



Mental Health and Well-being of Afghan Students in India: Stressors, Coping Strategies, and Support Needs

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Abstract

This study examines the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India, focusing on the challenges they face as international students from a conflict-affected background. The study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach, utilizing an interview-based questionnaire administered online to thirty Afghan students enrolled in various higher education institutions across India. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to enhance clarity and interpretation.

The findings reveal that Afghan students commonly experience stress, anxiety, homesickness, and emotional instability, particularly during the initial period of adjustment. These challenges are driven by academic pressure, financial difficulties, cultural adaptation, separation from family, and uncertainty regarding their future career prospects and visa status. In addition, the ongoing political instability in Afghanistan continues to exert a significant psychological impact on students' mental well-being.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrate resilience by adopting various coping strategies, including seeking social support, engaging in physical activities, and religious or spiritual practices.

The study highlights the urgent need for accessible counseling services, financial assistance, visa stability, and culturally sensitive community support systems to improve the overall well-being of Afghan students in India.

Keywords: Afghan Students; Mental Health; Well-being; International Students; India

1 Introduction

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being, particularly among students who are exposed to academic pressure, social expectations, and significant life transitions. In recent years, mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, and depression have increased globally, especially within higher education settings, where they can substantially affect students' academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life (World Health Organization, 2022).

The situation is even more complex in the context of Afghanistan, where decades of conflict, political instability, and humanitarian crises have had a profound impact on the psychological well-being of its population (Aleami et al., 2023). Prolonged exposure to violence, displacement, and uncertainty has resulted in widespread mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and trauma-related disorders, with young people and students particularly affected (Saleem et al., 2021).

Afghan students pursuing education abroad, including in India, represent a particularly vulnerable group. While studying abroad provides valuable academic and professional opportunities, it also exposes students to new challenges such as cultural adjustment, academic pressure, and difficulties in social integration (Naghavi et al., 2022). Many experience emotional distress due to separation from family and ongoing concerns about the situation in their home country (Green et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Afghan students in India face multiple interrelated stressors, including financial difficulties, social isolation, and uncertainty regarding their future prospects and legal status. These combined pressures create a “double burden” in which past trauma from conflict and displacement interacts with present academic, social, and economic challenges to shape their mental health experiences (Sifat et al., 2024).

Despite growing research on international students and conflict-affected populations, limited attention has been given specifically to Afghan students studying in India. This study therefore aims to examine the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India, focusing on the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they adopt, and support systems required to improve their well-being.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Afghan students studying in India face a complex set of psychological challenges shaped by both pre-migration and post-migration experiences. Exposure to prolonged conflict and displacement in Afghanistan has created long-term mental health vulnerabilities, including heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms. After relocating to India for higher education, these students encounter additional stressors such as academic pressure, cultural adjustment difficulties, financial constraints, and social isolation. These overlapping challenges significantly affect their mental health and overall well-being, often leading to stress, anxiety, emotional instability and reduced academic performance. Moreover, uncertainty regarding future career opportunities, visa status, and the ongoing political situation in Afghanistan further intensifies psychological distress.

Despite the presence of these challenges, there is a lack of focused empirical research examining the mental health and well-being of Afghan students within the Indian educational context. Most existing studies focus on Afghan populations in general or refugee groups, without specifically addressing the experiences of students. This gap limits the development of effective institutional and policy level-interventions.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the mental health experiences of Afghan students in India.

1.2 Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To assess the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India.
- To identify the key factors affecting their mental health.
- To examine the impact of academic, financial, and cultural stressors on their mental health and overall well-being.
- To explore coping mechanisms adopted by Afghan students.
- To suggest measures for improving their mental well-being at institutional and policy levels.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is the mental health condition of Afghan students in India?
- What factors affect their mental well-being?
- How do academic, financial, and cultural challenges influence their mental health?
- What coping strategies do Afghan students use to manage stress effectively?
- What type of support is needed to improve their mental well-being?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Mental Health in Afghan Context

The mental health of the Afghan population has been profoundly shaped by decades of conflict, political instability, and forced displacement. Prolonged exposure to violence and uncertainty has resulted in widespread psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Alemi et al. (2023) argue that mental health challenges in Afghanistan cannot be understood solely at the individual level; rather, they are deeply rooted in structural and socio-political conditions characterized by chronic instability and insecurity (Alemi et al., 2023). Supporting this view, Miller and Rasmussen (2024) emphasize that ongoing daily stressors such as poverty, insecurity, and displacement often have a more significant impact on mental health than exposure to traumatic events alone (Miller & Rasmussen, 2024).

In addition, the World Health Organization (2025) reports that Afghanistan has one of the highest burdens of mental health disorder globally due to prolonged conflict and instability (World Health Organization, 2025). At the same time, Mehrabi et al. (2023) highlight the role of spiritual and religious practices as important coping mechanisms that help individuals manage trauma and reduce psychological distress (Mehrabi et al., 2023).

2.2 Mental Health of Afghan Students and Youth

Afghan students and youth represent a particularly vulnerable group due to their exposure to prolonged conflict during formative years. Research suggests that pre-existing trauma is not eliminated through migration. Instead, it often persists and may intensify when individuals face new academic and environmental challenges.

According to Qamar et al. (2022), Afghan youth experience high levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, sleep disturbance and emotional instability, which negatively affects their academic performance and overall well-being (Qamar et al., 2022). Similarly, Panter-Brick et al. (2018) argue that chronic exposure to adversity significantly shapes emotional development and resilience among young people in conflict affected settings (Panter-Brick et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Neyazi et al. (2024) notes that the long-term psychological effects of conflict frequently extend into adulthood, influencing individuals coping strategies and education experiences. These findings indicate that Afghan students carry complex psychological burdens that continue to affect their adjustment and well-being even after migration (Neyazi et al., 2024).

2.3 Mental Health of Afghan Students in India

Afghan students in India constitute a distinct subgroup of international students who face multiple migration-related stressors. Mental health plays a critical role in shaping outcomes, as students experiencing psychological distress often encounter difficulties in concentration, motivation, and academic performance. Andrade (2006) explains that international students commonly experience adjustment challenges that negatively affect both their academic success and psychological well-being (Andrade, 2006). In the Afghan context, these challenges are further intensified by pre-existing trauma and ongoing concerns about conditions in their home country.

Frounfelker et al. (2023) highlight that Afghan students frequently face overlapping stressors, including financial constraints, social isolation, and anxiety related to family members in Afghanistan. These interconnected challenges significantly contribute to emotional strain and psychological vulnerability, underscoring the need for targeted institutional support within host countries such as India (Frounfelker et al., 2025)

2.4 Acculturation Stress and International Students Mental Health

Acculturation is a key factor influencing the mental health of international students. Berry (2005) defines acculturative stress as the psychological strain resulting from difficulties in adapting to a new cultural environment, particularly when individuals experience marginalization or limited support (Berry, 2005).

Empirical research by Smith and Khawaja (2011) demonstrates that international students often face multiple adjustments challenges, including language barriers, academic pressure, and social isolation, all of which are strongly associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The findings suggest that acculturation is not merely a cultural process but also a significant psychological challenge that directly affect the well-being of international students, particularly those from conflict-affected backgrounds.

2.5 Social Support and Coping Mechanisms

Social support is widely recognized as a critical protective factor in maintaining mental health. Cohen and Wills (1985) propose the “buffering hypothesis”, which suggests that strong social support systems can mitigate the negative effects of stress on mental health (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

In the Afghan context, Alemi et al. (2023) emphasize that individuals often rely on family, community networks, and religious practices as key coping mechanisms. These support systems play an essential role in enhancing emotional resilience and reducing psychological distress (Alemi et al., 2023).

In addition, institutional support mechanisms such as counseling services and peer support programs are crucial in helping students manage stress and adapt to new academic and cultural environments.

2.6 Mental Health Services and Help-Seeking Behavior

Despite the high prevalence of mental health challenges, access to mental health services among the Afghan populations remains limited. The International Rescue Committee (2023) identifies several barriers that hinder help-seeking behavior, including social stigma, lack of awareness, and limited availability of culturally sensitive services (International Rescue Committee, 2023). Similarly, Alemi et al. (2014) found that cultural perceptions and stigma significantly discourage Afghan migrants from seeking professional mental health support (Alemi et al., 2014).

The World Health Organization (2025) further emphasizes the urgent need to develop accessible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive mental health services, particularly for populations affected by conflict and displacement (World Health Organization, 2025).

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the **Stress and Coping Theory** proposed by (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986). Stress and coping theory explain how individuals perceive and manage stressors through cognitive appraisal and adaptive responses. It views stress as a dynamic transaction between a person and their environment rather than a fixed reaction to events, which explains how individuals’ response to stress through cognitive and behavioral strategies. Cognitive and behavioral strategies are core techniques used primarily in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to address unhelpful thoughts, emotions, and actions by targeting cognitive distortions and promoting adaptive behaviors. They work on the principle that thoughts influence feelings and behaviors, so modifying them leads to better outcomes. According to this theory stress arises when individuals perceive an imbalance between environment demands and their coping resources (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986). In Addition, **Acculturation Theory** Acculturation theory explains the cultural changes that occur when individuals or groups from different cultures come into sustained contact, leading to adaptations in behaviors, values, and identities. provides a framework for understanding how adaptation to a new cultural environment influences psychological well-being. Difficulties in cultural adjustment can lead to acculturative stress, which negatively impacts mental health. Together, these theoretical perspectives help explain how Afghan students experience and manage stress in a foreign academic and cultural context (Berry, 2005).

2.8 Research Gap

Although there is growing body of literature on the mental health of Afghans and on international students, significant gaps remain. Most existing studies focus on Afghan populations in general, examine refugee groups rather than students, or are situated in non-Indian host countries. There is a lack of empirical data specifically addressing the mental health and well-being of Afghan students within Indian higher education institutions.

Furthermore, limited research has explored the combined impact of academic, cultural, financial, and political stressors on Afghan students in India, or examined how these stressors interact with pre-existing trauma, coping strategies, and social support. The present study addresses these gaps by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India, with a specific focus on their lived experiences, coping strategies and support needs.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-method research design to explore the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India. The primary focus of the study is on qualitative data, which allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and emotional conditions related to mental health.

A qualitative approach is particularly suitable, as it enables the researcher to capture rich and detailed insights into the lived experiences of Afghan students. In addition, limited quantitative elements, such as descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), are incorporated to support and enhance the interpretation of qualitative findings.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Data were collected through an interview-based questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences related to mental health, academic pressure, cultural adjustment, financial challenges, and coping mechanisms. The use of open-ended questions allowed respondents to freely express their thoughts and experiences, resulting in detailed and meaningful qualitative data.

3.3 Sample Size

The study included a total of thirty Afghan students currently studying in various educational institutions across India. This sample size is appropriate for qualitative research, where the focus is on depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization.

3.4 Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling technique was employed to select participants based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Afghan students who were available and provided consent were included in the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview responses were systematically reviewed, coded, and categorized to identify recurring patterns and key themes reflecting the experiences of Afghan students in India. The coding process involved organizing the data into meaningful categories, which were subsequently grouped into broader themes, including mental health conditions, academic pressure, cultural and social challenges, financial difficulties, future uncertainty, and coping mechanisms. To enhance the clarity and presentation of findings, descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), were employed to illustrate the distribution of responses across the identified themes. This approach facilitated a structured interpretation of qualitative data while maintaining analytical depth. Furthermore, selected participants' responses were incorporated in the result section to support the identified themes and provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of the respondents. This combined qualitative-quantitative approach enhances the reliability and validity of the findings by integrating thematic interpretation with numerical representation.

4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the understanding that the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including both pre-migration experiences and post-migration challenges. The independent variables in this study include key stressors such as academic pressure, financial difficulties, and social adjustment challenges, past trauma, and future uncertainty. These factors collectively contribute to the psychological burden experienced by Afghan students. The dependent variable is mental health and well-being, which encompasses conditions such as stress, anxiety, emotional instability, and overall psychological functioning.

In addition, coping mechanisms and social support systems act as moderating variables. These factors help reduce the negative impact of stressors by enhancing resilience and psychological stability. Support from friends, family, and institutions, along with personal coping strategies such as physical activity and religious practices, play a crucial role in maintaining mental well-being. This framework is supported by **Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus and**

Folkman, 1984), which explains how individuals respond to stress, and **Acculturation Theory**, which highlights the psychological impact of adapting to a new cultural environment.

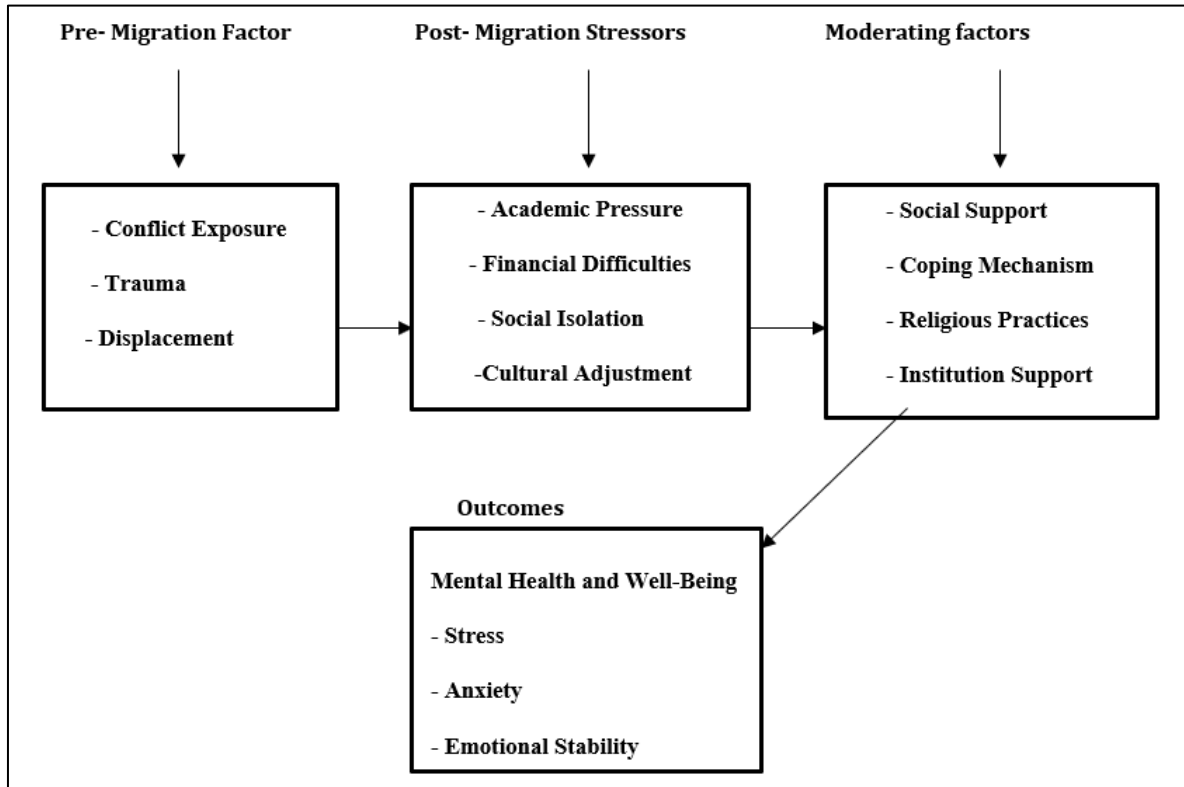


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

5 Results and Interpretations

After completing the data collection process, the next stage involved data analysis and interpretation. The data were collected through online interview-based questionnaire from Afghan students in India. To analyze the responses, thematic coding and descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies and percentage) were employed. The responses were systematically categorized into themes, and their frequencies and percentages were calculated to provide a clearer understanding of patterns in the data. The results are presented through tables and figures for effective interpretation.

Table 1 Overall Mental Health and Well-being of Afghan Students

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Mixed Mental Health (Up and Down)	12	40%
2	Adaptation and Improvement	10	33%
3	Stress and Anxiety	8	27%
4	Homesickness	7	23%
5	Feeling Stable and Good	5	17%
6	Feeling Safe in India	4	13%
7	Severe	3	10%

5.1 Interpretation

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India are **dynamic and multifaceted**. A significant proportion of respondents 40% described their mental health as mixed, reflecting the coexistence of both positive and negative experiences. Additionally, 33% participants reported adaptation and gradual improvement over time, suggesting resilience and the ability to adjust to a new environment. However, a considerable number of students continue to experience psychological challenges, with 27% reporting stress and anxiety, and 23% indicating feelings of homesickness. A smaller proportion of respondents 17% reported stable or positive mental health, often associated with sense of safety and better opportunities in India. Notably, 10% participants experienced distress, highlighting the presence of vulnerable individuals who may require immediate psychological support.

Overall, the findings suggest that Afghan students' mental health is not static but evolves over time, influenced by both adaptation processes and ongoing external stressors related to their academic, social and personal circumstances. These patterns are further supported these by participant's responses. **One participant stated, "I often feel stressed and anxious because of my studies and uncertain future." Another respondent noted, "Being away from my family and facing financial problems makes me feel mentally exhausted."**

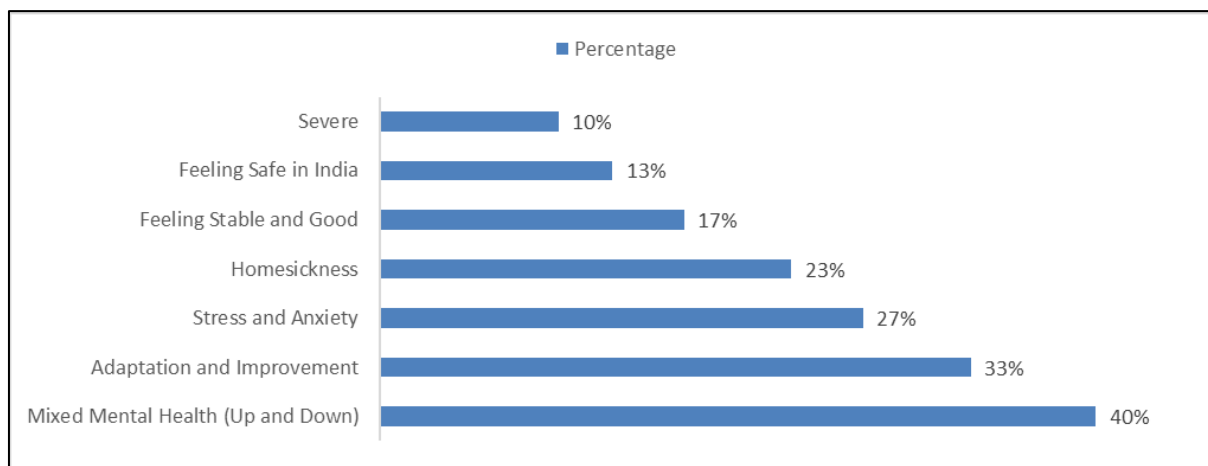


Figure 2 Overall Mental Health and Well-being of Afghan Students

Table 2 Experience of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Experienced Stress and Anxiety	18	60%
2	Academic Pressure	12	40%
3	Homesickness/ Family Separation	10	33%
4	Cultural Adjustment Stress	9	30%
5	Emotional Exhaustion/ Low Mood	8	27%
6	Feeling Stable and Good	7	23%
7	No Significant Stress	2	7%

5.2 Interpretation

The findings in Table 2 demonstrate that a large proportion of Afghan students experience considerable psychological distress during their studies in India. Approximately 60% of respondents reported experiencing stress and anxiety, indicating that mental health concerns are highly prevalent within this group. Academic demands appear to be a key contributing factor, affecting 40% of participants. Particularly in related to examinations, academic workload, and performance expectations. In addition, homesickness and separation from family were identified by 33% of respondents as a significant emotional challenge, highlighting the impact of migration and distance from support systems. Adjustment to a new cultural environment also contributes notably

to stress, with 30% of respondents reporting difficulties related to language barriers, and unfamiliar social norm. Moreover, 27% of respondents reported emotional exhaustion and low mood, reflecting symptoms often associated with depression. At the same time, 23% of students indicated a relatively stable mental state, suggesting that some individuals are able to adapt effectively existing pressures. In contrast, only 7% reported and absence of significant reinforcing the observation that psychological strain is widespread.

Taken together, these results point to the interconnected nature of academic, social, and emotional challenges, all of which contribute to elevated levels of stress and anxiety among students. This pattern is further illustrated through participants' narratives. **One respondent stated, "Academic pressure and being away from my family make me feel very stressed." Another explained, "Sometimes I feel emotionally exhausted due to financial and academic problems."**

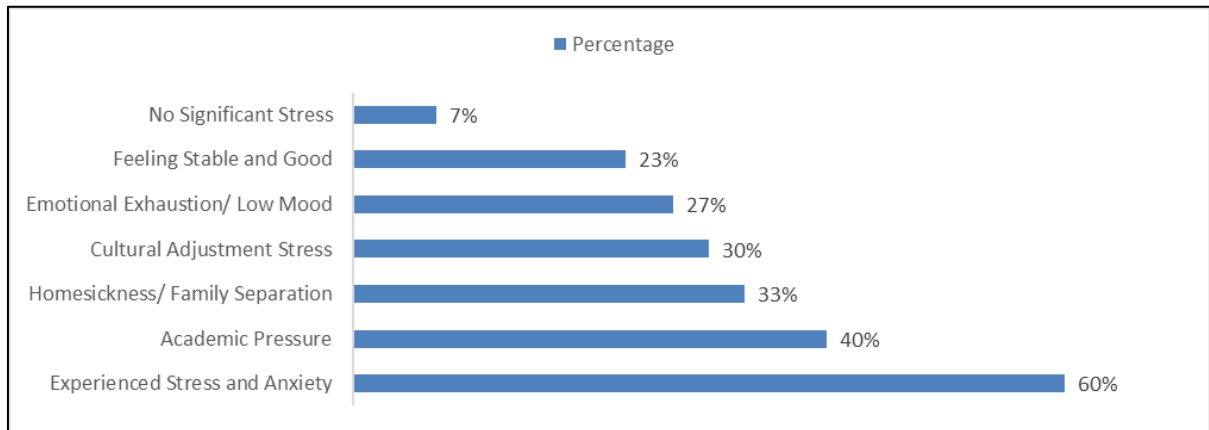


Figure 3 Experience of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

Table 3 Frequency of Emotional Stress and Mental Overwhelm

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Frequent Stress (Weekly/Daily)	11	37%
2	Occasional Stress (Exams/workload)	10	33%
3	Situational Stress (Special Even)	6	20%
4	Rare Stress	4	13%
5	No Stress	2	7%

5.3 Interpretation

The results in Table 3 indicate that emotional stress is common and recurring experience among Afghan students in India. a notable proportion of respondents 37% reported experiencing stress on a daily or weekly basis, suggesting that psychological pressure is a regular part of their lives. In addition, 33% of participant reported occasional stress, particularly during periods of increased academic demand such as examinations and assignment deadline. This pattern highlights the strong link between academic workload and fluctuations in stress levels. Approximately 20% of respondents experienced situational stress, meaning that their stress levels increased during specific circumstances, including personal challenges, academic deadlines, or concerns about the future. A smaller proportion 13% reported experiencing stress rarely, while only 7% of respondents indicated that they do not experience stress, reinforcing the observation that psychological strain is widespread among Afghan students in India.

Overall, these results suggest that emotional stress is not only widespread but also persist, often influenced by academic responsibilities and personal circumstances. This underscores the need for effective stress management strategies and institutional support systems to help students cope with ongoing psychological pressure. This trend is further illustrated through participants' responses. **One participant stated, "I feel stressed almost every day**

because of studies and personal concerns.” Another noted,” Stress increases especially during exams and deadlines.”

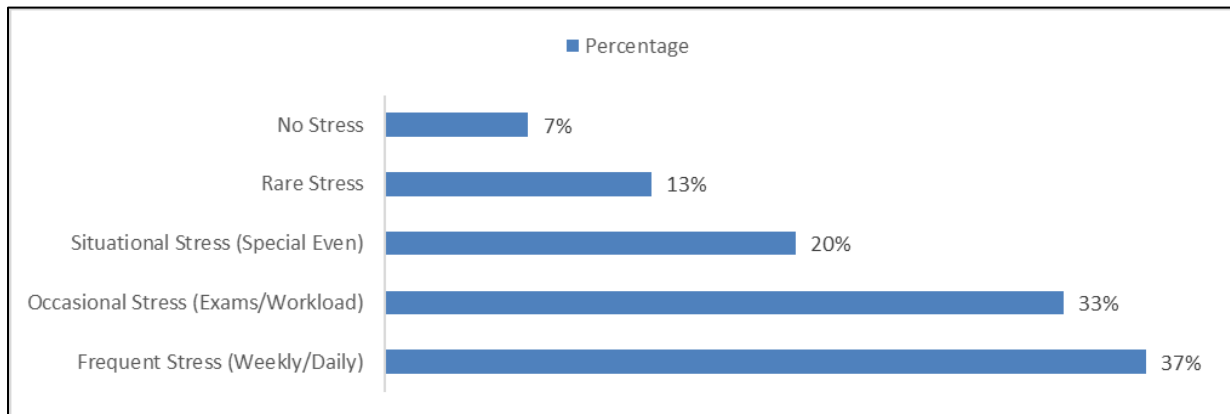


Figure 4 Frequency of Emotional Stress and Mental Overwhelm

Table 4 Impact of Academic Pressure on Mental Health

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	High Stress and Anxiety	18	43%
2	Mental Health	9	30%
3	Sleep Disturbance and Fatigue	8	27%
4	Reduced Concentration	7	23%
5	Motivation and Self-Discipline (Positive Impact)	6	20%
6	Mild/ Minimal Impact	3	10%

5.4 Interpretation

The findings in Table 4 show that academic pressure is a significant factor influencing the mental health of Afghan students in India. A substantial proportion of respondents 43% reported experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety as a direct result of academic demands, including examination, deadlines, and performance expectations. In addition, 30% of participants reported mental exhaustion, suggesting that prolonged academic stress may lead to burnout and emotional fatigue. These patterns highlight the multidimensional impact of academic pressure, affecting students both psychologically and physically. Beyond academic pressure also contributes to physical challenges. Approximately 27% respondents reported sleep disturbances and fatigue, while 23% indicate reduced concentration, both of which can negatively affect academic performance and overall well-being. Interestingly, 20% of participants perceived academic pressure as motivating factor. Helping them develop discipline, time management skills, and a sense of responsibility. However, despite this positive aspect, the overall impact of academic pressure remains predominantly negative for the majority of students. Only 10% reported minimal or no impact, indicating that most students are affected by academic-related stress to varying degrees.

Overall, the results suggest that academic pressure acts as a major stressor that significantly influences the mental health, cognitive functioning, and physical well-being. This pattern is further supported by participants' responses. **One respondent stated,” The pressure of exams and assignments affects my mental health a lot.” Another noted,” Because of academic pressure, I sometimes cannot sleep properly.”**

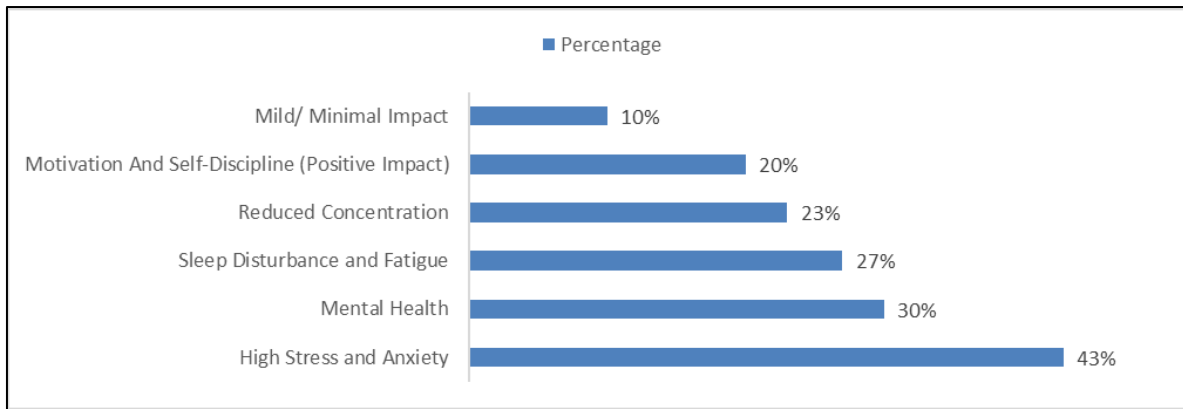


Figure 5 Impact of Academic Pressure on Mental Health

Table 5 Cultural and Social Adjustment Challenges

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Language Barrier	11	37%
2	Cultural Differences	10	33%
3	Difficulty Making Friends/ Social Isolation	9	30%
4	Food Differences	7	23%
5	Feeling Like an Outsider	6	20%
6	No Major Challenges	4	13%

5.5 Interpretation

The data presented in Table 5 indicate that culture and social adjustment represent as significant concern for Afghan students studying in India. The most commonly reported issue is the language barrier 37%, which limits affective communication and hinders social integration. Cultural differences were identified by 33% of respondents as a major source of difficulty, including variations in social norms, values, and everyday practices. These differences often contribute to feelings of discomfort and cultural disorientation during the adjustment process. In addition, 30% participants reported difficulty in forming friendships and experiencing social isolation, highlights the challenges of building social networks in a new environment. This lack of social connection can negatively impact emotional well-being and increase feelings of loneliness. Food related differences were reported 23% of students as a challenge, reflecting the broader issue of adapting to new cultural setting. Furthermore, 20% of respondents expressed feelings of being an outsider, indicating a sense of exclusion or lack of belonging within the host society. However, a smaller proportion of participants 13% reported no major challenges, suggesting that some students are able to adapt successfully to the new cultural and social environment.

Overall, the findings suggest that cultural and social adjustment difficulties play a crucial role in shaping the mental health and well-being of Afghan students, often contributing to stress, isolation, and emotional discomfort. This is further reflected in participant's responses. **One participant stated, "Language differences make it difficult to communicate with others." Another respondent noted, "I feel like an outsider sometimes because of cultural differences."**

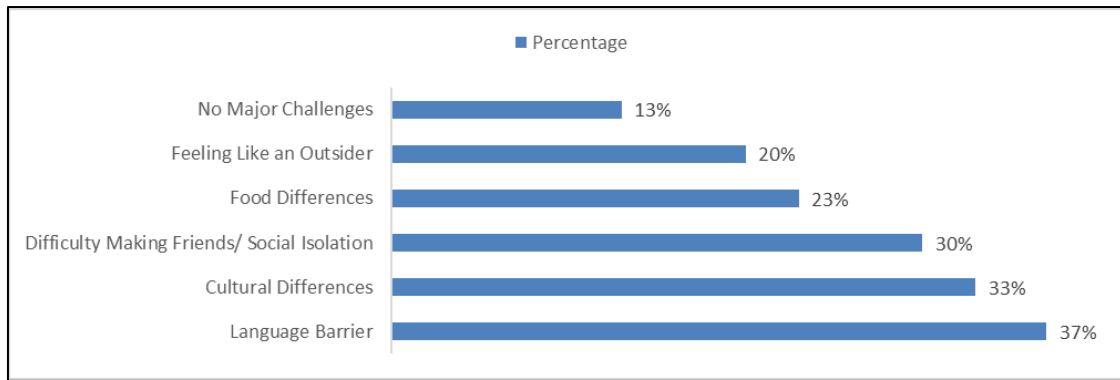


Figure 6 Cultural and Social Adjustment Challenges

Table 6 Impact of Financial Difficulties on Mental Health and Well-being

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	High Financial Stress	12	40%
2	Constant Worry About Expenses	10	33%
3	Moderate Financial Stress	8	27%
4	Impact of Studies/Concentration	7	23%
5	Motivation to Manage Finances	5	17%
6	No Financial Issues	4	13%

5.6 Interpretation

The data presented in Table 6 indicate that financial difficulties are a major source of stress among Afghan students in India, significantly affecting their mental health and overall well-being. A substantial proportion of 40% respondents reported experiencing high levels of financial stress, reflecting the challenges associated with managing tuition fees, accommodation, and daily living expenses. In addition, 33% of participants expressed constant worry about expenses, suggesting that financial concerns are persistent and ongoing. A further 27% respondents reported moderate financial stress, indicating that the majority of students experience financial pressure to varying degrees. Financial difficulties also have a direct impact on academic performance, with 23% of students reporting reduced concentration and difficulty focusing on their studies due to financial concerns. This highlights the interconnected nature of financial stability and academic success. Interestingly, 17% of respondents viewed financial challenges as motivating factor, encouraging them to develop better financial management skills and a stronger sense of responsibility. However, despite this positive perspective, the overall impact of financial stress remains predominantly negative. A smaller proportion of respondents 13% reported no significant issues, indicating that only a minority of students are financially stable.

Overall, the results suggest that financial difficulties constitute a critical stressor that not only affects students' mental health but also influence their academic performance and overall quality of life. This further reflected in participants' responses. **One student stated, "managing my expenses is very stressful and affects my studies."** **another respondent noted, "financial problems make it hard to focus on my education."**

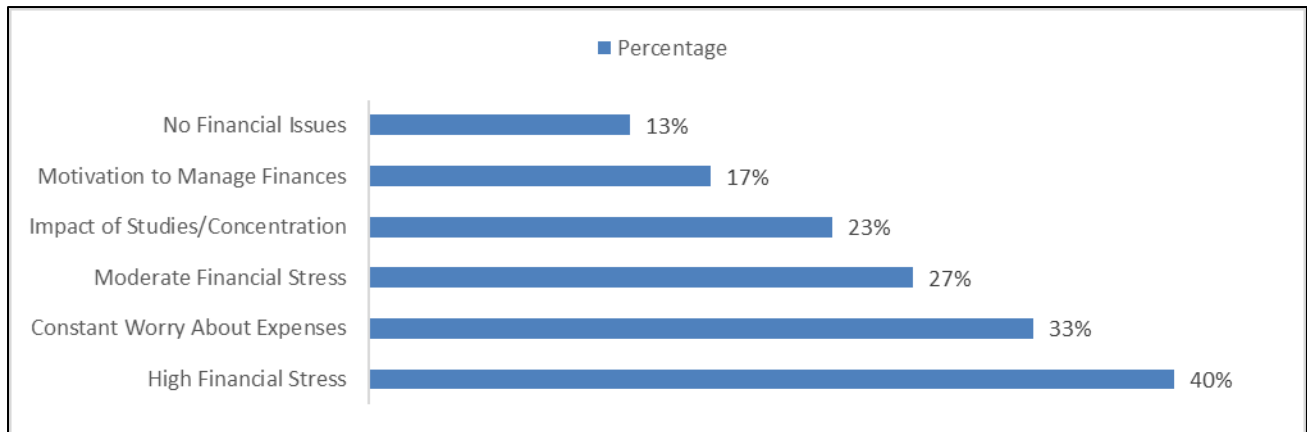


Figure 7 Impact of Financial Difficulties on Mental Health and Well-being

Table 7 The Impact of Future Uncertainty on Mental Health

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	High Anxiety About Future	13	43%
2	Concern About Afghanistan Situation	12	40%
3	Worry About Career Opportunities	11	37%
4	Feeling Insecure/ Unstable	10	33%
5	Visa and Legal Uncertainty	9	30%
6	Hope and Positive Outlook	6	20%

5.7 Interpretation

The data presented in Table 7 reveal that future uncertainty is a major source of psychological distress among Afghan students in India. A significant proportion of respondents 43% reported high levels of anxiety regarding their future, reflecting concerns about long-term stability and life planning. In addition, 40% of respondents reported being concerned about the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, suggesting that students remain emotionally connected to their home country. This transnational concern adds an additional layer of psychological burden beyond academic and social stressors. Concerns related to career opportunities were reported by 37% of participants, highlighting uncertainty about employment prospects after completing their education. Furthermore, 33% of participants reported feelings of insecurity and instability, reflecting a lack of clarity regarding their future direction. Visa and legal uncertainty were identified by 30% of students, emphasizing the stress associated with immigration policies and residency conditions. Despite these challenges, 20% of respondents expressed a sense of hope and maintained a positive outlook, demonstrating resilience and optimism.

Overall, the findings suggest that future uncertainty is a critical factor influencing the mental health of Afghan students, contributing to heightened anxiety, emotional instability, and a diminished sense of security. These results highlight the need for institutional and policy-level interventions to address students' concerns regarding career pathways, visa stability, and long-term prospects. **This is further reflected in participants' responses. One participant stated, "I am always worried about my future and career opportunities." Another respondent noted, "Uncertainty about visa and future plans makes me anxious."**

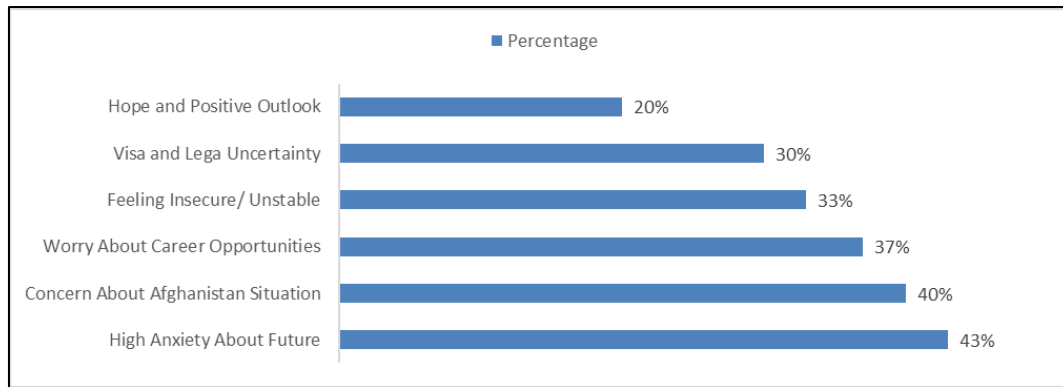


Figure 8 The Impact of Future Uncertainty on Mental Health

Table 8 Impact of Past Conflict and Instability on Mental Health

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Ongoing Psychological Impact	14	47%
2	Anxiety and Overthinking	11	37%
3	Emotional Distress (Sadness/Fear)	10	33%
4	Flashbacks and Memories	8	27%
5	Resilience and Personal Strength	6	20%
6	Minimal / No Impact	4	13%

5.8 Interpretation

The data presented in Table 8 demonstrate that past experiences of conflict and instability in Afghanistan continue to have a significant and lasting impact on the mental health of Afghan students in India. A substantial proportion of respondents 47% reported ongoing psychological effects, indicating that past trauma remains a critical factor influencing their emotional well-being. In addition, 37% of participants reported anxiety and overthinking, while 33% reported emotional distress, including feelings of sadness and fear. These patterns suggest that exposure to conflict has long-term psychological consequences that persist even after relocation to a safer environment. approximately 27% of respondents reported experienced flashbacks and recurring memories, which are common associated with trauma-related conditions. such symptoms can interfere with daily functioning, academic performance, and overall mental stability. Despite these challenges 20% of respondents highlighted resilience and personal strength, indicating their ability to cope with past experiences and adapt to new circumstances. A smaller proportion 13% reported minimal or no impact, suggesting variation in individual responses to trauma.

Overall, the findings underscore the enduring psychological impact of conflict and instability, reinforcing the idea that migration does not eliminate past trauma but rather interacts with present stressors to shape mental health outcomes. This highlights the need for trauma- informed support system for Afghan students in host countries. This is further reflected in participants' responses. **One participant shared," Memories of past conflict still affect my mental health.' Another respondent mentioned," Sometimes I remember difficult experiences from Afghanistan, which makes me anxious."**

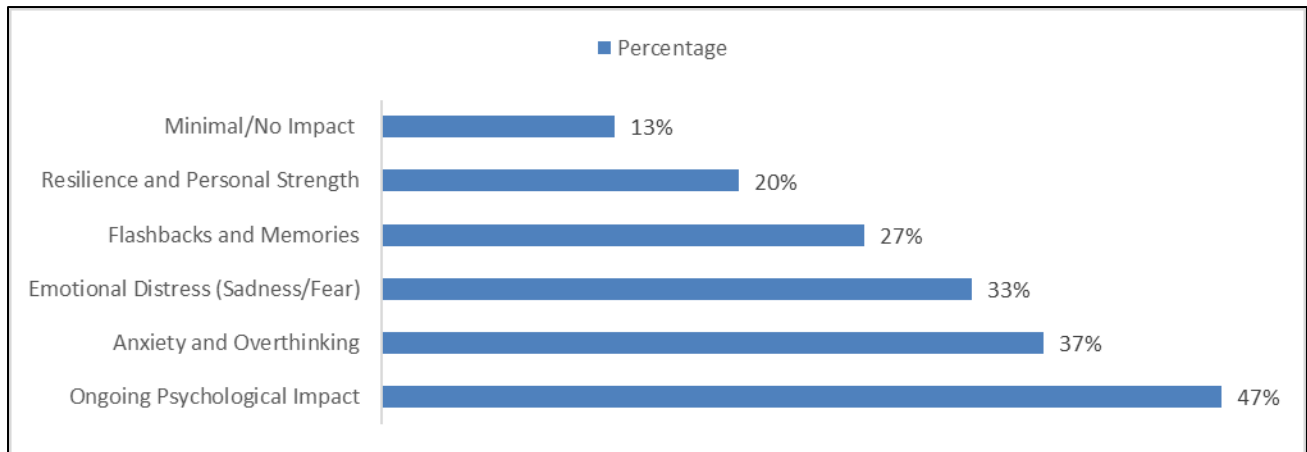


Figure 9 Impact of Past Conflict and Instability on Mental Health

Table 9 Coping Strategies for Stress and Well-being

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Social Support (Friends/ Family)	14	43%
2	Physical Activities (Gym/ Exercise)	10	33%
3	Entertainment (Music/ Movies)	9	30%
4	Time Management/ Staying Busy	8	27%
5	Religious/ Spiritual Practices	7	23%
6	Relaxation (Rest/ Alone Time)	6	20%
7	Travel/ Exploration	5	17%

5.9 Interpretation

The data presented in Table 9 reveal that Afghan student employ a diverse range of coping strategies to manage stress and maintain their mental well-being. The most common reported strategy, identified by 43% of respondents, is seeking social support from friends and family, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships in emotional regulation and psychological resilience. Physical activities such as gym and exercise were reported by 33% of participants, indicating the role of physical well-being. In addition, 30% of respondents relied on entertainment activities, including music and movies, as a means of relaxation and stress relief. Time management and staying engaged in productive activities were identified by 27% of students as effective coping strategies, helping them manage academic responsibilities and reduce feelings of overwhelm. Furthermore, 23% of participants reported using religious or spiritual practices, reflecting the cultural and personal significance of faith-based coping mechanism. Other strategies include relaxation techniques such as rest and spending time alone 20% as well as travel and exploration 17%, which help individuals refresh their mental state and reduce psychological strain.

Overall, the findings suggest that Afghan students adopt both emotional and behavioral coping mechanisms to navigate stress, demonstrating a considerable degree of resilience despite facing multiple challenges. these coping strategies play a crucial role in mitigating the negative impact of stressors and maintaining mental well-being. This is further reflected in participants' responses. **One participant stated," Talking to friends and family helps me manage stress." Another respondent noted," Going to the gym and staying active improves my mental health."**

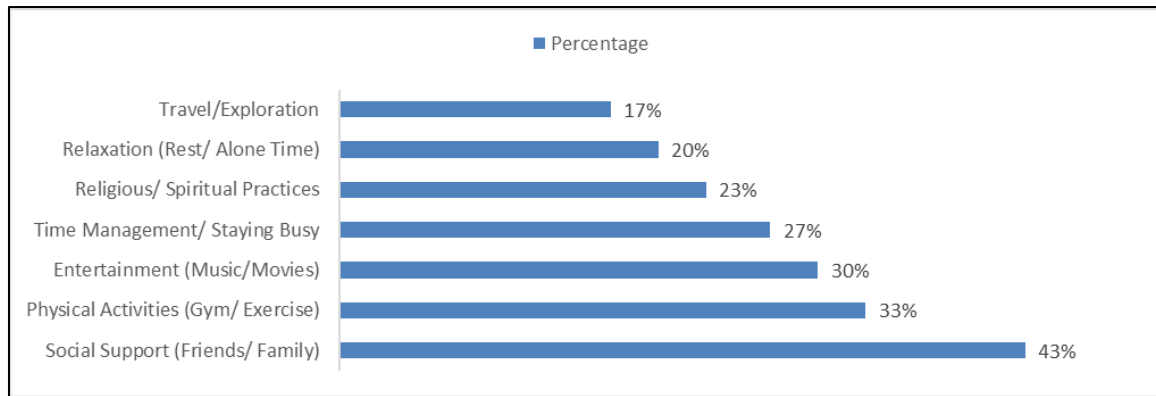


Figure 10 Coping Strategies for Stress and Well-being

Table 10 Support Needed to Improve Mental Well-being

SN	Themes	Total	Percentage
1	Counseling and Mental Health Services	14	47%
2	Financial Support	12	40%
3	Visa Stability/ Legal Support	10	33%
4	Academic Support and Guidance	9	30%
5	Community And Social Program	8	27%
6	Career Opportunities	7	23%
7	Cultural Integration Programs	6	20%

5.10 Interpretation

The data presented in Table 10 highlights the key areas of support required to improve the mental well-being of Afghan students in India. The most prominent need, identified by 47% of respondents, is access to counseling and mental health services, indicating a strong demand for professional psychological support within educational institutions. Financial support was reported by 40% of participants as a critical requirement, reflecting the significant burden of tuition fees, accommodation, and daily living expenses. In addition, 33% of students emphasized the importance of visa stability and legal support, as uncertainty in these areas contributes substantially to stress and anxiety. Academic support and guidance were identified by 30% of respondents as essential for managing academic pressure and improving performance. Furthermore, 27% highlights the need for community and social support programs, which can foster a sense of belonging and reduce social isolation. While 23% emphasize the importance of improved career opportunities and future planning support. Cultural integration programs were reported by 20% of participants as beneficial in easing the adjustment process, while, and better career opportunities.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving the mental well-being of Afghan students requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional support system. This includes institutional intervention, financial assistance, policy-level changes, and community-based initiatives to address the diverse challenges faced by students. This is further reflected in participants' responses. **One participant state, "Access to counseling services would help improve my mental health." Another respondent mentioned, "Financial and academic support would reduce a lot of stress."**

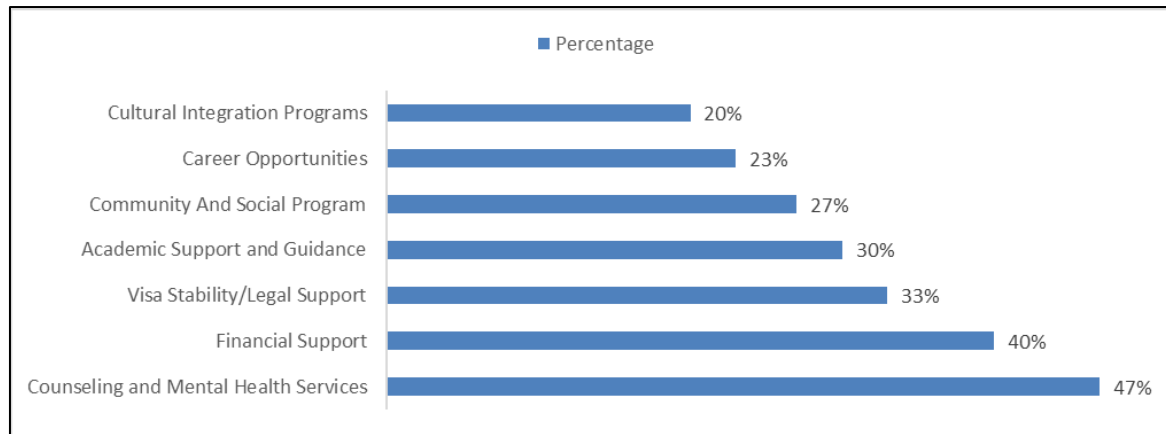


Figure 11 Support Needed to Improve Mental Well-being

6 Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India, highlighting the complex interaction between migration-related challenges, academic pressure, and socio-political factors. These results are largely consistent with existing literature on international students and conflict-affected populations.

6.1 Mental Health as a Dynamic Process

The study reveals that the mental health of Afghan students is not static but dynamic and evolving over time. Many students initially experienced homesickness, stress, and emotional instability upon arrival in India, which aligns with the concept of acculturative stress commonly observed among international students. Over time, several respondents reported adaptation and improvement, indicating resilience and coping capacity. However, the persistence of mixed emotional states suggests that adaptation does not eliminate psychological challenges but transforms them into ongoing, manageable stress.

6.2 Prevalence of Stress and Anxiety

The findings indicate that stress and anxiety are widespread among Afghan students, with the majority of respondents reporting frequent psychological distress. Academic pressure, cultural adjustment, and separation from family emerged as key contributing factors. These findings are consistent with previous research, which suggests that international students often face heightened psychological pressure due to academic demands and limited support systems. The presence of emotional exhaustion and low mood further reflects symptoms associated with depression and mental fatigue.

6.3 Academic and Financial Stressors

Academic pressure was identified as a major stressor, significantly affecting students' mental health through increased anxiety, sleep disturbances, and reduced concentration. Although some students viewed academic pressure as a motivating factor, the overall impact was predominantly negative. Similarly, financial difficulties were found to have substantial psychological impact, with many students reporting constant worry about expenses, which not only affects their mental well-being but also interferes with their academic performance. These findings highlight the interconnected relationship between financial stability, academic success, and mental health.

6.4 Cultural Adjustment and Social Isolation

Cultural and social adjustment challenges, including language barriers, differences in social norms, were identified as significant contributors to stress. Many students reported difficulty forming social connections, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion. These findings reinforce the importance of social integration and a sense of belonging in maintaining mental well-being. A lack of supportive social networks can intensify psychological distress and hinder successful adaptation.

6.5 Impact of Future Uncertainty

One of most significant findings of this study is the impact of future uncertainty on mental health. Concerns related to career opportunities, visa status, and the situation in Afghanistan contribute to high levels of anxiety and emotional instability. This reflects the concept of transnational stress, where individuals are affected by conditions in both their home and host countries. Afghan students continue to experience emotional strain due to their connection to ongoing instability in Afghanistan, even while residing in India.

6.6 Lasting Impact of Conflict and Trauma

The study highlights the enduring psychological effects of past conflict and instability in Afghanistan. Many students reported ongoing symptoms such as anxiety, emotional distress, and traumatic memories. These findings align with trauma-related research, which suggests that exposure to conflict can result in long-term psychological consequences. Importantly, migration does not eliminate trauma but interacts with current stressors to influence mental health outcomes.

6.7 Coping Strategies and Resilience

Despite facing multiple challenges, Afghan students demonstrate significant resilience through various coping strategies. Social support, physical activity, entertainment, and religious practices were identified as key mechanisms for managing stress. These findings emphasize that while students are vulnerable to psychological challenges, they also possess strong adaptive capacities. Coping strategies play a critical role in mitigating the negative effects of stress and maintaining emotional balance.

6.8 Need for Institutional and Structural Support

The findings strongly emphasize the need for comprehensive support systems to improve the mental well-being of Afghan students. Key areas of intervention include counseling services, financial assistance, visa stability, academic support, and social integration programs. This suggests that mental health is not solely an individual issue but also a structural and institutional concern. Effective policies and support mechanisms are essential to address the complex challenges faced by Afghan students.

Overall, the mental health of Afghan students in India is shaped by a combination of:

- **Acculturation stress**
- **Academic and financial pressure**
- **Future uncertainty**
- **Past trauma and conflict exposure**

While students demonstrate resilience and adaptability, the persistence of these stressors highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to support their mental well-being and academic success.

7 Conclusion

This study examined the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India, highlighting the complex challenges they face as international students from a conflict-affected background. The findings demonstrate that students' mental health is influenced by a combination of migration-related stress, academic pressure, financial difficulties, cultural adjustment challenges, and ongoing concerns about the situation in Afghanistan.

The study found that many students initially experience stress, homesickness, and emotional instability upon arrival in India. Although a significant number of students gradually adapt and demonstrate resilience, their mental health remains dynamic, with fluctuations between stability and distress. Stress and anxiety were identified as common experiences, largely driven by academic demands, separation from family, and uncertainty about the future career prospects and visa status. Financial difficulties and cultural adjustment challenges further contribute to psychological strain, affecting both academic performance and overall well-being.

Importantly, the findings also reveal the lasting impact of past conflict and instability in Afghanistan, which continues to affect students' emotional and psychological conditions. Despite these challenges, Afghan students employ a range of coping strategies, including social support, physical activity, and religious practices, demonstrating resilience and adaptability. Overall, this study concludes that while Afghan students in India exhibit

strong coping abilities, they remain vulnerable to multiple and overlapping stressors. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and support organizations to ensure their mental well-being and academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the mental well-being of Afghan students in India.

- **University Level Support:** Universities should establish accessible and culturally sensitive counseling services especially tailored for international students. Dedicated students support centers should be developed to address academic, emotional, and social challenges. Additionally, orientation programs and cultural integration initiatives should be organized to help Afghan students adapt more effectively to the new environment.
- **Financial Support and Scholarships:** Educational institutions and relevant authorities should expand financial assistance programs and scholarship opportunities for Afghan students. Ensuring timely disbursement of stipends and financial aid can significantly reduce stress related to living expenses and tuition fee.
- **Visa and Policy Support:** Government authorities should provide clear, consistent, and stable visa policies to reduce uncertainty among students. Consideration should also be given to allowing part-time work opportunities for international students, which can help them manage financial challenges and gain practical experience.
- **Mental Health Awareness:** Institutions should conduct regular mental health awareness programs to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior. Faculty members and administrative staff should be trained to identify signs of psychological distress and provide appropriate support or referrals.
- **Community and Social Support:** Universities should promote peer support groups and students- led communities to foster social interaction and sense of belonging. Creating inclusive campus environment can help reduce feelings of isolation and improve overall well-being.
- **Career and Future Planning Support:** institutions should provide career counseling services and job placement support tailored to international students. Guidance regarding post-study opportunities, internships, and career pathways can help reduce anxiety related to future uncertainty.
- **Trauma-Informed Support Services:** Given the lasting impact of conflict and instability, universities should adopt trauma-informed approaches in their support service. This includes providing specialized counseling and creating safe space where students can openly discuss their experiences without fear of stigma.

Overall, improving the mental well-being of Afghan students requires a comprehensive and multi-level approach involving universities, policymakers, and community stakeholders. Addressing academic, financial, psychological and social challenges collectively can significantly enhance students' well-being and academic success.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Statement of Ethical approval

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards.

Statement of Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study.

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Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

This appendix presents the interview questions used to collect data for the study on the mental health and well-being of Afghan students in India.

- How would you describe your overall mental health and well-being since coming to India?
- Have you experienced stress, anxiety, or depression during your studies in India: please explain your experience.
- How often do you feel emotionally stressed or mentally overwhelmed?
- How does academic pressures affect your mental health and well-being?
- What challenges do you face in adjusting to Indian culture and social life?
- To what extent do financial difficulties impact your mental well-being?
- How does uncertainty about your future (career, visa, situation in Afghanistan) affect your mental health?
- Do past experiences related to conflict or instability in Afghanistan still affect your mental health? if yes, how?
- What strategies or activities help you cope with stress and maintain your well-being?
- What kind of support would help improve the mental well-being of Afghan students in India?