

Creativity and Mental Health Challenges – Behavioural Patterns in Higher Education

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Introduction – In higher education, when creativity is a personality trait valued and emphasized in student recruitment and in training, mental health challenges often appear as a phenomenon. Students strive to accomplish and to fulfill requirements. A lack of awareness of the link between the desired creativity and ill mental health may lead to the student's own mishandling of failures resulting in behavioural patterns like mood-swings, frustration, anger, sadness, withdrawal, depression, or even suicide.

Purpose – The first objective of this study was to reveal psychological issues for students of higher education where creativity is essential in the profession. The second objective was to identify behavioural patterns in handling failure when creativity and mental health issues coexist.

Design/Methodology/Approach – Relevant literature was reviewed. A qualitative approach was applied in this study using observation and in-depth interviews through which psychological issues and behavioural patterns were identified.

Results – Findings in this study are: (1) students with high creativity are focused on reaching perfection; (2) students with creativity employ a strong driving-force to break through barriers; (3) students with creativity are diversified in handling failure; (4) awareness of the link between creativity and mental health challenges is low; and (5) coping with dissatisfaction does not often result in productive/positive communication. Cultural issues play a role in creativity and mental health. It is uncommon for students to reach out for help and often not considered as an alternative. Perfection and success in career development are overemphasized by the society. There is pressure from both the outside environment and inner self-desire to achieve of excellence.

Limitations and strengths of the study – Creativity is multidimensional. The strength of this study is to reveal behavioural patterns which resulted from handling failure for students with personality trait in creativity. Limitation of this study is that findings are based on observation and in-depth interviews. Further research may need to examine creativity and mental illness in higher education from medical perspectives. Furthermore, cross-cultural studies may provide insights into differences in behavioural patterns in creativity and mental issues.

Practical/Social value – This study examined psychological issues for students of higher education when creativity is a fundamentally indispensable characteristic of their aspired profession. The research found that young adults, influenced by culture, have a strong desire to conform the social norm; however, the mental health challenges that often exist alongside creativity have been less discussed in higher education, resulting in limited awareness of behavioural patterns once failure needs to be coped with.

Originality/Conclusions – Suggestions based on findings in this study are: (1) in higher education, awareness of the link between creativity and mental issues needs to be strengthened; (2) students in future career paths where creativity is an important personality trait need to have a better understanding of the possible link between creativity and mental illness; (3) coping with failure needs to be discussed and practiced in higher education; (4) negative behaviour patterns emerging in students experiencing failure can be important signals for administrators in higher education to comprehend and to intervene if necessary; and (5) medical support and assistance should be provided for students who reach out for help, but for those who need but refused to ask for help, strategic implementation may be necessary in an effort to support them.

Keywords: education, mental health