Feeling of Distrust: Exploring the Effects of Cynicism on Secondary Students' Mental Health

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Abstract

Cynicism is a broadly recognized concern in modern society that affects educational organizations. It has deleterious effects on causing distrust, frustration, anxiety, stress, decision-making difficulties, and communication breakdowns among administrators, principals, teachers, and students. The current research study aims to investigate the level of cynicism among students and its effects on their mental health at secondary level. Given the global and novel nature of cynicism, it is imperative to investigate the level of cynicism among secondary-level students with a special focus on how its affects their mental health. The objectives formulated for the current study were: to investigate the level of cynicism among students at secondary level and to find out the effects of cynicism on students' mental health at secondary level. The study also addressed the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of cynicism on students' mental health at secondary level. The study adopted a quantitative research design. All boys' government secondary schools of district Dir Lower were taken as the population of the study. There were 76 secondary schools, out of which 50% (38) schools were selected with a sample of 380 students using a simple random sampling technique. Among these 38 schools, 10 students from each school were taken. Out of these 10 students, the 5 high achievers and 5 low achievers students were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. In order to collect the data from the respondents, two scales were used. One was 'Cynicism and Lack of Trust' scale (CLOT) for assessing cynicism among students and the other was 'Mental Health Inventory' (MHI) for assessing the mental health of students. Linear regression was applied to obtain the required results. The results indicated that there were variations among the level of cynicism at secondary level. Most of the students fell on the average side of cynicism. Regression analysis for testing the hypothesis revealed significant strong effect of cynicism on students' mental health at secondary level which led to the rejection of the hypothesis. The study recommended that

teachers' briefing and proper guidance for students is recommended in order to provide them with the basic knowledge about cynicism and its adverse effects on their overall mental health. The study further recommends that teachers may utilize all the psychosocial and cognitive faculties. Therefore, students may be guided after taking proper counseling sessions with them to enhance their mental health in order to nip and reduce the effects and chances of cynicism.

Keywords: Cynicism, mental health, secondary level

Introduction

The modern world is facing various problems and challenges in which every individual wants his or her life to be comfortable and luxurious for which he/she seeks ways to fulfill various needs. Nobody can deny the fact that problems exist in every society and community, and the educational sectors are facing various problems and challenges as well. Administrators, teachers, and students face problems in educational institutions; however, the most affected among them are students. In this modern era, students face problems such as anxiety, depression stress, and burden. These problems lead to poor mental health. There is evidence that students shirk work and do not show interest in their school life. As a result, they are only interested in themselves and are not sincere and display cynical attitude toward something or someone. Therefore, it becomes very crucial to investigate the level of cynicism and to identify its effects on students' mental health.

Cynicism is like defense mechanism students take to protect themselves. It happens when students feel distrust, hurt or angry at something or someone and without having power to control those emotions and feelings, they are found growing cynical and start developing the feeling of dislike and hopeless which may affect their personal and social lives (Abraham, 2000). Oxford dictionary (2022) defines cynicism as (a) the beliefs that people only do things to help themselves, rather than for good or sincere reasons. (b) The belief that something good will not happen or that something is not important. (c) The fact of being willing to do something that might hurts other people, if you can gain some advantage.

A study conducted by Mazella (2007) commences by examining the Greek origins of the term and proceeds to provide a comprehensive overview of its evolution throughout ancient history. The study clarifies that the definition of cynicism in common terminology has been subject to

oscillation, as evidenced by the ancient Roman and Greek cycles of cynical performance. Moreover, the research demonstrates that cynicism's philosophical basis has maintained an unequivocal relation to its definition throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century. At the beginning of the 19th century, the term underwent a significant redefinition.

According to Brockway et al. (2002), cynicism is a negative attitude about various components of organization or college experience, cynicism causes negative emotions and feelings and during the academic career, students have reportedly exhibited various kinds of cynical attitude toward their institutional environment, academic environment, social environment and policy environment.

In many disciplines studies have been conducted on cynicism, which claims that cynicism had affected various institutions and organizations in the early 2000s. Furthermore, a research conducted in educational setting which included students (Eaton, 2000; Pitre, 2004), school administrators (James, 2005), educational supervisors (Arabacı, 2010), and teachers (James, 2005; Kalagan & Guzeller, 2010; Qian & Daniels, 2008). They argued that cynicism affected various educational institutes.

According to Galderisi et al. (2015), mental health is a dynamic and active state of mind that enables individuals to utilize their inherent abilities and qualities in accordance with the societal norms and values. Mental health encompasses fundamental social and cognitive abilities and skills, including the capacity to recognize and regulate one's own emotions and to comprehend the emotions of others. Achieving a state of internal equilibrium involves the flexible and active management of unfavorable life events and the establishment of a harmonious relationship between the mind and body.

Mental health is the basic and crucial component of total health, it means that it does not stand alone; it can be described in three different ways (a) as the absence of illness (b) as a condition of individual which enable that individual to perform all functions or (c) as a condition of equilibrium within individual's social and physical environment (Sartorius, 2002).

WHO (2010) described mental health is a condition of well-being wherein each individual understands their own true capacity and quality, can deal with the typical stress of life, can work effectively and efficiently and can support and make a commitment to his or her society.

It is very crucial to take mental health under discussion during the life span but specific attention may be given to adolescence (aged between 10 to 19 years) because it is the stage for distinctive and creative emotional and social development which sets the basis for long term well-being and health (Baltag & Servili, 2016).

According to Chengti (2018) a mentally healthy person has some characteristics such as identify his/her strengths, weaknesses, desires and motives, has a sense of personal worth, respects himself and feels safe in society, evaluates his behavior objectively, feels that he is loved and wanted. Furthermore, a mentally healthy person is able to bear disappointments and frustrations in everyday life, demonstrates emotional maturity in his behavior.

Statement of the Problem

Student cynicism is a universally declared burning issue in the modern world. It has been affecting performance of various organizations such as companies and industries. As well as, it has been effecting educational institutions. It is obvious that cynicism has badly effected various organizations as well as educational institutions. Consequently, Students' cynicism usually causes stress, frustration, anxiety, problems in making decision, distrust, and lack of communication among administrators, principals, teachers and students. Therefore, it becomes very necessary to find out the effects of cynicism because cynicism is a global issue; though, many people do not accept it. The researchers are keen to sort out whether or not cynicism exists among students and whether or not it has any effect on students' mental health at secondary level in district Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Hypothesis of the Study

To provide the basis for the investigation, the study formulated the following hypothesis:

H₀   There is no significant effect of cynicism on students' mental health at secondary level

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers have adopted descriptive research method in a quantitative way. According to Slevitch (2011), quantitative research method is viewed as a structured investigation and inquiry of a phenomenon through gathering numerical information, using relevant statistical strategies.

Population of the Study

All the Government Secondary Schools (Male) of district Dir (Lower) and all the enrolled students at Secondary level constitute the population of this study. According to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elementary and Secondary Education Department (KPESED, 2021) there are 76 boys' government secondary schools in district Dir Lower, and the number of total enrolled students is 32678.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size was calculated through Raosoft online sample calculator. A total of 50% of the school (among 76) was selected as the sample of the study with a sample of 380 students. These 50% (38) schools were taken through simple random sampling technique. The number of respondents in each single school was 10. Within each school 2 strata were made those were top and low. Then, from each strata 5 students were randomly selected.

Research Instruments

For measuring cynicism 'Cynicism and Lack of Trust" scale (CLOT), which has been developed by Floberg et al. (2014). This was a standardized tool but was adapted according to the requirements of the study intent and restricted to a five-point Likert scale only. The scale ranges from strongly disagree (SDA) to strongly agree (SA). The questionnaire comprises of 22 question items. To sort out the reliability of the questionnaire, pilot testing was conducted by the researchers. Prior permission was sought through Email. To measure the mental health of students at Secondary level, a standardized questionnaire known as "Mental Health Inventory"

developed by Veit and Ware (1983) was used for the study. The questionnaire comprises of 18 question items.

Data Analysis
Table 1: Level of Cynicism among Students at Secondary Level

Level	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent
High	17	4.5	4.5
Average	294	77.4	77.4
Low	69	18.2	18.2
Total	380	100.0	100.0

The table-1 shows the level of cynicism among students at secondary level. Cynicism at secondary level was measured through 'Cynicism and Lack of Trust' scale. Out of 380 respondents, 17 (4.5%) respondents had high level of cynicism, 294 (77.4%) respondents had average level of cynicism, while, 69 (18.2%) respondents had low level of cynicism at secondary level.

Regression Analysis
Table 2: Cynicism and Mental Health

Model Summary			
Model R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.348ᵃ .121	.119	7.997

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	P
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	89.831	3.352		26.801	.000
Cynicism	-.387	.054	-.348	-7.211	.000

The table-2 shows the regression analyses for hypothesis. The null hypothesis was tested at significant value of 0.05. Regression analysis for cynicism and mental health shows a significant relationship between the two with T=-7.211, R=.348 while P=.000 indicating a strong significant effect. Thus the null hypothesis that "There is no significant effect of cynicism on students' mental health at secondary level" is hereby rejected.

Results

1. The results of the study indicated that among 380 respondents, 17 (4.5%) respondents had a high level of cynicism, 69 (18.2%) respondents had a low level, while 294 (77.4%) respondents had an average level of cynicism at the secondary level.

2. With respect to students' mental health conditions, only one out of 17 respondents with a high level of cynicism had better mental health, 10 had poor mental health, and 6 had average mental health according to the Cynicism and MHI scale. Among the 69 respondents with a low level of cynicism, 48 had better mental health, 14 had poor mental health, and 7 had average mental health.

3. A relatively high number of 294 respondents exhibited an average level of cynicism. Among them, 123 had better mental health, 90 had poor mental health, and 81 had average mental health according to cynicism and MHI scale. Moreover, the study revealed that cynicism affects the mental health of students at secondary level.

Conclusions

Cynicism is like defense mechanism students take to protect themselves. It happens when students feel hurt or angry at something or someone and without having power to control those emotions and feelings, they are found growing cynical and start developing the feeling of dislike and hopeless, which may affect their personal and social lives. Therefore, the present research study aimed to investigate the level of cynicism among students and its effects on their mental health at secondary level. Based on the data collected and the analyses of the data, it is concluded that students at secondary level do possess different level of cynicism, ranging between low and high level as per norms and values of the scale. A significant number of students possess an average level of cynicism, whereas, a small number of students were found with high level of

cynicism, while a considerable number of respondents had low level of cynicism. Students with high level of cynicism had poor mental health conditions; whereas, a significant number of respondents had average level of cynicism with better mental health conditions. A considerable number of respondents had low level of cynicism, with good mental health conditions. Furthermore, the hypothesis of the study was tested using regression analysis at a significant level 0.05. It was concluded that there is a significant effect of cynicism on students' mental health at secondary level.

Recommendations

1. Among the many traits, cynicism is the fast growing trait which is proving an open barrier to the smooth progression of education. Therefore, the study recommends that teachers' briefing and proper guidance for the students is recommended in order to provide them the basic knowledge about cynicism and its adverse effects on their overall academics. Likewise, School authorities may also focus on producing a conducive and supportive learning environment that fosters students' critical thinking and problem solving capabilities. Students may be provided with such platforms where they could easily express their ideas and thoughts.

2. To reduce cynicism among children and to improve their mental health, parents may keep a vigilant check and balance on their daily schedule outside the class in order to minimize the chances of moral corruption. They may encourage them to freely speak and share their mind with them about the moral and ethical norms. Parents may create an environment where children could easily accesses and share their complex feelings, emotions, ideas and thoughts. They may also guide their children with the uncertain situation around them and train them how to deal with the stressful situations.

3. Teachers may utilize all the psychosocial and cognitive faculties. Therefore, students may be guided after taking proper counseling sessions with them about sharpening their mental health in order to nip and reduce the effects and chances of cynicism.

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