CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research students are an important segment of academic population (Larivière, 2012). They put their utmost effort to complete their doctoral research while creating an original piece of work. In most of the countries doctoral degree is a fundamental requirement to establish a career in academia. It can be seen that research students often struggle with loneliness, lack of social support, stress, depression symptoms and also the pressure to discontinue their research mid-way.

Ph.D. students are more vulnerable to the pressure related to fulfilling the requirements for conducting research in time, publishing research work, teaching and finding appropriate job (Hyun et al. 2007). Often neglectful attitude towards mental health concerns are a significant contributory reason for quitting Ph.D. (Wilson, Mason, & Ewing, 1997; Turner & Berry, 2000). Various studies show that the factors associated with research are significantly linked with the emotional health of the researcher and the tendency to complete it. Some of the factors include academic, research and non-research work burden, the extent of social, administrative, and financial support (Hyun et al., 2016).

Keeping this in view, the aim of the present study was to investigate the role of financial support in terms of fellowship provided by some funding authority on mental health of the research students. In the investigation, equal number of fellowship holder and non-fellowship holder research students of both the genders were included. There is abundance of literature on various aspects of health of university, college and school students but there is scarcity of researchers in the field of mental health especially on doctoral students in Indian scenario. The present investigation intended to explore this area. The unique feature of the present study was that it examined the effect of fellowship on the mental health of the research students. It was identified as the area for research because financial difficulty is commonly considered as one of the root cause for mental health problems.
At a glance, the comparison between fellowship holder and non-fellowship holder research students display a significant difference where fellowship holders emerged to be better on mental health, quality of life and self-esteem whereas non-fellowship holders were found to be higher on depression, anxiety and perceived stress. Scarcity of money causes inability to fulfill academic and daily living requirements and deteriorate individual’s emotional health (Hodgson & Simoni, 1995). Parthi and Rohilla (2017) found in their study that research students suffer poor mental health as compared to the post graduate students. Further, non-fellowship holders were prone to mental health difficulties than fellowship holders. Numerous other studies also confirmed that financial difficulties are one of the major causes for mental health difficulties (Toews, Lockyer, Dobson, Simpson, Brownell, & Brenneis, 1997: Furr, Westefeld, McConnell & Jenkins, 2001; Nogueira-Martins, Fagnani, Macedo, Citero & Mari, 2004;).

Another aim of the study was to investigate gender differences on the measured variables. Finding indicated that females suffer from poor mental health and perceive less social support than males. However, no significant differences were found on majority of the measured variables. One of the reasons for gender difference could be that females are more communicative about the symptoms of mental health difficulties they experience than males (Noble, 2005). Another reason may be that due to more social freedom to express feelings and more exposure to situations females experience depression and stress as compared to males (Andrade, 2006; Zender, 2009). Nobel, (2005) reasoned that females articulate even minor difficulties and symptoms of the problems they are experiencing more easily than males.

Inter-correlation between mental health and rest of the variables indicated significantly positive correlation between mental health score, depression, anxiety, and perceived stress scores. Significant negative correlation was found between mental health score, quality of life, self-esteem and social support scores. All the measured variables were also identified as significant predictors of mental health among research students.
The above stated observations indicate a stark difference on mental health among fellowship holder and non-fellowship holder research students. The findings of the study are an eye opener for the university authority and the educational policy makers. Although there are various kinds of fellowships being provided to the students but still maximum number of research students are unable to avail them as the eligibility criteria which need to be fulfilled is quite difficult, tiring and time consuming. Interestingly, many of the research scholars are also unaware about the types of fellowships available for them.

There is a dire need that educational authorities and education policy makers should consider the fact that financial difficulties are deteriorating the mental health of the research students and quality of the research as well. A minimal amount of fellowship could be provided to the students who have entered in the field for research in order to help them deal with financial burden.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

- There is a need to carry out intensive research in the field of mental health of research students to find out other possible causes of poor mental health among them at the all India level.
- Research can be undertaken to study the sleep patterns and physical health dimensions along with mental health dimensions among research scholars.
- Academic stream wise comparison can be another interesting study to understand the mental health of research students.
- Research can also be conducted on foreign students doing their Ph.D. research work in Panjab University and other universities in India.
- A study can be carried out to understand the research supervisor’s perspective on the mental health of their respective research students.
- Influence of mental health training programs and counseling of research scholars can be an important area of research.
- Research can be conducted on linking Ph.D. degrees with the employment avenues available across disciplines.