Exploring the Mental Health Challenges of Today's Students

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Abstract
Mental health is essential, especially for students, since it can have an impact on the daily life of the student. It is a significant component of the student's psychology, which includes psychological processes, emotional response, and social skills, since it influences stress, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions. The study involved 157 respondents and was analysed using multiple regression analysis. The findings of the study found that factors such as individual and family support have a significant impact on the mental health of the student and followed by academic support. This study can contribute in terms of awareness of what factors drive students to have mental problems, which can then help them in strengthening their resilience and mental health.
Keywords: Mental Health, Individual Factors, Family Support, Academic Factors, Friend Factor, Financial Factors

Introduction
Over the past few years in Malaysia, the rise of youth with Mental Illnesses has increased significantly from less than 450,000 youths with mental disorders in Malaysia in 2019 compared to 900,000 in 2023 (The Star, 2025). University life is a significant life transition where students must adjust to academic expectations, social relationships, and their personal lives. At this stage, students need to have strong resilience, especially good mental health, and this requires environmental support (DeRosier et al., 2013). However, now the issue of student mental health is increasing and is a global concern. An individual's psychological health is a major factor in their academic success, personal growth, and their quality of life after leaving school.

The demands of university-level academic study, the stress of making new friends and transitioning to being on their own, and the pressures of paying for school, put college students at an increased risk for experiencing mental health problems. Although awareness is increasing regarding student mental health issues, research shows that many colleges and universities do not adequately address these issues in terms of providing mental health support to students. There is much to learn about what impacts student mental health, the different types of support available to students, and the various aspects of their lives that affect their mental health. Several psychological factors have been identified that cause

excessive anxiety and symptoms of depression. Among them are a Lack of self-stress management and struggling with emotions, experiencing lower psychological levels (Krycak et al., 2012). Family including parental conflict, lack of moral and emotional support, and family financial stress also have an influence on mental health and increase the risk of mental disorders (Ennis and Bunting, 2013).

In addition, academic stress is also a contributor to student mental stress. Student stress and fatigue due to high academic workload, competitive grades, and difficulty understanding assignments (Al-Tammemi et al., 2020). A study conducted by Shahid & Farhan (2022) in Malaysia found that students in Malaysia struggle with motivation, academic focus, and problems in hybrid learning, which leads to mental health issues. Moreover, relationships with friends also play a role in shaping emotional well-being. Students need to get positive peer support to reduce stress, but experiences of bullying, academic comparison can increase anxiety and depression (Sabramani et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, the increase in the cost of living makes students have financial concerns because they rely on limited scholarships, causing the need to work part-time, and this further increases student stress and makes student performance decline (Aziz et al., 2025). There are many interconnections between these elements; however, the relative contributions of these elements to mental health and the actual impact on mental health remain to be explored further, especially in terms of the local context. Therefore, it is necessary to study how each of these elements affects mental health of students so that more effective intervention strategies can be developed to improve the mental health of students.

The results of this research also have practical and empirical applications for many stakeholders. They provide information to help develop effective support policies for students, strengthen systems of academic support, educate families on the role of emotional support, and guide practitioners in creating targeted interventions. By taking a holistic approach to student mental health, this work improves the overall effectiveness of mental health initiatives in higher education settings.

Literature Review
Mental health is essential because it can influence the way of thinking and can affect individual emotions. Mental health, especially for students, is more vulnerable to mental disorders such as depression, stress, and extreme anxiety (Latiff et al., 2014). According to Kumaran et al. (2022), it was found that mental health cases among students, especially in Malaysia, have increased to a worrying level because students are the country's assets and will lead the country. This conclusion was supported by a study by Kotera et al. (2021), which found that the mental health level of Malaysian students is more worrying than that of students from abroad. Therefore, understanding the factors that contribute to this issue is essential.

In Malaysia, numerous studies have been conducted on mental health among students. The Latiff et al. (2014) study found that 60% of students experienced anxiety, 27% depression, and 22.6% experienced stress. Mental health has been found to be increasing dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic due to online learning (Kumaran et al., 2022). Currently, there are students who have lost motivation and have severe anxiety because they are not used to

adapting to technology, in addition to technological constraints at home and an unconducive home environment. Therefore, anxiety is a common psychological issue for university students and is then followed by depression, suicidal behaviour, eating disorders, and substance use (Pedrelli et al., 2015). This conclusion proves that empirical studies have found that mental health among university students has moved from a common issue to an issue that requires immediate attention.

Life history, upbringing, ways of managing stress, and level of self-motivation are among the individual factors. Most students who are unable to understand their weaknesses have the potential to experience less psychological resilience due to experiencing prolonged negative emotions. High symptoms of stress and anxiety among Malaysian students are due to academic pressure, low motivation, and low self-esteem (Kotera & Ting, 2021). Similarly, a study conducted by Latiff et al. (2014) found that students who experience physical health problems and have an unhealthy lifestyle are at high risk of experiencing severe depression. In addition, personal factors that lead to the severity of mental disorders include lack of self-control, negative thinking, and weak coping. Therefore, students who easily experience intense emotions when they are unable to manage internal stress are at greater risk of mental health issues.

Harmony within a family is also one of the determinants of students' mental well-being. Family support is essential, as it can increase students' inspiration and motivation. A study conducted by Latiff et al. (2014) found that families with conflict, burden of responsibility, and low socioeconomic status have a strong relationship with higher psychological effects. Students from low-income families have concerns about family financial uncertainty regarding study financing, food and drink expenses, resource needs, and access to facilities. This concern is evidenced by a study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2019), which found that students from B40 families are the most reluctant to receive mental health assistance. Difficult life experiences and stigma from the surrounding environment create negative thoughts towards mental health treatment. Therefore, support from family is essential and can affect students' emotions and motivation, causing them to go down and increasing the risk of mental health issues.

Peer influence is also one of the factors that can contribute to stress, depression, and anxiety due to pressure and social comparison (Lee & Syaid, 2017). This is because friends are the main support at university, but they can also provide pressure when having problems in relationships. Students tend to feel more comfortable sharing their problems with friends rather than seeking professional help. Ibrahim et al., 2019). However, it can worsen the situation if the student's friends do not have psychological support skills. So, friends are more dualistic because they can protect and support each other, but if one doesn't know how to give advice, it can increase pressure.

The main stress among students is the academic factor. High academic workload, exam pressure, and competition increase the level of student anxiety. Kotera & Ting, 2021). This, in turn, increases the mental health of students. In addition, an environment that is not conducive, such as a packed timetable, a non-conducive environment, and a lack of necessary facilities such as internet, computers, access to references, and lecturers who do not interact well, can increase the risk of student stress. The quality of learning will decline when the level

of academic stress increases, causing a lack of focus on education and subsequently affecting student performance. Therefore, when emotions increase due to academic stress, performance drops, which affects mental health.

A study conducted by Latiff et al. (2014) found that students who are short of money experience higher stress and lose focus on academics. In today's world, financial problems are a significant issue because of the many additional costs associated with learning, particularly during the pandemic, which requires access to technology such as the internet, computers, devices, and appropriate study environments. Such circumstances can lead to higher student stress, depression, and anxiety (Kumaran et al., 2022). Therefore, emotional stress increases due to economic constraints that prevent students from maintaining stable learning.

Methodology
This study is a qualitative study that employed multiple regression analysis to examine the factors that influence students' mental health. The sample of this study is 157 participants who were selected by the random sampling method. Questionnaires were distributed online and physically. Participation is voluntary. Questionnaires that have been completed are screened first. Incomplete data and outliers are removed from the analysis. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the influence of dependent variables and independent variables, where the dependent variable is mental health, which is measured using a yes or no response. All independent variables were measured using a Likert scale or an appropriate measurement scale. This study has been tested for reliability, and all measures show a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.887, which is considered acceptable for this research.

The regression model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Individu + \beta_2 Family + \beta_3 Academic + \beta_4 Friends + \beta_5 Financial + \varepsilon \qquad (1)$$

Where:

      Y = Mental Health

      β_0 = Intercept

      $\beta_1 \dots \beta_5$ = Regression coefficients

      $\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$ = Error term

Data Analysis
This study aims to examine the factors that influence the mental health of university students. Independent variables are factors from individuals, family, friends, academics, and finances. This study analyses the data using multiple regression analysis to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between mental health and the 5 factors discussed. This section presents the results of the overall model complexity of the study.

				Std. Error	Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.483[a]	.234	.208	.24990	.234	9.200	5	151	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Financial, Individual, Academic, Family, Friends									

Model Summary

The model summary results show that the R-squared value of 0.234 indicates these five factors collectively explain 23.4% of the variance in mental health outcomes. Overall, the results indicate that the combination of individual, family, friend, academic and financial factors provide a statistically significant explanation for the mental health of respondents.

ANOVAª

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.873	5	.575	9.200	.000ᵇ
	Residual	9.430	151	.062		
	Total	12.303	156			

a. Dependent Variable: MentalHealth
b. Predictors: (Constant), Financial, Individual, Academic, Family, Friends

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to verify whether the regression model fits the data based on five factors. Overall, the ANOVA results indicated significant differences in mental health among the respondents.

Coefficientsª

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.129	.094		22.729	.000
	Individual	-.091	.031	-.281	-2.983	.003
	Family	-.093	.030	-.271	-3.116	.002
	Academic	.064	.031	.182	2.053	.042
	Friends	-.027	.031	-.087	-.896	.372
	Financial	-.018	.029	-.051	-.617	.538

a. Dependent Variable: MentalHealth

The results of the regression analysis indicated that the regression analysis showed how much each of the predictor variables relayed their part in terms of the Mental Health score. The significant intercept model statistics (i.e., 2.129) (p < .001) indicates what the Mental Health score will be when all five predictor variables are at their minimum value. Based upon the five predictor variables, Individual, and Family were significant predictors of Mental Health and both had a negative relationship. Specifically, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for the Individual variable is -0.091 (p = .003), while the trend for Family is -0.093 (p = .002). Thus, higher levels of personal stress or family issues are related to lower levels of Mental Health when controlling for all other predictor variables. Conversely, the Academic predictor variable is a significant positive predictor of Mental Health (B = 0.064, p = .042), suggesting that positive academic experiences or conditions will improve an individual's psychological health. Meanwhile, the Friends (B = -0.027, p = .372) and Finance (B = -0.018, p = .538) variables are not statistically significant predictors since their p-values exceed the .05 cutoff for statistical significance.

Based on the standard coefficients' results in this study, we can determine that the Individual and Family factors were the strongest predictors of Mental Health (Beta = -0.281; Beta = -0.271). The Academic factor had a moderate positive association with Mental Health (Beta =

0.182), while the Friends and Finance factors contributed very minimally to Mental Health. Therefore, it can be concluded that Mental Health is more heavily impacted by the Individual and Family factors than by the Friends and Finance factors. As such, Mental Health initiatives must focus primarily on the Individual and Family factors, while the Academic factor serves as a supporting component. The inverse correlation between Individual and Mental Health indicates how an individual's stress, emotional difficulties, or maladaptive behaviours can greatly influence that person's psychological state of being. Individuals with strong self-management practices, effective coping mechanisms and low levels of stress typically exhibit better Mental Health outcomes.

Family factors can influence an individual's Mental Health. Family conflicts can cause stress that leads to negative psychological effects, while Family relationships that are Positive and emotionally supportive can help protect the individual from psychological stress. The Family environment of People receiving emotional support (Family and Non-Family) was found to be One of the best predictors of the Mental Health of individuals. Academically, Positive Academics are also linked to Positive/higher levels of Mental Health. A Positive learning environment, manageable workloads, good academic performance, and Institutional Supportive Services are all areas that can provide psychological wellness for Students. If the students feel they can manage their Academic requirements, and receive Support from their School, they are more likely to experience higher levels of Mental Health. Therefore, programs that address Mental Health and coping with Academic demands should be implemented in Universities, Colleges, and high Schools using the following Mobility Models of Student Support: Stress Relief Programs; Counselling Services; and Family Support

Conclusion
The study's findings indicate that individual and family factors are the most important factors for mental health. This demonstrates that individual stress and family conflict have a great impact on student psychology. Family support has a very large impact, where individuals who have a harmonious family environment tend to achieve satisfactory health levels. However, academic factors such as a conducive environment and controlled academic workload have a smaller impact compared to individual and family factors but are an important element in balancing student psychology. While friend and financial factors were found not to have a significant impact however, academic factors are still vital for balancing student mental health.

Consequently, the findings of this study provide information that self-development and family support can have the greatest impact on mental health. Academic support can also help in improving mental health by offering program for managing stress and academic guidance. The findings of this study can contribute to the Ministry of Education, colleges and universities to better understand and be prepared to address student health issues. This finding can emphasize that student mental health is very critical and needs to be given attention and addressed systematically since students are national assets. Through understanding the factors that contribute to mental health, it can improve student well-being not only in academics but also shape students into resilient, competitive human capital who are more willing to contribute to national development in the future.

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