# University Students' Preferences in Seeking Help from Others for Their Personal Issues

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**Abstract:**

This study aimed to identify the preferences of university students in seeking help from others to solve their personal problems, utilizing a sample of 128 students from the University of Chlef, Algeria. The researcher employed a descriptive analytical approach, along with the calculation of percentages to address the study's two main questions. The findings revealed that students face a variety of issues, ranked as follows: psychological, emotional, social, economic, familial, academic, health, religious, and sexual. It was also found that students primarily prefer to seek help for their problems from their peers, followed by their families. Some students do not disclose their problems to anyone, while others seek assistance from psychological counselors. A very small fraction of the sample seeks help from their relatives. The study recommends raising students' awareness of the importance of pedagogical accompaniment and the role of psychological centers available at every university, encouraging them to seek help for their problems from professionals.

**Keywords :** University; Students; Issues; Pedagogical Accompaniment; Psychological Counselor; Psychological Centers.

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## Introduction

Universities are expected to produce graduates that meet the labor market demands, placing significant responsibility on these institutions to invest in human capabilities, ensuring their preparation and qualification for the workforce to competently and effectively fill their roles post-graduation, thereby constructively contributing to national development and prosperity.

Higher education institutions serve as educational and organizational environments where students receive their education, significantly influencing their productivity. For quality educational outcomes, it is crucial to ensure good adaptation and adjustment of students within these institutions due to the varied educational, social, and emotional needs at this educational stage. Failing to meet these needs can lead to academic problems that affect students' future socially, psychologically, and academically [1].

Recent reforms in university education in Algeria include transitioning to the LMD system (License-Master-Doctorate) and accompanying pedagogical support for students as decreed by Executive Decree No. 09-03, dated January 3, 2009, which mandates "continuous supervision and support for students to facilitate their integration into university life and the labor market" [2]

Continuing the reform initiatives, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has established University Psychological Assistance Centers (CAPU) across all universities in the academic year 2019/2020. Managed by psychology professionals, these centers aim to "facilitate psychological and pedagogical support for students by addressing their various concerns through individual consultations, study days, awareness events, and open days," focusing on framing students or specialists and providing training [3].

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Algeria, like other countries, closed all university institutions and implemented a remote learning system through the Moodle platform to ensure students' safety. The blend of face-to-face and remote learning continued even after the pandemic, gradually returning to traditional classroom settings while maintaining active remote learning platforms and encouraging faculty to upload their lessons online.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research did not stop there but continued its journey by enacting new laws to meet labor market demands. In the academic year 2022/2023, opportunities were provided for students approaching graduation at the bachelor's or master's level to establish startups, with the ministry overseeing these initiatives and establishing a dedicated branch at each

university to address students' concerns, focusing on training in this field through study days and training seminars, alongside emphasizing English language proficiency.

### 1. Study Problem

Students enter university full of ambition and hope, seeking fulfillment of their needs and achievement of their goals. However, they encounter an environment starkly different from what they were accustomed to in secondary education, with a different educational system and its implications, students from various provinces, and sometimes international students.

Additionally, the university's distance from their residence might necessitate staying in university accommodations or spending the whole day on campus and returning home in the evening. Students must navigate all these university education requirements and adapt to them while facing a range of challenges that impact their behavior, academic achievement, and overall life.

Previous studies such as those by Kadri, 2012; Flouh, 2019; Al-Awd, 2020; Saadoun & Flouh, 2021; Fadel & Yassin, 2022, have shown that new university students suffer from various issues including academic, psychological, social, economic, and health problems, etc. Similarly, studies by Al-Banna & Al-Rubai, 2006; Zakaouah, 2017; Khalil, 2019; Ben Amor, Hafi, & Gadja, 2021; Erkan et al., 2012, indicate that students in other levels also face almost the same problems, though these vary in type, severity, and order from one study to another.

In light of previous studies and their recommendations, this study aims to identify common problems among university students and the ways they disclose them by answering the following questions:

- What are the most common problems among university students?

- To whom do university students prefer to disclose their problems when seeking help?

### 2. Study Objectives:

- To highlight the common problems among university students.

- To identify the individuals to whom students disclose their personal problems to seek help in finding solutions.

### 3. Study Significanc:

  ‒ The importance of the subject studied, as identifying students' problems is a crucial factor in determining how to assist them through designing counseling and therapeutic programs.

  ‒ The importance of the university stage itself, which is one of the key institutions that supply the community with qualified human resources performing their functions with high efficiency.

  ‒ Highlighting the importance of seeking psychological help from qualified professionals, as the counselor can play a key role in helping students understand their problems and thus solve them.

  ‒ Educating parents about the most common problems their children face to provide necessary advice and ensure a safe environment within the family.

  ‒ Presenting the results of this study to those responsible for student affairs to recognize the problems students face, take necessary measures, and provide suitable conditions for healthy student development.

  ‒ Opening avenues for further research.

### 4. Operational Definition of University Students' Problems:

Problems faced by university students are the difficulties that cause them distress and tension, negatively affecting their academic achievement and psychological and social adjustment. These problems are measured in this study by the degree to which students respond to the study's questions.

### 5. Previous Studies:

- **Study by Al-Banna and Al-Rubai (2006):**

This study aimed to identify the most common problems faced by students at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza. The researchers designed a tool and applied it to a sample of 200 students. The study found that the ranking of problems was as follows: life and university building issues, educational problems, psychological issues, moral and social problems, and finally, sexual problems.

- **Study by Erkan et al. (2012):**

This study aimed to reveal the relationship between the nature of the problems and their levels among Turkish university students and their desire to seek help. A scale measuring concern about problems and a scale of psychological desire to seek help were applied to a sample of 5,829 students. The study found that Turkish university students often suffer from emotional, academic, and economic

problems, and they typically prefer to seek help from their families and friends. Students who sought help from professionals were generally from the middle social class.[4]

- **Study by Al-Kaisi (2014):**

This study aimed to identify the level of problems (academic, health, and financial) faced by students at Tafila Technical University in Jordan. The researcher used a scale she developed on a sample of 300 students. The results showed that the ranking of problems was as follows: health issues, financial problems, and finally, academic problems.

- **Study by Kandil and Bakir (2016):**

This study aimed to identify the problems faced by female students at the Faculty of Science and Arts at King Khalid University in Asir, Saudi Arabia, and their relation to academic level and major. The researchers used a list of 57 problem statements they developed, which was applied to a sample of 707 students from various scientific and literary disciplines. The study found that students suffer from various problems, ranked as follows: academic issues, psychological problems, social issues, health problems, and family issues.

- **Study by Zakaouah (2017):**

This study aimed to identify the sources of problems as perceived by university students. The researcher designed a questionnaire and applied it to a sample of 150 students at the University Center of Relizane. The study identified three main categories of problems: academic, psychological, and social.

- **Study by Khalil (2019):**

This study aimed to uncover the problems faced by students at the Faculties of Education at Sohag University through the analysis of their diaries, proposing a conceptual framework for addressing and treating these issues. The study sample consisted of 230 students, and content analysis was used. The study found that students suffer from several types of problems, categorized as economic issues, social problems, educational difficulties, administrative issues, and general problems.

- **Study by Kazim and Abbas (2019):**

This study aimed to highlight the educational and psychological problems faced by students at the College of Basic Education at Wasit University in Iraq, proposing mechanisms for some solutions to alleviate them. The researchers designed a tool and applied it to a sample of 150 students. The study revealed that students suffer from significant educational and psychological issues.

- **Study by Ben Amor, Hafi, and Gadja (2021):**

This study aimed to uncover the common problems among university students at the University of Chlef in light of personal variables. The Salim Khaled scale (2003) was applied to a sample of 100 students. The study found that the most common problems among students, in order of frequency, were psychological issues, problems occupying free time, social and moral problems, and educational issues.

## 6. Field Study Procedures
**Methodology:**

Given that the study aimed to identify the problems of university students and the ways they disclose them, the descriptive analytical approach was deemed appropriate.

**Population and Sample:**

The study population consisted of all second and third-year students from the Department of Social Sciences at Hassiba Ben Bouali University in Chlef, across various specialties. The study sample comprised 128 students.

**Tool:**

The study tool consisted of a form with two questions. One was an open-ended question allowing students to freely express the most troubling issues in their lives, with a promise of confidentiality that no one else would see their responses. The other question was closed-ended, requiring students to specify the person they would prefer to confide in about their personal problems in seeking help to resolve them.

## 7. Results

### A. Results of the First Question:
To answer the first question directed at students, "What are the most troubling problems in your life?" frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the students' responses. The following table illustrates the results:

**Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages of University Students' Problems Ranked by Importance**

| Type of Problem | Frequency | Percentage | Rank |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Psychological** | 82 | 64.06% | 1 |
| **Emotional** | 76 | 59.37% | 2 |
| **Social** | 59 | 46.09% | 3 |
| **Economic** | 57 | 44.53% | 4 |
| **Family** | 46 | 35.93% | 5 |
| **Academic** | 42 | 32.81% | 6 |
| **Health** | 36 | 28.12% | 7 |
| **Religious** | 26 | 20.31% | 8 |
| **Sexual** | 15 | 11.71% | 9 |

The table indicates that psychological problems are the most prevalent among students, affecting approximately two-thirds of the students at a rate of 64.06%. Emotional problems are close behind at 59.37%, while social and economic problems are reported by nearly half of the students at rates of 46.09% and 44.53%, respectively.

About a third of the sample reports family and academic problems, with respective rates of 35.93% and 32.81%. A quarter of the sample experiences health issues, noted at 28.12%. Less than a quarter report religious issues at 20.31%, and the least common are sexual problems at 11.71%.

### Results of the Second Question:

The second question asked, "To whom do university students prefer to disclose their personal problems in seeking help?" Frequencies and percentages were used for analysis, and the results are displayed in the following table:

**Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages of Categories to Whom Students Disclose Their Problems, Ranked by Importance**

| Confidants | Frequencies | Percentages | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Peers** | 48 | 37.5% | 1 |
| **Family** | 34 | 26.56% | 2 |
| **None** | 33 | 25.78% | 3 |
| **Psychological Counselor** | 29 | 22.65% | 4 |
| **Relatives** | 6 | 4.68% | 5 |

The table shows that 37.5% of students disclose their problems to their peers, while about a quarter prefer to confide in their family or no one at all, with percentages of 26.56% and 25.78% respectively. Disclosing to a psychological

counselor ranks fourth at 22.65%, and relatives are the least preferred confidants, with only 4.68%.

## 8. Discussion
**Discussion of the First Question's Results:**

The findings reveal that students suffer from psychological, emotional, social, economic, family, academic, health, religious, and sexual problems. These results are consistent with previous studies, though they differ in the severity and ranking of these issues.

Psychological problems topped the list, with two-thirds of students experiencing anxiety, frustration, and lack of self-confidence; this is significant as psychological well-being affects other aspects of students' lives. They require substantial psychological security, which ranks second only to physiological needs in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1970), emphasizing the importance of security needs that include the desire for safety, security, and tranquility, and to avoid anxiety, turmoil, and fear [5].

The daily life of a student, filled with commuting, research, attending lectures, guided assignments, and sourcing references, places them under considerable stress, negatively impacting their psychological state. Moreover, like other societal segments, students were not immune to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with ongoing impacts particularly for those who contracted the virus themselves, had family members affected, or lost loved ones.

The ongoing conflict in Gaza and related images circulating on social media also affect students, as do other members of the Algerian community who consistently support Palestine. Our study's findings align with those of Zakaouah (2017)[6], which highlighted prominent psychological issues like stress and emotional instability, undefined fears, etc.

Emotional problems ranked second, involving issues such as misunderstandings with partners, loss of trust, fear of expressing feelings, or breakups. This is natural as students are at an age where they consider marriage and finding suitable life partners. The need for love and belonging, ranked third in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1970), involves the desire to establish emotional and affectionate relationships, highlighting that students need support in understanding themselves and the feelings of others to make sound decisions about their life partners.

Social issues, ranked third, include social anxiety and misunderstanding others' feelings, which could be evident during presentations or thesis defenses, and some students may struggle to find compatible friends.

Economic issues, ranked fourth, reflect the financial strains students face as the monthly allowance is often insufficient due to the general or below-average living standards of many Algerian families, making it difficult for families to meet the extensive needs of their university-going children, including research, commuting, and appropriate clothing.

Even though universities may provide stipends, these are usually inadequate, leading some students to take jobs, particularly in bookshops or shops near universities, which may prevent them from attending lectures and negatively affect their academic achievement. This aligns with findings from Flouh (2019)[7], indicating that students suffer from economic and financial issues due to insufficient university grants and inadequate personal spending money to meet various needs.

Family issues, which represent about a third of the sample, are deemed significant as the family is one of the most crucial socialization institutions. Interactions within the family can often be fraught with tension because parents may struggle to understand their children who are now young adults.

 These young adults are in need of a certain level of independence and freedom. In this regard, Zahran (1986)[8] advised parents to be flexible in understanding their children and to avoid widening the gap between them. He recommended granting them the right to enjoy their trust, involve them in family matters, allow them the freedom to choose their friends, sports activities, clothing, hobbies, and to express and respect their opinions and ideas.

Academic problems ranked sixth, students indicated that the curriculum, teaching methods, and evaluation techniques employed by professors do not meet their needs. Additionally, some students are dissatisfied with the majors they were assigned due to poor academic performance in the first year of common core university studies.

Several researchers have focused on academic problems exclusively; for instance, the study by Barzaoui and Hachemi (2017)[9] identified issues related to relationships with professors, the university environment, academic standards, student skills, academic advising, and exams. Similarly, the study by Zakaouah (2017)[10] found a lack of diversity in teaching methods, scarce use of educational tools, poor academic advising, and exam anxiety. Meanwhile, the study by Flouh (2019)[11] discovered that students were unaware of the LMD system, uncomfortable with the academic system, lacking in note-taking skills, and unable to use computers, among other issues.

The university bears a share of the responsibility for the academic problems of students, and thus the researcher agrees with Fofana's view that 'American

universities see themselves as responsible for a student's failure and his departure from studies because they accepted him into their fold.

If he was outstanding and had a level that allowed him to enter, and if he did not complete his studies or did not succeed, then the university is responsible for that. Therefore, it is necessary to accompany him until he reaches safe harbor, as accompaniment is inevitable and unavoidable'[12].

Health issues, represented by diseases suffered by students that require significant care for recovery, could often be traced back to unbalanced diets, ignorance of essential health rules during eating, or students resorting to fast food due to time constraints. Some may also find the food provided in university residences unsuitable, and others might delay eating until very late due to their busy schedules.

Religious issues are second to last, such as non-adherence to timely prayer, religious extremism, or feelings of guilt and self-reproach over mistakes made by students are significant. Students may overlook that the door to repentance is always open and that God forgives all sins except associating others with Him.

Sexual problems, although less frequent, are significant, such as addiction to watching pornographic films, engaging in illicit relationships, or resorting to masturbation and other sexual deviations, even if less frequent, cannot be overlooked due to their potential impact on students' behavior and productivity. These issues require urgent solutions. Our study's results align with those of Al-Banna and Al-Rubai (2006)[13] in this regard.


**Discussion of Results from the Second Question:**

The study found that a third of students prefer to confide in their peers about their problems, a concerning trend as seeking help from a peer of similar age might complicate the issue due to lack of experience. A quarter of students turn to their families for help in solving their problems, although families might not always be aware enough to assist or guide their children correctly.

Another quarter of students consult no one because their problems are very personal and embarrassing, thus keeping them hidden deep within. This makes such issues personal secrets unknown to others.

The remaining quarter seek help from psychological counselors, indicating an awareness that advice should only be sought from qualified professionals. A very small fraction of students seek help from relatives, which could cause problems between the student, their relatives, and their family.

Our study's results partially align with those of Erkan et al. (2012), which found that students often prefer to seek help from their families and friends and that students seeking help from professionals typically belong to the middle social class (Erkan et al., 2012, as cited by Kandil & Bakir, 2016).[14]

The results reveal that only a small fraction of university students consult specialists, despite the existence of pedagogical support outlined in Article 2 of Executive Decree No. 09-03, dated January 3, 2009. This decree defines various aspects of student support including informational and administrative support, which involves reception, guidance, and mediation; pedagogical support, which involves accompanying learning and organizing personal work; methodological support in imparting university work methodologies individually and in groups; technical support in the use of pedagogical tools; motivational support to encourage students to pursue their training paths; and professional guidance to assist students in preparing their career projects[15].

Jaeni (2019)[16] mentioned that pedagogical support is one of the most effective means to help students integrate into university life. Unfortunately, it appears that the desired goals are not being achieved due to difficulties in implementing pedagogical support.

Researchers agree with Treiki (2018)[17] on the challenges in the realm of infrastructure and trainers, the poor input from secondary education, a lack of awareness of the importance of pedagogical support that fails to convince professors and students, and the lack of professors' experience requiring pedagogical training or merely formal implementation of such measures.

The study by Abbasi and Khoan (2019)[18] found that pedagogical support for university students does not meet their advisory needs in psychological, social, and academic areas, as it is rarely implemented in colleges for the benefit of students, and when implemented, it rarely yields effective and tangible results.

The reason students may not turn to specialists could be due to a lack of awareness of the existence of University Psychological Assistance Centers (CAPU), which are intended to provide psychological assistance from specialized psychology professors, or students might have heard of them but do not understand the roles these centers play.

This is a shortcoming of the officials responsible for these centers in not educating students about their roles through study days, scientific seminars, conferences, or open houses where brochures are distributed and questions answered.

**Conclusion:**

University students face various issues: psychological, emotional, social, economic, familial, academic, health-related, religious, and sexual. Some students confide their problems to peers, some seek help from family or psychological counselors, while others keep their issues to themselves.

Responsibility is shared between the students themselves for not turning to specialists, and the family and university, which may not meet the students' needs according to their requirements and the new developments in their lives.

## Recommendations:

- Raise awareness among university students about the importance of consulting psychological counselors who are experts in understanding the nature of problems and methods of providing help.

- Train professors on how to effectively implement pedagogical support for students.

- Activate the role of pedagogical support by monitoring the process at the college level and providing periodic statistics.

- Enhance the role of psychological centers opened at universities by promoting the center, the roles performed by psychological counselors, and the services they offer.

- Provide guidance for students which could be in the form of study days or national or international conferences.

- Educate families on the importance of their active participation in advising their children and helping them solve their problems.

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