

Rise of anxiety disorders in students



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The aim of this essay is to discuss the growing issue that is the rise of anxiety disorders in students, following a three stage structure to discuss different areas of the topic. Firstly, I will start off with a description of what anxiety and anxiety disorders are and why it appears to be a growing problem amongst students. I will then move on to discussing any relevant information and research on the topic, such as the current statistics relating to the levels of anxiety amongst students. Finally, I will finish with a consideration as to why this anxiety amongst students is a growing issue of public concern, and what we should be doing about it.

Anxiety is a common feeling that people can get in there everyday life, it is a feeling of fear or worry about situations in life that they are unsure about. In psychologist Seligmans article about phobias and preparedness anxiety is explained to be an evolutionary hardwiring that makes us scared of threats in order to aid our survival (Seligman, 1971). However, for most, this feeling of being anxious passes once that difficult situation is over for them. If this feeling of being anxious persists even after the situation is over, and this feeling gets in the way of the individual being able to do everyday tasks, that is when it may be consider to be a disorder. For students, their lives have many factors which may cause feelings of anxiety, which is why anxiety disorders for students may be on the rise.

There are several kinds of anxiety disorders that an individual can suffer from. These include: panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, phobias, and generalised anxiety disorder, with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) being the most common of them all (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Löwe, 2006).

There are many theories as to what causes anxiety disorders, such as the

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biological, social, and cognitive explanations. An example of one of these explanations is that the biological theory explains anxiety as a chronic oversensitivity of the body's alarm system and of the fight or flight response, also known as the 'behavioural inhibition system' BIS (Gray, 1983), therefore this causes the individual to have heightened nervousness and fear of normal situations. There is also some research that suggests that anxiety may have a genetic component (Bennett, 2005).

With these being theories of what causes anxiety in general for individuals, there are also many factors that may cause anxiety specifically among students. One of these factors may be leaving home for the first time and being in an unfamiliar environment, and also not having their support system, such as their parents and friends, readily available to them. The dramatic change in academic demands is the most common cause of anxiety in students as they have come to university with a pressure to do well, whether this pressure stems from the student themselves or their parents (Tartakovsky, 2016). Also, with today's society being so centred around examinations for students, this is having an effect on the students psychological and emotional well-being, causing test anxiety to become more of a problem for them (Rothman, 2004). With the combination of student life factors, and the new experiences that they have to take on it is probably likely to exacerbate any underlying forms of anxiety that an individual may already suffer with.

In 2013, there were 8.2 million cases of anxiety reported in the UK (Fineberg, 2013), and more and more of these reports are coming from students. According to a survey conducted by the Anxiety Disorders

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Association, there has been a massive increase in the prevalence of anxiety disorders among students, with more and more of them having to seek help. In fact, in 2014 a study that was conducted by Penn State found that anxiety had become more prevalent than depression among university students, making it the lead mental health issue amongst them. The study found that more than half of the students that visited the health services on campus had told them that they were having issues with their anxiety. As well as this, a survey that was conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA) in 2015 found that almost one in six students had been diagnosed with anxiety, or was being treated for it.

In small amounts feelings of anxiety can actually be helpful to students as it can cause them to work harder and achieve what they are worried about not achieving. It can also help to heighten an individual's senses and reaction times, which means that it may even be able to help aid exam performance (NHS, 2014). However, in another survey that was conducted by the ACHA, results found that 21.9 % of students reported that in the last 12 months that their anxiety had affected their academic performance, meaning that it had effected them in ways such as receiving a lower grade, or not being able to complete an assignment. These statistics also show that anxiety disorders have been on the rise as that statistic of students having their academic performance effected by their anxiety is up from 18.3 % than that was found in a survey that was conducted in 2008, showing that anxiety is an increasing concern for students. It also shows that anxiety is becoming a detrimental problem for students, not just as a normal feeling that is there to help them. If there is a lack of help for these students then it could be

detrimental to them and their mental health, and if it goes left untreated it could lead to worse things such as self-medicating with alcohol or even taking their own lives, as statistics show, suicide is the second leading cause of death for students.

With this now having to be recognised as a public concern, the next step is knowing what they need to do about it, particularly what the universities and public services should be doing about it. For those individuals choosing to go to university there needs to be robust and available support in place for them to reach out to if they are in need. Providing help for their students is important for universities so that they can ensure the well-being of their students, and that their mental health problems do not get in the way of their education so they can reach their full potential.

The main issue for students is understanding where they are able to seek help from. A study was conducted showing that one in four students did not know how to find help for their mental health issues (Gumener, 2016).

However, counselling services are now provided by an increasing amount of universities, and there has been an awareness of these services and their roles amongst students. However, statistics amongst the UK still show that students are still reluctant in seeking help from them, with a study conducted by the National Union of Students (NUS) in 2016 showed that only one in 10 students who are going through mental health difficulties will actually turn to counselling services for help. However, even though these statistics are still low, there has actually been an increase in the amount of students that are choosing to seek help, so it is actually a positive that this is on the rise. This rise of university provision of counselling services will

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hopefully help towards raising awareness of mental health support, and therefore increase the amount of students that choose to seek it. Hopefully, with this increase in provision of counselling services, and also the increase in awareness of these services, more and more students will be able to receive help for their disorder and anxiety will become less of a pressing problem amongst students.

In conclusion, anxiety is a mental health disorder that relates to an individual's fear or worry about an event that may have an uncertain outcome for them, with it becoming a disorder if it gets in the way of everyday situations. There are many theories as to what causes anxiety, and there are also specific things that may cause anxiety amongst students. Because of this, statistics show that anxiety is a growing cause of concern for students, with it even interfering with their academic performance. Therefore, the public should be working towards making counselling services readily available to students, as well as increasing the awareness of these counselling services, therefore increasing the amount of students that they are able to help.

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