

# MENTAL HEALTH AND ACADEMIC VALIDATION: A STUDY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDIES

THANGADURAI, T.<sup>1</sup> – IBRAHIM, N. N.<sup>1</sup> – AZMAN, N. H. A.<sup>1</sup> – YUSNI, N. F.<sup>1</sup> – IDRIS, R.<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education and Social Science, Universiti Selangor, Selangor, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author  
e-mail: crashidin7[at]unisel.edu.my

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**Abstract.** The association between mental illness and academic validity has been observed in several studies. The current study is to investigate the association between mental illness and academic validation among social sciences students at University Selangor. For this aim, 150 students from the Department of Social Sciences at University Selangor were chosen by filling out Google Forms based on mental illness and academic validation survey questionnaires. To obtain data on mental illness, the general health questionnaire (GHQ-12) was utilized, with 5 items for academic validation. The data were then analysed with the statistical program Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) to evaluate the hypothesis. The findings indicate that there is a small positive association between mental illness and academic validity. Finally, the data were examined using a correlation coefficient with a confidence level of 90%. The findings revealed that general health and some of its components, such as depression and anxiety, were significantly related to educational performance, whereas no significant relationship was found between academic validation and other components, such as physical symptoms and social performance disorders. According to the findings of this study, the higher the students' mental health, the better their educational validation, albeit it appears that other elements and their interactional effects also influence the students' educational validity.

**Keywords:** *mental illness, academic validation, students, relationship*

## Introduction

Mental illness affects thoughts, mood, and behaviour, impacting one's ability to cope with daily tasks (Koops and Kuebel, 2021). It can range from temporary conditions to chronic diagnoses like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety. Untreated mental illness can disrupt work and relationships, but many individuals are able to function in their lives with treatments (Kosyluk et al., 2021). However, for those with significant impairment, mental illness often involves societal stigma, which can hinder them from getting proper treatments and impact life goals (Kosyluk et al., 2021). This is linked to a recent study that shows a significant link between students' mental health experiences and their academic performance (Dias et al., 2022). University students face intense emotional and intellectual pressures, such as meeting deadlines and adapting to competitive environments, which can detrimentally affect mental health, well-being, and academic performance (Duffy et al., 2020). The transition from high schools to universities involves new responsibilities like financial independence, social adjustments, and self-management, which may heighten mental health risks and decrease academic success (Gamage and Herath, 2021). Young adulthood is a high-risk period for developing mental health issues that can impair academic achievement, leading to dropouts or even increased mortality rates (Duffy et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies mental health as a critical yet under-addressed public health area, with nearly one billion people around the world are affected by mental disorders (Latoo et al., 2022). University students, experiencing intense

academic and social pressures, show higher rates of mental health issues particularly depression, anxiety, and stress compared to the general population (Gamage and Herath, 2021). Geopolitical, socio-economic, and technological evolution nowadays contribute to further mental health stressors for students. Research reveals that traditional and remote-learning university students face similar challenges, highlighting a need for in-depth, effective interventions (Ali et al., 2024).

With the challenges, students seemed to seek academic validation either from friends, family, and lecturers. Academic validation is the proactive process of affirming students' abilities and value, crucial for building confidence, particularly in non-traditional students who may face discouraging messages (Swanson and Cole, 2022). This concept includes interactions initiated by institutions that reinforce students' learning capacity, enhancing engagement and academic outcomes. Validation theory advocates for institutions to validate diverse student identities and promote well-being and engagement (Ali et al., 2024). This study aims to identify the association between mental illness and academic validation experiences of Social Sciences students, aiming to provide insights essential for understanding this relationship. Evidence suggests that severe mental health issues significantly risk students' academic self-efficacy and impede their overall academic progress, with a concerning rise in mental health challenges among university students, which majority of them have concerning symptoms (Gamage and Herath, 2021). This quantitative study seeks to explore the relationship between mental illness and academic validation among social science students. This objective provides a foundation for further research and potential interventions to support students' academic and mental well-being (Swanson and Cole, 2022). The study addresses the unique challenges faced by students transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, emphasizing the importance of mental health in academic success (Grøtan et al., 2019). This period involves significant social, financial, and personal adjustments, which can lead to stress. An increasing number of students report substantial mental strain during their university years, highlighting the need for intervention. With student mental health recognized as a key public health concern, this study contributes to literature aimed at understanding and mitigating the impacts of mental health on academic achievement, supporting efforts to enhance student well-being and success (Grøtan et al., 2019).

## ***Literature review***

### ***Mental illness***

Mental illness among university students has become an increasingly researched area due to its significant impact on academic performance and overall well-being. Research shows that university students, particularly those in social sciences, often face heightened stress and anxiety related to academic demands and career goals, contributing to mental health challenges (Dias et al., 2022). Many students find it difficult to seek help, partly due to limited time and resources. While some higher education institutions effectively highlight their professional resources, others may not, leaving students unaware of valuable services such as the Counselling unit available to them. Additionally, many students struggle with time management skills that could help them balance personal time with academic responsibilities. Some may overindulge in personal routines like social media and recreational activities, such as online gaming, including popular multiplayer games. This lack of support and awareness compounds

these mental health challenges, further impacting students' academic experiences. The influence of gender on mental health and academic achievement is also notable. Studies indicate that female students often outperform their male counterparts academically, though they report higher levels of anxiety and stress (Da Silva and Vettore, 2023). These gender differences are partly attributed to biological and cultural factors, with women generally being more open about emotional challenges. In comparison, male students experience mental health issues at lower rates but may face unique academic challenges. Additionally, students from specific socioeconomic backgrounds, such as those from low-income families or with limited access to resources, are more vulnerable to mental health issues and, consequently, to academic difficulties (Dias et al., 2022).

Lifestyle choices and individual behaviours also affect the relationship between mental health and academic performance. Research highlights that healthy habits like regular exercise, balanced diets, and consistent sleep schedules can help mitigate the negative impact of mental health issues on academic success (Chu et al., 2023). For instance, students who maintain a balanced lifestyle tend to exhibit better academic resilience despite facing mental health challenges. However, the pressures of transitioning to adulthood during university years can lead to increased risk factors for poor mental health, highlighting the need for preventive measures within university settings (Abrantes et al., 2022). These challenges include managing academic pressure, building new social networks, achieving financial independence, and adjusting to living away from home.

### ***Academic validation***

Academic validation, or the sense of being valued and supported within an academic environment, is a crucial factor in students' academic success and well-being. Academic achievement is often assessed through grades, which serve as a benchmark for student success and future opportunities (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023). High academic achievement is associated with better employment prospects, higher income, and greater productivity, while also contributing to students' overall life satisfaction. Academic achievement is influenced by various factors, including students' motivation, the quality of their educational environment, family support, and community resources, all of which contribute to positive academic outcomes (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023). A study conducted in Norway revealed that mental health issues significantly impact students' academic self-efficacy, with those experiencing severe symptoms four times more likely to report low self-efficacy (Grøtan et al., 2019). This relationship is influenced by factors such as financial stress and feelings of loneliness, both of which contribute to delayed academic progress. Students with greater financial vulnerabilities or weaker support networks are more likely to experience low academic self-efficacy, demonstrating that students' emotional and socioeconomic backgrounds can deeply affect their academic performance and engagement in their studies (Grøtan et al., 2019).

Research further underscores the importance of academic validation in fostering students' sense of belonging and enhancing their academic performance. Swanson and Cole (2022) study found that students who feel validated in their academic environment exhibit lower levels of anxiety and higher GPAs. Examples of academic validation include receiving positive feedback from professors, acknowledgment of academic achievements, and support from peers in study groups. Academic validation provides psychological benefits, such as a stronger sense of campus belonging, which positively influences both mental health and academic outcomes. Such findings highlight the need

for institutions to foster supportive academic environments where students feel acknowledged and encouraged in their academic journeys (Ali et al., 2024).

### ***Mental illness and academic validation***

The interaction between mental illness and academic validation among social science students is a topic of growing interest. Many students with mental health issues seek academic validation as a way to improve their self-esteem and academic motivation. This need for validation can help students cope with anxiety, depression, and stress, as it fosters a sense of competency and belonging in their academic community (Williams et al., 2018). However, when validation is lacking, students may experience worsening mental health symptoms, which can negatively impact their academic performance. Academic validation plays a protective role by enhancing students' self-esteem and reducing the psychological distress often associated with mental illness. Positive academic feedback and support from faculty and peers help students manage feelings of inadequacy and academic-related anxiety, leading to improved mental health outcomes and academic performance (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023). In contrast, students who lack such validation may find themselves in a cycle of low self-esteem, reduced academic motivation, and deteriorating mental health, indicating the essential role of supportive academic environments (Williams et al., 2018).

In summary, there is a complex and reciprocal relationship between mental illness and academic validation. Students who receive positive validation are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes and maintain stronger mental health, while those who lack validation are at higher risk of academic and psychological challenges. Ensuring accessible mental health resources and fostering a validating academic environment can greatly benefit students' academic and personal growth. Future research should continue to explore this dynamic, particularly among social science students who face unique challenges in balancing mental health with academic achievement (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023).

### **Materials and Methods**

The study employs a quantitative research approach in order to gain a thorough understanding on the connection between mental illness and academic validation among social sciences students. The use of statistical techniques to find patterns and possible causal correlations between variables is made possible by quantitative methods. This method aids in assessing the importance of the findings and examining the degree and direction of the relationship between mental illness and academic validation. Google Forms was used to conduct online questionnaires for the research, providing an organised and effective means of gathering data. The poll asked questions about demographics, mental health, and academic validation. In order to choose participants who have certain attributes relevant to the research question, purposeful sampling was used. The sample consisted of UNISEL students from a range of age groups, genders, and academic level in order to provide a thorough portrayal of the broader student population to evaluate the mental illness and academic validation. To gather information, standardised questionnaires were employed. These included the General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12) to assess mental health, and the Academic Validation Questionnaire (AVQ) to evaluate academic validation perceptions.

The study's protocols were arranged in a methodical manner. In order to compile background data and crucial information on the study question, a literature review was first carried out. The next step was to draft a study proposal outlining the objectives, approach, and expected outcomes. Subsequently, the idea was presented for ethical approval in order to guarantee adherence to ethical standards. After receiving ethical permission, study participants were enlisted. The intended survey was used to gather data, which was then examined to produce important results. A thorough research report comprising all of the findings was created, and slides and rehearsals were used to prepare the findings for presentation. Ultimately, the finished study and report were turned in. Pilot studies were conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments used, following the guidelines by Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002). Data reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha as suggested by Tavakol and Dennick (2011), while the psychometric properties were reviewed according to standards.

## Results and Discussion

The introduction phase of the analysis describes the respondents' demographic details. Following that, it provides descriptive data for important characteristics including mental illness and academic validation. Correlation analysis is the form of inferential statistics used to examine the impact of mental illness and academic validation. *Table 1* displays the distribution of respondents based on their level of study. Out of a total of 150 respondents, 98 individuals, which accounts for 65.3% of the sample, are pursuing a diploma. The remaining 52 respondents, representing 34.7% of the total, are enrolled in degree programs. This indicates that a majority of the respondents are at the diploma level, with a smaller proportion working towards a degree. This distribution helps in understanding the educational background of the sample population and can provide insights into the study's context regarding the level of academic engagement among the respondents. *Table 1* presents the distribution of respondents' gender within the sample. Out of the total 150 respondents, 43 are male, constituting 28.7% of the sample. The remaining 107 respondents are female, making up 71.3% of the sample. This data indicates a higher representation of females compared to males in the survey population, with females outnumbering males by a ratio of more than 2:1. The total number of respondents is 150, accounting for 100% of the sample.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Level of study		
Diploma	98	65.3
Degree	52	34.7
Gender		
Male	43	28.7
Female	107	71.3
Age		
18-20	80	53.3
21-23	64	42.7
24-26	6	4.0
Years in university		
First year	55	36.7

Second year	74	49.3
Third year	21	14.0

The data presented in *Table 1* illustrates the distribution of respondents' ages in a study. Most respondents, comprising 53.3%, fall within the 18-20 age range, indicating a significant representation of younger individuals in the sample. Those aged 21-23 constitute 42.7% of the respondents, reflecting a substantial portion of young adults. In contrast, respondents aged 24- 26 are a smaller group, comprising only 4.0% of the total sample. This distribution suggests that the study predominantly involves individuals in their late teens to early twenties, highlighting a demographic skew towards younger age groups among the survey participants. *Table 1* presents data on the distribution of respondents based on their years in university. Most respondents, comprising 49.3%, are in their second year, followed by 36.7% in their first year. A smaller proportion, 14.0%, are in their third year. This distribution suggests that the sample is predominantly composed of students in their early years of university education, with a significant number still in their first or second year. *Table 2* shows the correlation analysis to examine the impact of mental illness and academic validation. Results show there is no significant relationship between mental illness and academic validation among Social Sciences students in this study. The weak correlation ( $r=0.151$ ) and the non-significant p-value ( $p=0.65$ ) suggest that mental illness does not have a substantial impact on academic validation for this group of students.

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis of mental illness and academic validation among social sciences students.

Category	Analysis	Academic validation
Mental illness	Correlation Coefficient (r)	.151
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.65
	N	150

The study's findings demonstrated that there is no significant relationship between mental illness and academic validation among Social Sciences students, as evidenced by a weak correlation coefficient ( $r=0.151$ ) and a non-significant p-value ( $p=0.65$ ). This shows that, in this sample, mental illness experiences had no direct effect on views or experiences with academic validation. This finding contradicts previous research that emphasized the importance of mental health on academic experiences and validation. Grøtan et al. (2019) found that students with significant mental health symptoms were four times more likely to have low academic self-efficacy, which is a key component of academic validation. Similarly, Swanson and Cole (2022) found that pupils who feel intellectually valued have lower anxiety and higher academic performance. The discrepancy may be attributed to various contextual or demographic factors, such as the predominance of younger students in their first or second year in this sample, who may not yet fully associate mental health challenges with academic identity or performance. The demographic profile also revealed a larger proportion of diploma students (65.3%) and females (71.3%), with the majority of participants aged 18 to 23 years. This is consistent with the findings of Gamage and Herath (2021), who stated that the early university years are characterized by a transitional period in which students adjust to new academic and social expectations. Despite these pressures, the findings indicate that students may not rely solely on academic validation to cope with mental suffering, or vice versa. It is possible that other coping methods, such as peer support, personal

resilience, or external validation from family, have a larger influence in their academic success.

Furthermore, while previous research (Dias et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2020) has highlighted the link between academic pressures and mental health worsening, the current findings suggest that academic validation alone may be insufficient to ameliorate mental discomfort. This could be related to institutional limitations in giving meaningful validation, or to the presence of underlying mental health concerns that are not easily influenced by external academic evaluation (Kosyluk et al., 2021). It is also consistent, who stated that students frequently lack understanding or access to campus mental health resources, limiting academic institutions' ability to effectively help students with mental health difficulties. Gender is another factor that could influence this dynamic. Da Silva and Vettore (2023) discovered that, while female students excel intellectually, they frequently report higher levels of stress and worry. The predominance of female participants in the current study may explain the existence of mental health problems, but it also shows resilience or compensatory mechanisms that protect their academic performance, resulting in a non-significant link. Another possible explanation is that not all students viewed academic validation in the same way. According to Ali et al. (2024) as well as Swanson and Cole (2022) and, academic validation entails institutional attempts to confirm students' abilities and identities. If such validation was inconsistent or insufficient in the participants' environment, it may have had a limited impact on mental health. In the final analysis, whereas previous research has demonstrated a theoretical and empirical link between mental illness and academic validation, the current study discovered no significant association among Social Sciences students at the selected institution. This emphasizes the significance of contextualizing mental health and academic results according to specific demographics and settings. Additional study should look into other moderating or mediating variables, such as social support, psychological resilience, or institutional climate, that could help explain the relationship between mental health and academic validity. It is also critical for universities to continue investing in mental health services and creating validating academic environments that cater to students' different needs, particularly as they move into adulthood (Ali et al., 2024; Grøtan et al., 2019).

## Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the link between mental illness and academic validation among Social Sciences students. Despite the well-documented psychological and academic constraints that university students encounter (Gamage and Herath, 2021; Duffy et al., 2020), this study found no statistically significant relationship between mental illness and academic validation among the sample group. The limited link shows that, while both mental illness and academic validation are important components of the student experience, they may not have a direct, measurable influence on one another among these students. The demographic composition primarily younger, diploma-level, and female students provides important context for interpreting this outcome. It is possible that this group relies on non-academic kinds of support, or that institutional validation procedures have not yet evolved sufficiently to influence students' mental health in meaningful ways. Furthermore, the findings may represent students' resilience or adaptation in overcoming academic problems despite mental health concerns. While previous research has highlighted the protective role of academic validation in

promoting academic engagement and emotional well-being (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Swanson and Cole, 2022), the absence of a significant link in this study suggests that the relationship may be more complex, involving multiple intervening factors such as individual coping mechanisms, external support systems, and university resource accessibility (Kosyluk et al., 2021). Ultimately, this study adds to the expanding discussion on student mental health and academic experiences by providing a more nuanced knowledge of how these variables interact in certain educational and social contexts. It also emphasizes the significance of building personalized, inclusive support systems that take into account students' different backgrounds and psychological needs. Future research should use a more thorough approach that incorporates qualitative data and investigates additional influencing elements to improve student success and mental well-being.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that no conflict of interest is involved with any parties in this research.

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