Exploring the Relationship Between Social Factors and Dark Emotions in Higher Education Students

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Abstract

The emotional and psychological well-being of higher education students is significantly influenced by various social factors. These include family, friends, relationships, societal expectations, and even influencers. Negative emotional states, commonly referred to as dark emotions—such as sadness, anger, fear, stress, jealousy, guilt, and lust—often arise from interactions with these social environments. This paper explores the relationship between these social factors and the development of dark emotions in higher education students. It highlights how social contexts can act as either triggers or buffers for emotional well-being. The study proposes practical strategies to address social factors, thereby alleviating the negative emotions experienced by students.

Keywords: Dark emotions, social factors, higher education students, emotional well-being, stress, societal influence, family dynamics

Introduction

Dark emotions, such as anxiety, stress, frustration, and depression, have increasingly been recognized as significant factors influencing the well-being and academic performance of students in higher education (Beiter et al., 2015). Among the various contributors to these emotions, social factors play a crucial role. Social factors encompass a range of external influences, such as peer relationships, social support, family expectations, and societal pressures, all of which can significantly shape students' emotional experiences (Stewart & Thomas, 2019). In the context of Gujarat, a state known for its diverse cultural and social landscape, understanding how these factors interact with students' dark emotions is essential to developing effective interventions.

Higher education students often face unique social pressures, ranging from the demand to conform to societal expectations to navigating complex peer dynamics (Kaur & Kaur, 2020). Social isolation, competition, and family responsibilities may exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression (Arnett, 2016). Furthermore, the collectivist culture in many parts of India, including Gujarat, tends to emphasize communal success, placing additional stress on students who may already be struggling with academic performance (Saraswathi & Tripathi, 2021).

By exploring the relationship between social factors and dark emotions, this study seeks to shed light on the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the mental health challenges faced by students in Gujarat. The findings could provide valuable insights for educational institutions to create more supportive social environments, fostering emotional resilience and promoting better academic outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Stewart, & Thomas (2019)**

To investigate the role of social relationships, including peer and family connections, in influencing mental health outcomes, specifically dark emotions like anxiety and depression among college students. The study employed a quantitative survey-based approach with 500 undergraduate students across various universities, using standardized mental health and social support questionnaires. Strong social connections were found to be inversely related to the prevalence of depression and anxiety. Students with higher perceived social support reported lower levels of stress and frustration. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering healthy social environments to mitigate dark emotions.

- **Kaur, & Kaur (2020)**

To examine the effect of peer influence on academic stress and related dark emotions in higher education students. A cross-sectional survey was conducted on 400 undergraduate students in India, including a section on academic stress, peer influence, and dark emotions using validated scales. The study revealed that negative peer influence significantly contributed to higher levels of academic stress, which was directly linked to the manifestation of dark emotions such as anxiety and frustration. Conversely, positive peer relationships were associated with better emotional outcomes, reducing the intensity of negative emotions.

- **Beiter et al. (2015)**

To explore the prevalence of dark emotions—depression, anxiety, and stress—among college students and their association with social factors such as social isolation and lack of support. A survey-based study involving 374 undergraduate students who completed assessments on depression, anxiety, stress, and social support. The results highlighted that social isolation was a major predictor of depression and anxiety in students. Those lacking social support networks were found to experience significantly higher levels of stress, suggesting the critical role of social factors in managing dark emotions.

- **Raj, Sen, & Kalra (2019)**

To explore the impact of family expectations on academic stress and its relation to dark emotions among Indian college students. Using a mixed-method approach, the study surveyed 300 students from various universities in Gujarat and conducted in-depth interviews with 30 participants to assess the pressures of family expectations. High family expectations were positively associated with academic stress, which in turn exacerbated dark emotions such as frustration, anxiety, and depression. Students

who perceived lower family expectations reported lower stress levels and fewer negative emotional outcomes.

- **Saraswathi, & Tripathi (2021)**

To provide a cultural analysis of social development in Indian students, with a focus on the intersection of social factors and emotional well-being. This is a theoretical review integrating findings from various empirical studies on the social factors influencing Indian students' mental health, particularly in terms of social pressures and expectations. The review suggests that cultural factors, including societal expectations and family responsibilities, can intensify dark emotions among students. Collectivist values often add pressure on students to meet communal expectations, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression.

SOCIAL FACTORS

- Social factors play a significant role in influencing dark emotions among students in various ways. These factors shape how individuals perceive themselves, relate to others, and cope with life's challenges. For this study, six significant social factors are taken into consideration as follows:

Family	Families are often the first and most significant source of emotional support. A nurturing family environment can help individuals manage their emotions, while a dysfunctional or unsupportive family can lead to feelings of isolation, frustration, or sadness. Conflicts within the family, such as parental disagreements or divorce, can heighten dark emotions.
Relatives	Relatives often contribute to social pressure by making comparisons with other family members or imposing traditional beliefs. This can lead to students feeling judged or undervalued, contributing to dark emotions.
Friends	Friends influence behaviour, attitudes, and emotional responses. Students may feel pressure to conform to their friends' standards, whether in academic performance, social activities, or lifestyle choices. The fear of not fitting in can cause dark emotions.
Relationships	Relationships, especially in adolescence, are often emotionally intense. Breakups, unreciprocated love, or unhealthy relationship dynamics can cause students to feel heartbreak, anger, and depression. In relationships, feelings of insecurity or jealousy may arise, leading to anxiety and frustration. For example, concerns over trust or fear of abandonment can result in emotional distress.
Society	Societal standards of success, gender roles, beauty, and behaviour can create pressure on individuals to conform. If students feel they do not

	measure up to societal ideals, they may experience feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and frustration.
Influencers	Social media often presents an idealized version of reality, where influencers showcase success, beauty, and happiness. Constantly consuming this content can make students feel inadequate or dissatisfied with their own lives, leading to envy, sadness, and frustration. The lack of expected attention can lead to feelings of rejection and insecurity. The public nature of online criticism can intensify these dark emotions.

DARK EMOTIONS

- Dark emotions, including sadness, anger, fear, and anxiety, are prevalent among higher education students due to academic pressure, social competition, and personal challenges. While these emotions can signal the need for change or adaptation, they can become dangerous if not managed effectively. Prolonged exposure to dark emotions can lead to severe mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety disorders, negatively impacting students' academic performance and overall well-being. Furthermore, these emotions can strain relationships, hinder effective coping strategies, and create a cycle of distress that impedes personal and academic growth, making it crucial for students to seek support and develop healthy coping mechanisms. For this study, the following dark emotions have been considered after a thorough review of the literature.

Sadness	A deep feeling of sorrow or unhappiness, often triggered by loss, disappointment, or a difficult situation.
Anger	A strong feeling of displeasure or hostility in response to perceived wrongs or injustices
Fear	An emotional response to a perceived threat or danger, often resulting in anxiety or a fight-or-flight reaction.
Stress	Mental or emotional strain caused by challenging circumstances, often involving pressure or overwhelming demands.
Hatred	An intense dislike or animosity toward someone or something, often fueled by fear, anger, or a sense of betrayal
Jealousy	A feeling of envy or insecurity, often related to the fear of losing something valuable to someone else.
Ego	A sense of self-importance or identity that can sometimes lead to pride, defensiveness, or arrogance.
Despair	A deep sense of hopelessness or loss of faith in the possibility of improvement or a positive outcome.
Guilt	A feeling of remorse or responsibility for having committed a wrong or hurt someone, either intentionally or unintentionally.
Lust	An intense desire, often sexual in nature, but it can also refer to a strong craving for power, control, or material things.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To investigate the impact of family members on the dark emotions of higher education students
- To investigate the impact of relatives on the dark emotions of of higher education students
- To investigate the impact of friends and peers on the dark emotions of higher education students
- To investigate the impact of relationships on the dark emotions of higher education students
- To investigate the impact of presence of society on the dark emotions of higher education students
- To investigate the impact of influencers on the dark emotions of higher education students
- To provide recommendations for improving emotional support for students based on social dynamics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. **Sample Size -** A sample of *2000 higher education students* was collected from *4 districts* of Gujarat having the highest literacy rates which are Surat, Ahmedabad, Anand, and Gandhinagar

2. **Sampling Method -** The sample was collected using the *two-stage sampling method*, one of the methods of probability sampling. In the first stage, four districts of Gujarat are selected with the highest literacy rates. In the second stage, data will be collected from these districts using *convenience sampling*, a method of non-probability sampling.

3. **Sources of Data -** The study is based on *primary data collection*. Ten dark emotions are selected based on the literature review and interviews taken from college students. Further, the data is collected from 2000 students using a *structured questionnaire* by Google Forms

4. **Statistical Tests -** Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software. the p-values from the Chi-square test were employed to assess whether there is a statistically significant association between the variables. To further understand the strength or intensity of this association, Cramér's V was utilized.

DATA ANALYSIS

Objective 1

H0: There is no significant association between family members and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

H1: There is a significant association between family members and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

Table 1 – Family Members				
Social Factor	**P**	**H1**	**V**	**Association**
Family	0.000	Accepted	0.142	Moderate

Interpretation

- The p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the results are statistically significant. This means we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1), which suggests that there *is* a significant association between family and dark emotions.
- Cramér's V value of 0.142 suggests a **moderate association** between family and the level of dark emotions. While the relationship is statistically significant, the strength of the association is moderate.

Objective 2

H0: There is no significant association between relatives and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student
H1: There is a significant association between relatives and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

Table 2 – Relatives				
Social Factor	**P**	**H1**	**V**	**Association**
Relatives	0.000	Accepted	0.134	Moderate

Interpretation

- The p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the results are statistically significant. This means we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1), which suggests that there *is* a significant association between relatives and dark emotions.
- Cramér's V value of 0.134 suggests a **moderate association** between relatives and the level of dark emotions. While the relationship is statistically significant, the strength of the association is moderate.

Objective 3

H0: There is no significant association between friends and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

H1: There is a significant association between friends and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

Table 3 – Friends				
Social Factor	**P**	**H1**	**V**	**Association**
Friends	0.000	Accepted	0.155	Strong

Interpretation

- The p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the results are statistically significant. This means we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1), which suggests that there *is* a significant association friends and dark emotions.
- Cramér's V measures the strength of the association between two categorical variables. In this case, a value of 0.155 indicates a **strong association** between friends and dark emotions.

Objective 4

H0: There is no significant association between relationships and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

H1: There is a significant association between relationships and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

Table 4 – Relationships				
Social Factor	**P**	**H1**	**V**	**Association**
Relationships	0.000	Accepted	0.165	Strong

Interpretation:

- The p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the results are statistically significant. This means we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1), which suggests that there *is* a significant association between relationships and dark emotions.
- Cramér's V measures the strength of the association between two categorical variables. In this case, a value of 0.165 indicates a **strong association** between relationships and dark emotions.

Objective 5

H0: There is no significant association between society and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

H1: There is a significant association between society and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

Table 5 – Society				
Social Factor	**P**	**H1**	**V**	**Association**
Society	0.000	Accepted	0.168	Strong

Interpretation:

- The p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the results are statistically significant. This means we reject the null hypothesis (H₀) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1), which suggests that there *is* a significant association between society and dark emotions.
- Cramér's V measures the strength of the association between two categorical variables. In this case, a value of 0.168 indicates a **strong association** between society and dark emotions.

Objective 6

H0: There is no significant association between influencers and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

H1: There is a significant association between influencers and the level of dark emotions experienced by a student

Table 6 – Influencers				
Social Factors	**P**	**H1**	**V**	**Association**
Influencer	0.000	Accepted	0.141	Moderate

Interpretation:

- The p-value is below the significance threshold of 0.05, indicating that the relationship between administrative factors and dark emotions is statistically significant. This leads us to reject the null hypothesis (H₀) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1), meaning that there *is* a significant association between influencers and dark emotions experienced by students.
- A Cramér's V value of 0.141 indicates a **moderate association** between influencers and dark emotions. While the relationship is statistically significant, the strength of the association is not very strong, suggesting that influencers have a noticeable but limited impact on the level of dark emotions among students.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Social Factors	P	H1	V	Association
Family	0.000	Accepted	0.142	Moderate
Relatives	0.000	Accepted	0.134	Moderate
Friends	0.000	Accepted	0.155	Strong
Relationships	0.000	Accepted	0.165	Strong
Society	0.000	Accepted	0.168	Strong
Influencers	0.000	Accepted	0.141	Moderate

DATA INTERPRETATION

- **P-values (P) -** All p-values are 0.000, which is below the significance threshold (0.05). This suggests that for each factor, we reject the null hypothesis (H0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1). This means there is a significant association between social factors and the level of dark emotions experienced by students.

- **Cramer's V-values (V) -** These values represent the strength of the association. Higher V-values suggest stronger associations.

- **Strong Associations** - Society (0.168), Relationships (0.165) and Friends (0.155) show stronger associations. This means that these social factors have a more significant impact on dark emotions, indicating their stronger role in shaping a student's emotional state.

- **Moderate Associations** - Family (0.142), Influencers (0.141) and Relatives (0.134) show a moderate association with dark emotions. This implies that these factors have a noticeable, but not strong, influence on the level of dark emotions.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Friends (Strong Association - 0.155)

- Promote healthy friendships and peer support systems within the academic environment. Positive peer relationships can provide emotional support and help mitigate stress.
- Encourage group activities, study groups, and extracurricular clubs that foster positive peer interactions. Provide workshops or seminars on communication and conflict resolution to help students develop strong and supportive friendships. Introduce peer mentoring programs where senior students can guide and support newcomers.

2. Relationships (Strong Association - 0.165)

- Provide students with resources and support to navigate personal relationships, which are often a significant source of emotional turmoil.
- Establish counseling services that offer guidance on relationship management, coping strategies for emotional challenges, and mental health support. Create awareness campaigns about healthy relationships and emotional well-being, helping students identify and address negative relationship dynamics.

3. Society (Strong Association - 0.168)

- Address societal pressures and expectations that contribute to student stress and anxiety. Educating students about coping with social norms and expectations can help mitigate their negative impact.
- Incorporate discussions about societal pressures, including academic expectations, career prospects, and social norms, into the curriculum. Offer seminars or workshops on managing societal pressures, self-care, and building resilience. Engage with societal narratives through open forums or student-led discussions to create a supportive community within the institution.

4. Family (Moderate Association - 0.142)

- Support students in managing family expectations and relationships. Family can be a source of both support and stress.
- Involve family members in academic orientation programs to set realistic expectations regarding academic performance and personal development. Provide counseling services that include family therapy or guidance on managing familial pressures, especially for students dealing with cultural or generational gaps.

5. Relatives (Moderate Association - 0.134)

- Educate students on setting healthy boundaries with relatives and managing extended family expectations.
- Offer workshops on assertiveness training and managing family dynamics. Encourage students to seek support from peer groups and university counselling services when dealing with intrusive or stressful interactions with relatives.

6. Influencers (Moderate Association - 0.141)

- Promote media literacy and critical thinking to help students navigate the influence of social media and public figures on their emotional well-being.

- Include sessions on media literacy in student development programs, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between positive and negative influences. Encourage students to follow positive role models and influencers who promote mental well-being, academic success, and personal growth.

Overall Suggestions for Social Factors:

- **Support Networks:** Encourage the formation of support networks, such as peer support groups, student communities, and mentorship programs. These networks can offer students a sense of belonging and reduce the impact of social stressors.
- **Counselling Services:** Enhance access to mental health and counseling services on campus. Providing a safe space for students to discuss social pressures and seek advice can alleviate dark emotions.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns focused on social well-being, highlighting the importance of healthy relationships, media influence, and societal expectations. Equip students with strategies to handle social stressors effectively.
- **Regular Feedback and Open Communication Channels:** Establish regular feedback mechanisms, such as student surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, to openly communicate with students about their experiences, concerns, and the challenges they face. This proactive approach allows institutions to identify stressors early, adapt policies, and provide targeted support. Open communication fosters a sense of community and ensures students feel heard and valued, which can significantly alleviate stress and dark emotions.

CONCLUSION

- This research explored the relationship between social factors and the experience of dark emotions among higher education students. The study found significant associations between various social factors—including family, friends, relationships, society, relatives, and influencers—and the prevalence of negative emotional states like sadness, stress, jealousy, anger, and despair. Associations with society, friends, and relationships emerged as the strongest contributors to emotional distress, followed by family and influencers.
- The findings highlight the importance of emotional support systems, not only within the academic setting but also within personal and social environments. Developing emotional resilience and fostering healthy relationships are crucial for students to better manage the emotional challenges posed by these social factors.

FUTURE SCOPE

- Impact of Digital Interactions: Explore the influence of increased digital and online interactions, especially post-pandemic, on the emotional well-being of students.
- Mental Health Interventions: Investigate the effectiveness of mental health interventions and counseling services in educational institutions and how they can mitigate dark emotions.

- Long-term Effects: Study the long-term impact of dark emotions on academic performance, career outcomes, and personal development.
- Cross-cultural Comparisons: Conduct cross-cultural research to examine how social factors influence dark emotions in students from different regions and backgrounds.
- Role of Technology: Assess the potential of artificial intelligence, mental health apps, and digital platforms in supporting emotional well-being and offering solutions to counter negative social influences.
- Peer and Social Dynamics: Further explore the dynamics of peer relationships, societal expectations, and family interactions, focusing on strategies for emotional resilience.
- Influencers and Social Media: Delve deeper into the role of social media influencers and online content in shaping student emotions, particularly feelings of inadequacy or jealousy.

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