

"Mental Health Perceptions and Coping Strategies among Female Paramedical Students: A Cross-Sectional Insight"

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies related to mental health among female paramedical students. These young women are immersed in rigorous academic programs while simultaneously navigating societal expectations, financial stress, and entrenched gender norms. Using a structured questionnaire, the research gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from students enrolled in various allied health disciplines, exploring their understanding of mental well-being, methods of stress management, and the availability of emotional support systems. The findings reveal a concerning dichotomy: while students demonstrate a theoretical awareness of mental health concepts, their practical confidence in managing emotional distress is relatively low. Most respondents rely on informal coping mechanisms such as speaking with family or friends and engaging in hobbies. Alarming, only a small percentage seek professional mental health support, underscoring the lingering stigma and limited accessibility of such services. Emotional stress, academic workload, and financial instability were identified as dominant stressors—exacerbated for those from low-income families. Despite these obstacles, many students displayed commendable resilience and self-awareness, with a strong emphasis on self-belief and the desire to support future generations of women. However, societal support remains inadequate, and institutional frameworks often fall short of addressing the mental health needs of female students. This study calls for the urgent implementation of structured, gender-sensitive counseling programs within educational institutions. Without systemic change, the emotional toll on future healthcare professionals could jeopardize not only their personal well-being but also the quality of care they provide.

Keywords: Mental Health, Women's Emotional Well-being, Allied Health Sciences, Paramedical Education, Stress Management, Societal Support, Emotional Resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has emerged as a vital foundation of holistic human development, comprehensive emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how individuals think, feel, act, and manage stress. For young women, especially those enrolled in demanding academic environments like paramedical education, mental health becomes an even more critical yet often overlooked aspect of their daily lives.

In the Indian socio-cultural landscape, young women are expected to balance academic excellence with traditional roles and responsibilities within the family and society. This dual expectation often subjects them to unique psychological pressures that may not be fully recognized or addressed by existing institutional frameworks. Furthermore, the competitive and clinically intensive curriculum of allied health science programs can lead to heightened stress levels, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, further intensifying mental health challenges.

This study zeroes in on the lived experiences of female students in allied health science disciplines across Tamil Nadu, aiming to explore their understanding of mental health, their coping mechanisms in response to stress, and the external support structures or the lack thereof that influence their psychological resilience. It is

imperative to recognize that while discourse around mental health is gaining momentum globally, the gendered nuances of mental well-being, especially among young Indian women, remain under-explored in academic literature.

By systematically analyzing student responses, this research seeks to offer a dual perspective: one that captures the personal struggles of these students, and another that highlights systemic gaps in emotional and psychological support. The broader objective is to inform educational policymakers, institutional leaders, and mental health practitioners about the urgent need for a gender-sensitive, empathetic, and proactive approach to mental well-being in academic environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the past twenty years, the conversation around mental health has seen a marked transformation, with increased emphasis on its importance across educational, occupational, and personal spheres. However, literature that specifically focuses on young women enrolled in paramedical education particularly within regional Indian contexts remains sparse. This review synthesizes global frameworks, national data, and regional studies to contextualize the current research.

Mental Health in Higher Education

Mental health challenges among university students have been extensively reported. The World Health Organization (2022) states that nearly 20% of students worldwide are affected by psychological disorders, with anxiety and depression being most prevalent. In India, the National Mental Health Survey (2016) highlighted a high incidence of mental health conditions among individuals aged 18 to 29, with women being more significantly impacted. Contributing factors often include academic workload, social pressures, and future-related uncertainties.

In the field of allied health sciences, students frequently encounter compounded stressors due to the intense combination of theoretical learning, hands-on training, and emotional exposure through patient interactions. Kumar et al. (2019), in their research on nursing students, found that over 65% experienced heightened academic stress female students, in particular, reported more emotional burnout.

Gendered Aspects of Mental Health

Gender plays a crucial role in mental health outcomes. Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) observed that women are more inclined to dwell on stressors, making them more susceptible to emotional disorders such as depression and anxiety. In Indian society, where traditional gender expectations persist, these tendencies are intensified. Female students are often burdened with balancing academic tasks and familial responsibilities, especially within conservative households.

According to Das et al. (2021), many young women in professional studies hesitate to express emotional difficulties due to fears of being judged or labeled as “psychologically weak.” This stigma is particularly harmful in culturally close-knit environments where family reputation carries great weight.

Coping Strategies and Stress Management

Research has explored various techniques students employ to handle emotional and academic stress. Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress and coping theory remain a cornerstone in this domain, suggesting that individuals adopt either emotion-focused or problem-focused coping mechanisms.

Singh & Misra (2015) noted that many female students in Indian academic settings lean towards emotion-based strategies, such as confiding in friends, crying, or social withdrawal. Few seek formal counseling, often due to societal stigma or limited awareness. Alternative methods like yoga, meditation, and browsing social media have gained traction. However, Narayanan et al. (2020) warned that social media’s effects are mixed while it can provide distraction and connectivity, it may also foster anxiety and harmful comparisons.

Support Systems: Institutional and Societal

Although awareness around student mental health is growing, many educational institutions still lack robust support frameworks. The University Grants Commission (UGC, 2021) acknowledged the importance of mental health units in colleges but noted inconsistent implementation across institutions and regions.

Anuradha et al. (2022) revealed that only 27% of surveyed Indian colleges had appointed mental health professionals, and under 10% conducted routine mental wellness initiatives. In Tamil Nadu's allied health institutions, the scarcity of gender-responsive psychological support is especially concerning.

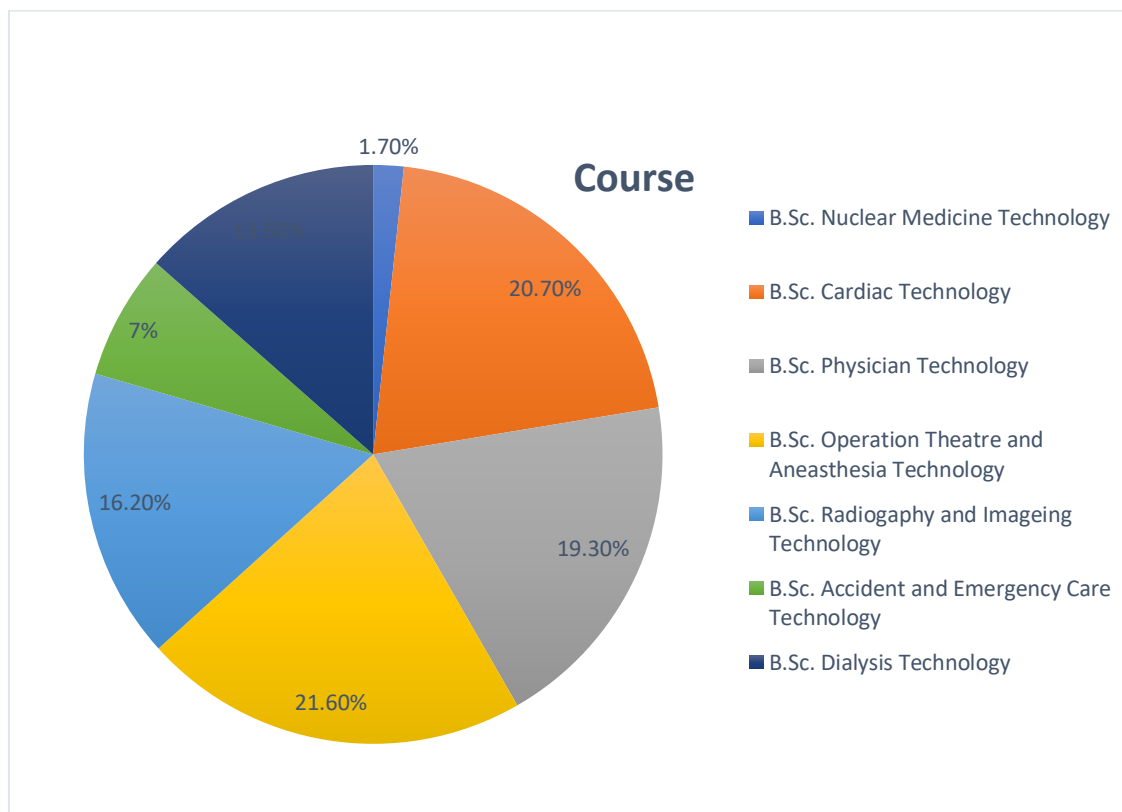
MATERIALS AND METHODS

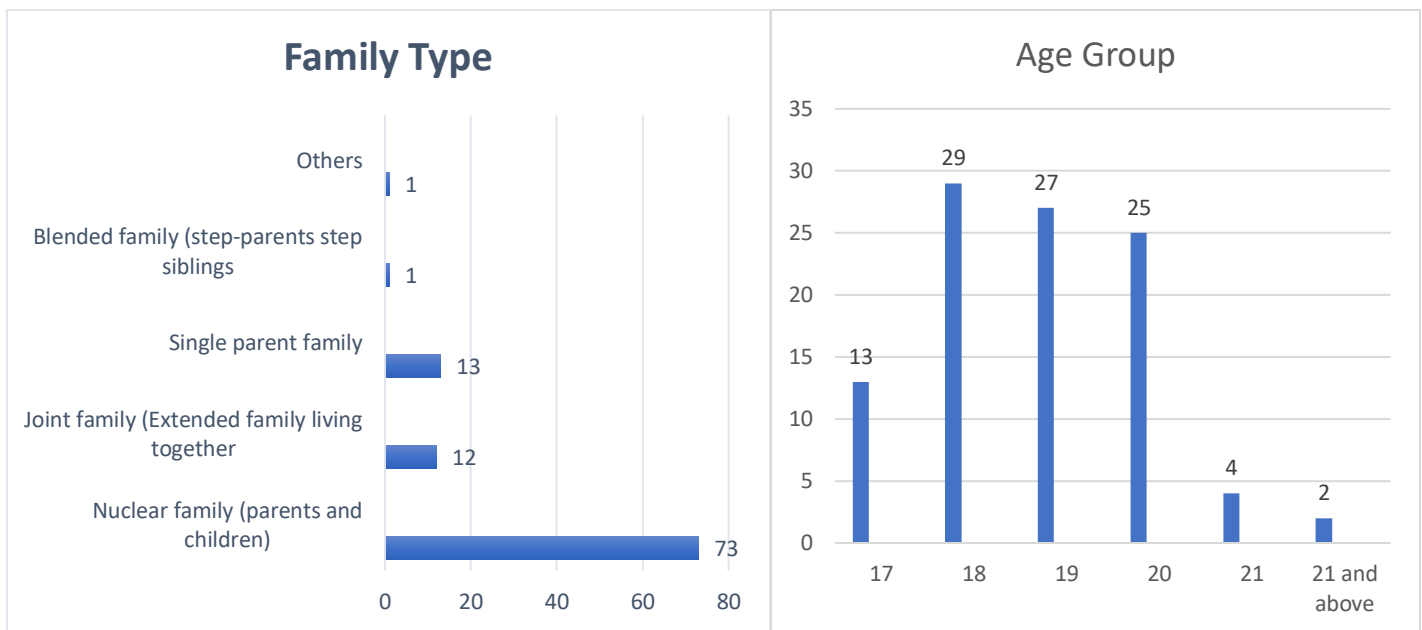
This study used a cross-sectional survey design to examine the mental health perceptions and coping strategies of female paramedical students. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire created using Google Forms, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to assess students' understanding of mental health, sources of stress, coping methods, and emotional support systems. The survey link was shared via email, WhatsApp, and student groups across various allied health institutions. A total of 118 students voluntarily participated, and all responses were collected anonymously to maintain confidentiality and encourage honesty. The data was exported for analysis, where descriptive statistics were used for quantitative responses, and thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data. Informed consent was obtained digitally, and ethical principles were followed throughout the study to protect participant privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

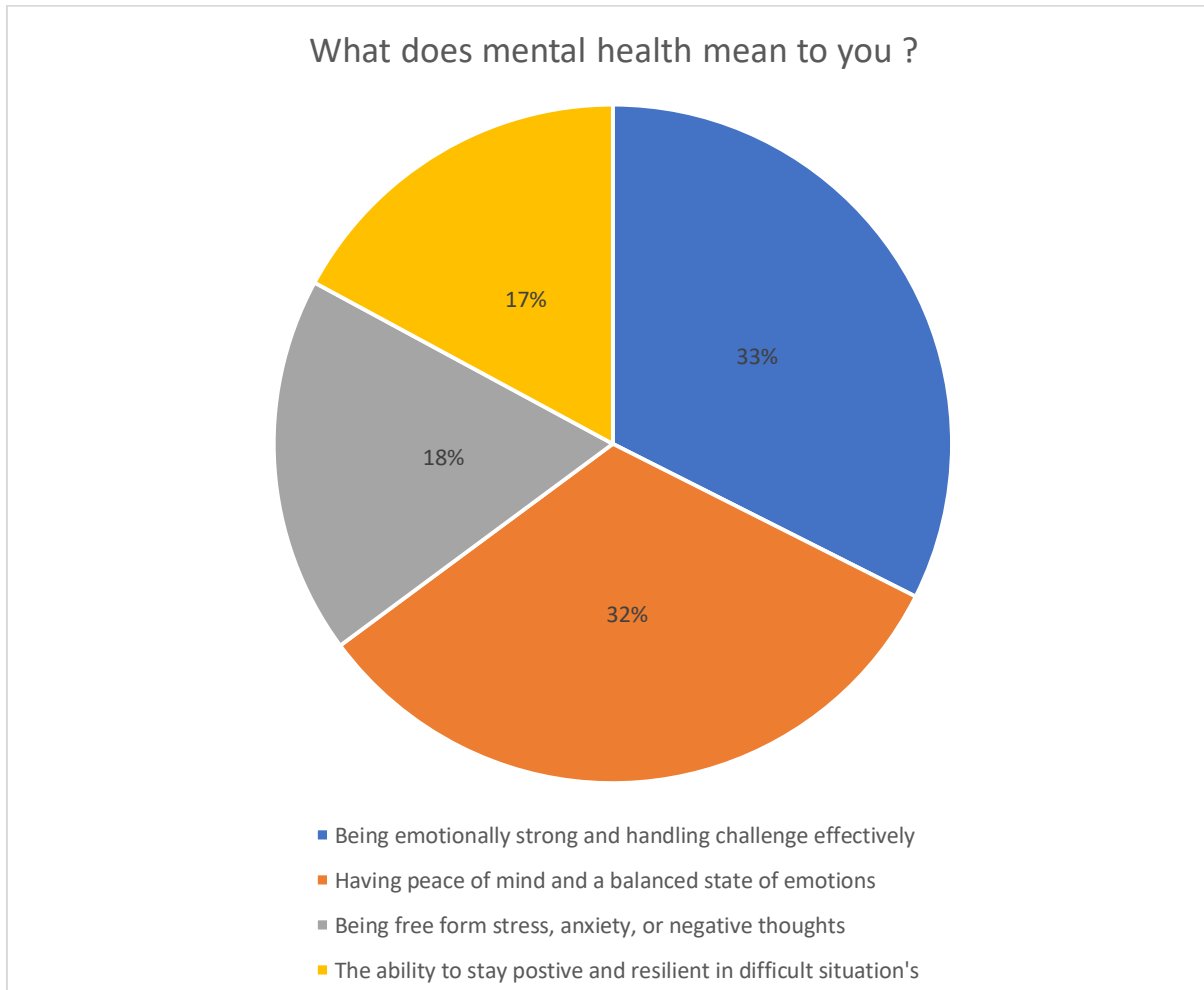
This study explores the mental health perceptions, stress responses, and resilience strategies of female paramedical students across various disciplines in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. A total of 118 responses were collected and analyzed to assess their understanding of mental well-being and the coping mechanisms they employ in response to emotional and academic pressures. The findings are both revealing and alarming offering a crucial glimpse into the mental health challenges faced by young women training to become future healthcare professionals during one of the most formative and emotionally demanding phases of their lives.

Demographics and Academic Background

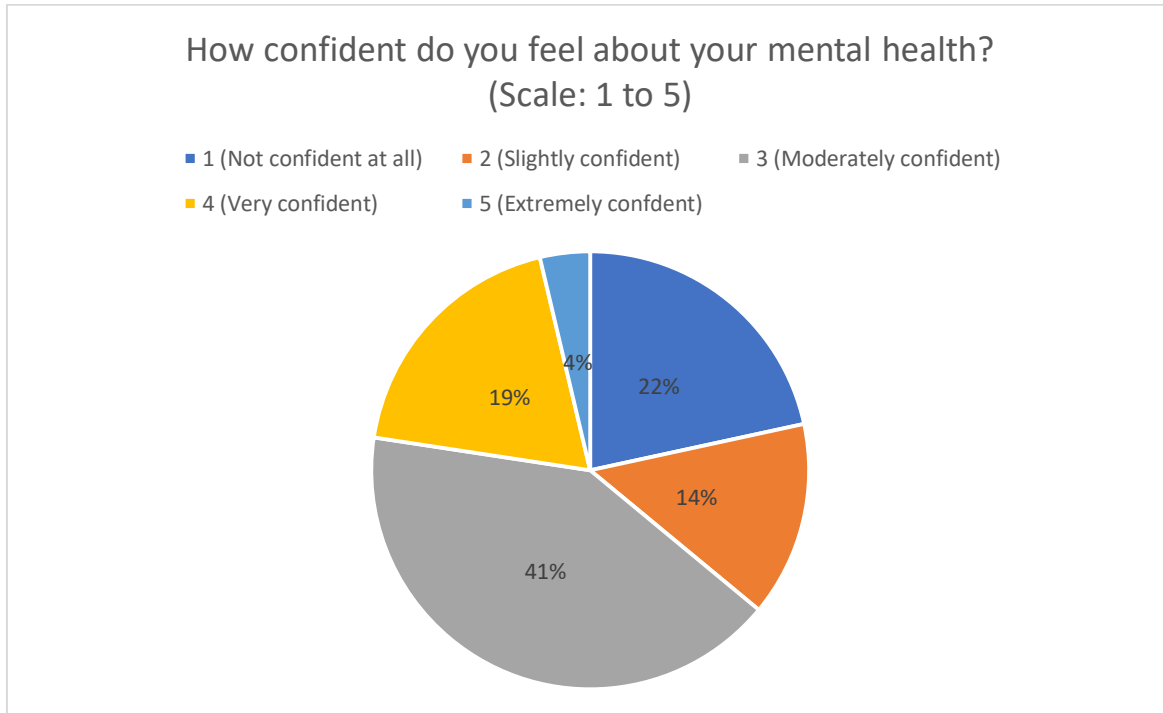




The majority of respondents in this study were young women aged between 18 and 20 years, a transitional and emotionally sensitive stage of life, making them more susceptible to mental health challenges. Most were enrolled in clinically demanding courses such as Operation Theatre and Anesthesia Technology (21.6%), Cardiac Technology (20.7%), and Physician Technology (19.3%), where both academic pressure and emotional exposure are high. A significant portion (73%) came from nuclear families, while 13% were from single-parent households—an indicator of varied emotional and financial support systems. These demographic factors together suggest that the intersection of age, academic intensity, and family background plays a crucial role in shaping the mental health experiences of female paramedical students.



Understanding and Internalization of Mental Health

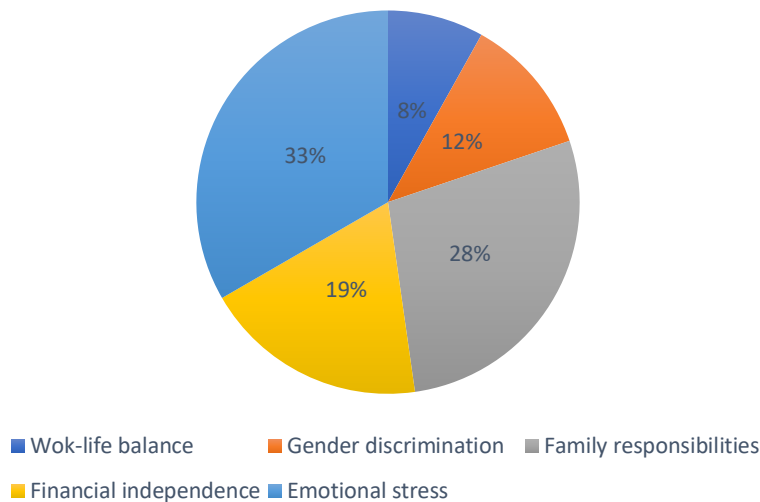


While a majority of students demonstrated a mature understanding of mental health—defining it primarily as emotional strength (33%) or peace of mind (32%)—there was a clear disparity between awareness and self-confidence. Only 4% of respondents felt extremely confident in managing their own mental health, while a concerning 36% rated themselves at the lowest levels of confidence. This disconnect highlights a critical issue: despite knowing what mental health entails, many students lack the practical skills or institutional support to apply this knowledge effectively. The findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted, skill-based interventions that move beyond theoretical awareness to build emotional resilience and coping strategies in real-life situations.

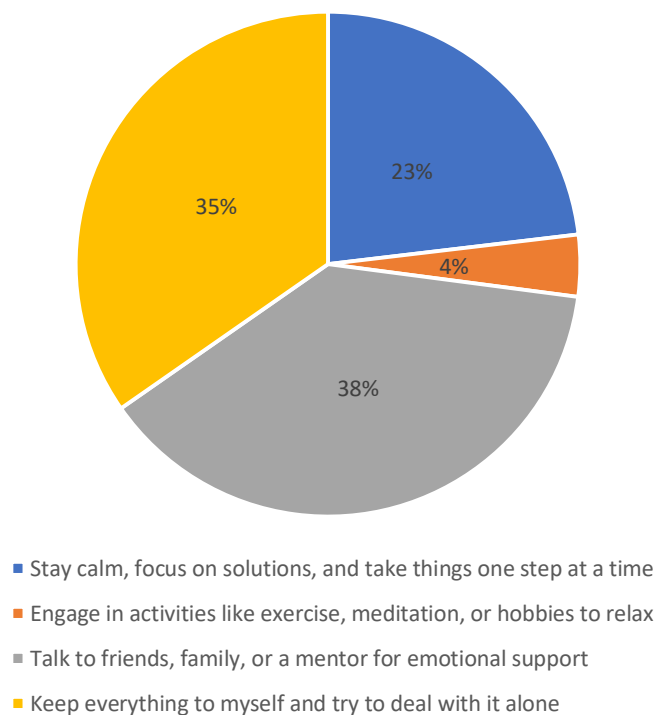
Stress Triggers and Coping Approaches



What is the biggest challenge women face in maintaining mental strenght?



How do you personally handle stress and pressure in daily life?

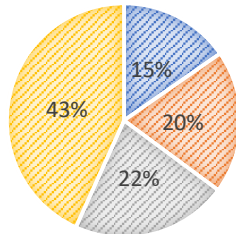


Over half of the respondents (54%) reported experiencing situations that challenged their mental health, with emotional stress (33%), family responsibilities (28%), and financial independence (19%) emerging as the most significant stressors—further intensified by gender roles and societal expectations. In terms of coping mechanisms, the majority (60%) turned to friends and family for support, while a mere 2% sought professional help, indicating either limited access or prevailing stigma around formal mental health care. Alarmingly, 35% admitted to internalizing their struggles and dealing with them alone, a behavior that poses serious risks for long-term emotional well-being. These patterns reveal a silent mental health crisis among female students, where personal networks are heavily relied upon while professional resources remain underused. The findings highlight the urgent need for awareness programs, accessible counseling services, and emotionally safe spaces within academic institutions to address this critical gap in mental health care.

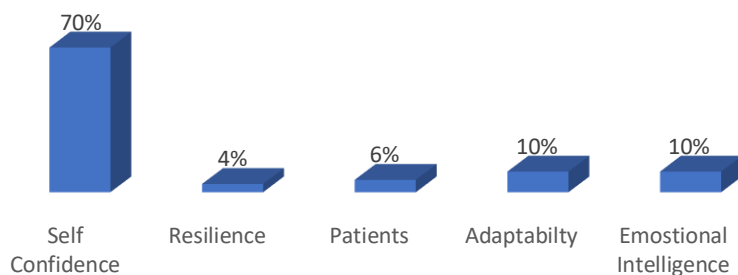
Resilience and Role Models

HOW DO YOU DEFINE A MENTALLY STRONG WOMAN?

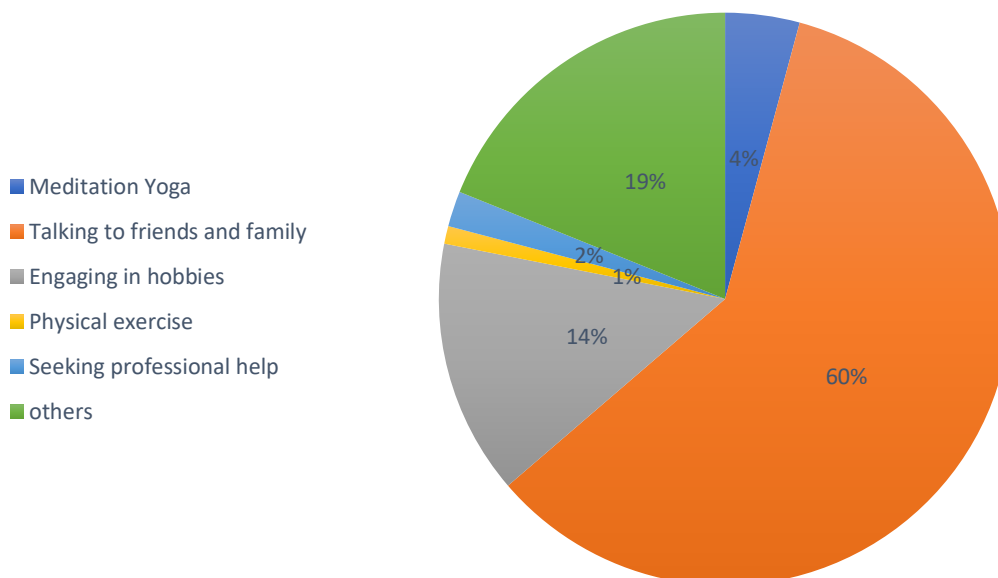
- Someone who never gives up despite challenges
- Someone who remains calm under pressure
- Someone who adapts to changes and keeps going
- All of the above



Which of the following qualities do you think is most important for building mental health?



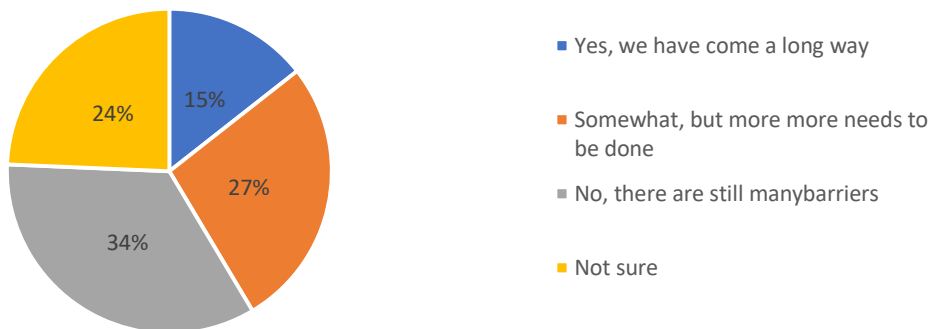
How do you usually manage stress ?



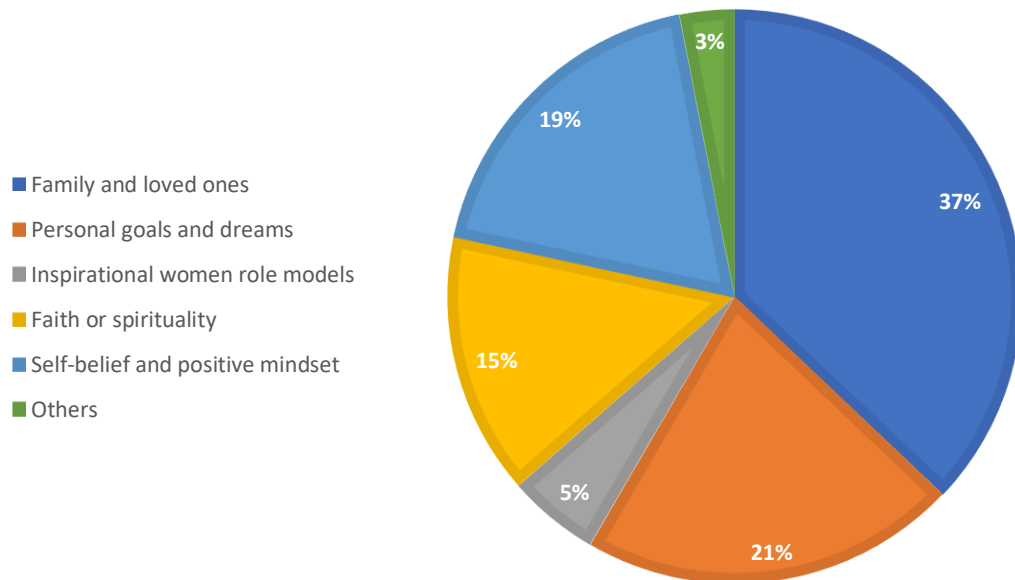
Students widely identified core traits such as adaptability, composure, and persistence as defining characteristics of mental strength, with 43% choosing a combination of all these qualities. A striking 70% of respondents viewed self-confidence as the most essential factor for maintaining mental well-being, placing it well above emotional intelligence, adaptability, or patience. However, despite recognizing the importance of these attributes, students showed limited engagement in practices that build and sustain them. Only 4% reported participating in structured self-care activities like yoga or meditation. This reveals a disconnect between the values students hold and the actions they take—highlighting a gap between intention and implementation. While they aspire to be mentally strong, many lack the resources, guidance, or empowerment to translate these ideals into consistent daily habits.

Support Structures and Motivation

Do you think society provides enough support for women's mental health?

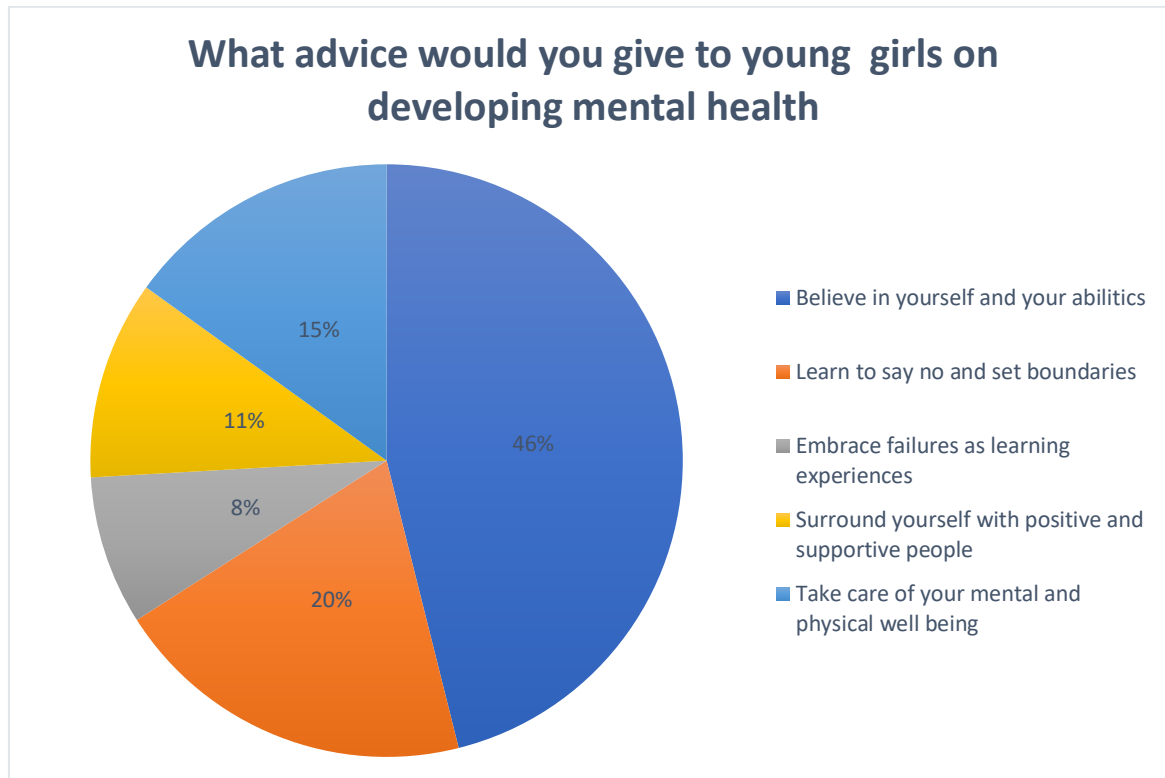


WHAT MOTIVATIONS YOU TO STAY MENTALLY STRONG DURING TOUGH TIMES?



When facing difficult times, students primarily draw strength from family and loved ones (37%), as well as from personal goals (21%) and self-belief (19%). This mix of external and internal motivation highlights their emotional resilience, yet it also underscores a major gap: in the absence of institutional and societal support, these individual coping strategies are often insufficient. Despite increasing conversations around mental health, only 15% of respondents felt that meaningful progress has been made, while 34% believed that society still provides little to no support for women's mental well-being. This disconnect reflects a deeper issue—students may be motivated and self-aware, but without structured reinforcement through campus mental health programs or counseling services, they remain vulnerable to emotional burnout and isolation.

Advice for the Next Generation



When asked what advice they would offer to younger girls regarding mental health, nearly half of the participants (46%) emphasized the importance of believing in oneself, followed by encouraging boundary-setting (20%) and maintaining both mental and physical well-being (15%). These responses reflect the emotional insights students have gained through personal experiences, highlighting their awareness of the inner strength required to navigate life's challenges. Despite facing their own limitations in terms of access to resources or support systems, these young women are eager to empower others with the wisdom they've acquired. Their guidance signals a generational shift—a readiness to break cycles of silence and stigma, provided they are given the tools and encouragement to do so.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that female paramedical students face emotional challenges, even though they understand the importance of mental health. Stress from studies, home responsibilities, and money issues affects their well-being. Many students depend on friends or family for support, but professional help is often missing. Though they value emotional strength, they need more structured guidance. Colleges must create supportive mental health systems to help these students succeed both personally and professionally.

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