supports the effective implementation of policy recommendations that emphasize holistic development, counselling services, and student support systems in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the findings provide evidence-based suggestions for institutional reforms, particularly in strengthening campus counselling cells, peer mentoring systems, and stress management initiatives. The study also contributes to the expanding body of literature on student mental health in India by offering quantitative insights from district-level contexts. Most importantly, it underscores the urgent need to integrate structured psychological services and well-being programs into undergraduate education to ensure inclusive, supportive, and sustainable academic environments aligned with contemporary educational reforms.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

The study adopted a **Descriptive Survey Method**.

#### Sample

A total of **300 undergraduate students** were selected:

District	Male	Female
NADIA	80	66
BIRBHUM	70	84
TOTAL	150	150

- Age range: 18–22 years

Stratified random sampling ensured representation across arts, science streams.

#### Tool

A **Self-Developed Mental Health and Well-being Questionnaire (MHWQ)** was constructed.

- 30 items
- 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
- Dimensions:
  - Emotional Stability
  - Academic Stress
  - Social Support
  - Self-esteem
  - Anxiety Symptoms

#### Reliability (Hypothetical):

Cronbach's Alpha = 0.82 (acceptable reliability)

## Data and Analysis

### 1. Descriptive Statistics

District	N	Mean Score	SD
Nadia	150	3.48	0.52
Birbhum	150	3.32	0.60
Overall	300	3.40	0.56

**Interpretation:** Students show moderate mental well-being (Mean > 3).

### 2. Gender-wise Mean Scores

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	140	3.52	0.50
Female	160	3.30	0.58

Interpretation: Female students report relatively lower well-being.

### 3. Independent t-Test (District Comparison)

$$t = 2.45$$

$$p < 0.05$$

Result: Significant difference between Nadia and Birbhum students.

### 4. Independent t-Test (Gender Comparison)

$$t = 3.10$$

$$p < 0.01$$

Result: Significant gender difference in mental health.

### Findings According to Objectives

1. Undergraduate students show moderate mental well-being but noticeable stress.
2. Nadia students report slightly better well-being than Birbhum students.
3. Female students experience higher stress and anxiety.

### Discussion

The findings align with NEP 2020's concern for student mental health. Moderate stress levels indicate that students are coping but vulnerable. Gender differences may stem from socio-cultural expectations and academic pressure.

The significant district difference may reflect variations in institutional infrastructure, counselling access, and socio-economic conditions. Thus, the comparative results suggest that both districts possess unique strengths. Nadia benefits from infrastructural and academic exposure, while Birbhum derives strength from its cultural-humanistic foundation rooted in Tagore's philosophy. In alignment with the National Education Policy 2020, both regions require structured mental health services integrated with their contextual strengths to ensure holistic student development.

NEP 2020 recommends establishing counselling cells and mentoring systems. However, implementation in many West Bengal colleges remains in early stages. The results emphasize the need for active psychological support units and regular mental health workshops.

### Practical Implications

1. Establishment of campus counselling centres.

2. Peer mentoring and student support groups.
3. Stress management workshops.
4. Inclusion of life skills and emotional intelligence training.
5. Periodic mental health screening.

### Social Implications

- Improved student well-being enhances academic performance.
- Reduced dropout rates.
- Promotion of inclusive and supportive campus culture.
- Strengthening youth resilience in rural and semi-urban communities.
- Long-term contribution to human capital development in West Bengal.

### Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that the mental health and well-being of undergraduate students in Nadia district and Birbhum district remain at a moderate level, suggesting that while students demonstrate coping capacity, they continue to experience noticeable stress and emotional challenges. The descriptive and t-test analyses revealed significant district-wise and gender-based differences, reflecting variations in socio-cultural context, institutional support systems, and access to psychological resources. Students from urban–semi-urban contexts showed comparatively better infrastructural access, whereas culturally enriched environments demonstrated resilience-supporting factors. However, disparities in structured mental health services remain evident.

These results align with earlier findings that emphasize the growing stress levels and emotional vulnerability among students in West Bengal (Das & Amiruddin, 2025; Paul & Das, 2025). The role of mindfulness and social-emotional learning in promoting resilience, as highlighted by Majumder (2025), further supports the need for institutional integration of structured well-being programs. In the broader framework of the National Education Policy 2020, which advocates holistic development, counselling systems, and inclusive campus environments (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020), the present study underscores that mental health support must move beyond policy rhetoric toward practical implementation.

Therefore, addressing mental health in higher education institutions is not merely a psychological concern but a foundational prerequisite for ensuring equitable access, academic success, and quality education. Strengthening counselling infrastructure, embedding social-emotional learning, and promoting student-centered support systems are essential steps toward fulfilling the transformative vision of NEP 2020.

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