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ANXIOLYTICS AND ANTIDEPRESSANTS: CONSUMPTION AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH USE IN UNIVERSITY NURSING STUDENTS IN THE INTERIOR OF SÃO PAULO

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Abstract: The mental health of university students, particularly those in the nursing course, is a relevant issue due to the high consumption of anxiolytics and antidepressants. These future health professionals face academic challenges, practical activities and interactions with patients that can lead to the development of disorders such as anxiety and depression. The initial use of psychotropic substances, such as benzodiazepines and antidepressants, can temporarily relieve symptoms, but when consumed inappropriately, can lead to abuse. The prescription of psychotropic drugs by various medical specialties without proper monitoring can result in inappropriate use of these drugs. This descriptive study applied a questionnaire with 10 closed questions to students from all periods of the Nursing course at the Eduvale College in Avaré, in the interior of São Paulo, with the aim of identifying and analyzing patterns of consumption of anxiolytics and antidepressants and the factors associated with their use among university students. The data was analyzed and organized in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The results showed that a significant proportion of students reported suffering from mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, with anxiety being prevalent in 48% of those interviewed. Of these, only 17% use psychotropic medication, often without specialized monitoring. This scenario highlights the need for psychological support and the implementation of awareness programs on the responsible use of psychotropic drugs in the university environment.

Keywords: University students, anxiety, depression, psychotropic drugs, consumption.

INTRODUCTION

The mental health of university students is a highly relevant issue, especially when it comes to the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants. In the context of the nursing course, this issue takes on even more importance, as these future professionals face academic challenges, clinical practices and interactions with patients (ARAÚJO et al., 2022).

The challenges that emerge during transition period and throughout the academic journey, including changes in environment and demands, increased responsibilities, distance from family, interpersonal interactions, pressures and worries about the future, financial constraints, and accommodation problems, are circumstances to which students must adjust. For a considerable proportion of university students, these changes can lead to high levels stress, which can cause a variety of psychological complications. Current studies consider that higher education students are a group vulnerable to the development of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety (MARINHO et al., 2019; BARBOSA et al., 2020).

Depressive and anxiety disorders are a group of illnesses that have significant consequences for the lives of individuals and their families. These conditions are considered a major public health problem. In addition, depression and anxiety play a central role in the global burden of disease, surpassing other disorders in their prevalence and impact (WHO, 2017).

Anxiety is a natural response of our body activated by the perception of a threat in certain situations. This emotional response can vary, involving feelings of fear, nervousness, worry and unease. It is important to differentiate between anxiety as a normal emotion or response and anxiety as a disorder response to a specific threat and disappears after controlling the situation; in the disorder involves

an emotional response disproportionate to its stimulus and even in its absence this response remains at the same intensity (DSM-5, 2014; KARINO et al., 2014).

Depression, on the other hand is a chronic illness characterized by mood swings marked by loss of interest, apathy and deep sadness, but in depression this sadness can set in for a long time. It is important to note that it is not limited to the emotional aspect; it compromises physical functioning, thinking and mood, altering the individual's perception and experience of reality (ALVES, 2015).

Given the manifestation of these disorders and the concomitance between an intense routine and academic life, the initial consumption of psychotropic substances can temporarily attenuate or regulate the symptoms presented (CYBULSKI et al., 2017). Psychotropic substances are agents that exert an effect on the central nervous system (CNS), whose biochemical characteristics are capable of modifying the sensory perceptions, emotional state, consciousness and behavior of the individual (FERRAZ, 2018).

Among these substances are anxiolytics and antidepressants; the main anxiolytics are benzodiazepines, which have the ability to mitigate anxious symptoms or promote sleep, varying according to the dosage administered; an anxiolytic drug should induce the lowest level of depression in the Central Nervous System compatible with its therapeutic efficacy, thus reducing anxiety and providing a sedative effect. Antidepressants, on the other hand, potentiate monoaminergic transmission through multiple mechanisms; the most prevalent of these are those that suppress the function of serotonin and norepinephrine transporters, or both (KATZUNG, 2017).

In an attempt to intensify the perception of well-being, these psychotropic drugs are consumed without the proper medical prescription. This is often because individuals don't

think their symptoms are severe enough to seek care at a clinic or psychiatric institution (ALOSAIMI, 2016).

It is currently observed that the prescription of psychotropic drugs is carried out by various medical specialties, with data recording the use of benzodiazepines without the necessary prescription, with a percentage variation between 3.3% and 8.4%. This fact reinforces the finding of negligence in properly filling out prescription forms or even the presence of signs of forgery. The improper prescription of psychotropic drugs by non-specialized mental health professionals has been a contributing factor to the undue consumption of benzodiazepines and antidepressants (ANGELO et al., 2016).

Considering the multiplicity of reasons, factors, symptoms and the academic experience itself, it is noteworthy that health students are the main consumers of psychotropic drugs, regardless of medical advice. This phenomenon can be attributed to the early exposure of these future professionals to human adversity, or even to the greater ease of access to such drugs (MARINHO et al, 2019). It is therefore imperative to carry out an in-depth study on this subject.

BACKGROUND

The study is justified by the growing concern about the mental health of university students, especially considering academic stress and emotional challenges faced during graduation. And the high prevalence of anxiety and depression disorders in the general population and how this can affect university students.

It is essential to understand the factors associated with the consumption of these drugs in order to contribute to mental health promotion strategies in the university environment.

HYPOTHESIS

It is postulated that the prevalence of anxiolytic and antidepressant drug use among university nursing students is high, attributable both to the individual circumstances of social and academic life and to the easy accessibility of medical prescriptions and these psychotropic drugs. This finding highlights the need to implement control measures and provide adequate guidance on the subject.

OBJECTIVE

The general objective of this study is to identify and evaluate consumption and the factors associated with the use of antidepressants and anxiolytics among university students in the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th terms of the nursing course at Eduvale College in Avaré.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

The specific objectives are:

- Identify the most commonly used anxiolytic and antidepressant drugs.
- Evaluate the dynamics of the use of these drugs, such as the frequency and length of treatment
- Characterize whether the purchase of these drugs was on prescription or not and which specialty prescribed them.
- Recognize the reason why the person started taking the medication.

METHODOLOGY

It was developed descriptively by applying a questionnaire to students from the following periods: 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th of the Undergraduate Nursing course at the Eduvale College in Avaré.

The sample for this survey was made up of all the students on the course who were present on the day of the survey from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. The average was 150 people who were present on the days from Monday to Friday and at the

times described, but the total sample was 106 students. The questionnaire included 10 closed questions pertinent to the topic described.

The interviewees took part in the survey after signing an informed consent form outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the work in question, as well as being informed that the research had been approved by the Research Ethics Committees set out in Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council. The Research Ethics Committees must be accredited by the National Research Ethics Commission (CONEP), approved under CAAE 8000.8624.6.0000.5411.

The databases studied were books, articles, theses, monographs and dissertations through consultations on internet databases, with the exclusion criterion being documents published more than 10 years previously.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The method adopted for analyzing the data will be based on the use of Excel. This process will include inserting the data into spreadsheets, organizing it, applying formulas and statistical functions offered by Excel, as well as creating graphs to illustrate the results. Excel offers a wide range of features that will be exploited to ensure accurate analysis of the data and its presentation in a clear and accessible manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After all the data analysis, the following graphs were drawn up as a result of the research carried out.

According to the graph above, 72% of students enrolled in the nursing course are between 18 and 24, and only 4% are over 45. Abres (2021) shows that the 19 to 24 age group represents an average of 42.95% of students enrolled in higher education and also shows that the The 40-64 age group represents 13.26% of those enrolled, based on the num-

ber of higher education enrolments in 2021.

The analysis of graph 2 shows that the largest percentage (84%) of students on the nursing course are women and only 16% are men. Abres (2021) states that women are the majority in the number of enrolments in higher education in general, accounting for 58.4% of enrolments. Brasil (2015), mentions that the Nursing course in Brazil had 261,215 thousand students enrolled, of which 85% were women, and was classified as the sixth largest higher education course in the country.

Graph 3 shows that only 7% believe that the combination of academic and personal routines is not stressful, while 93% say that it is. Barbosa (2022) states in his study that all the life changes that students have to go through during their university career produce high levels of stress.

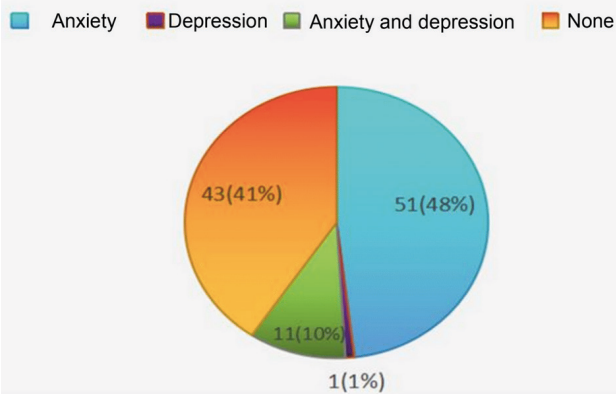


CHART 4- DOES SOME DISEASE
Source: PEREIRA, 2024.

With the graph above, we can analyze that 48% of nursing students at this college claim to have a disorder, which is anxiety, and in contrast, with the 2nd highest rate, 41% claim not to have any type of disorder, yet with the analysis another data can be observed where 10% of the interviewees say they have anxiety and depression. According to Cybulski et al. (2017), several studies indicate that between 15% and 29% of university students have psychiatric disorders during their academic career.

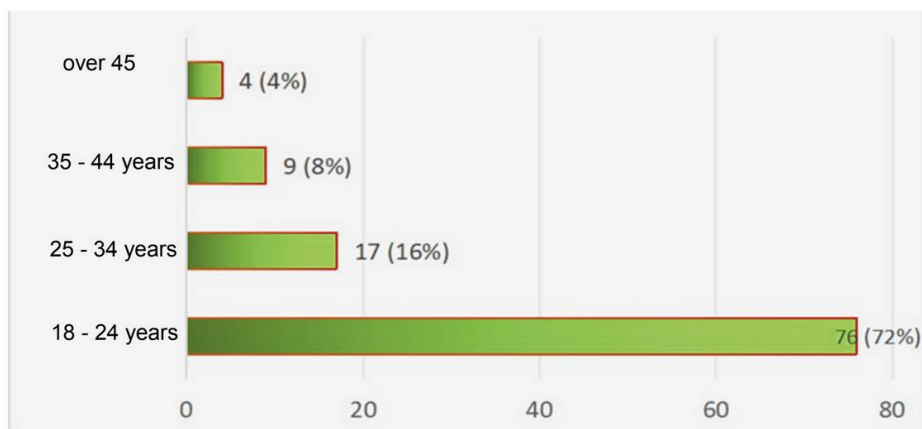
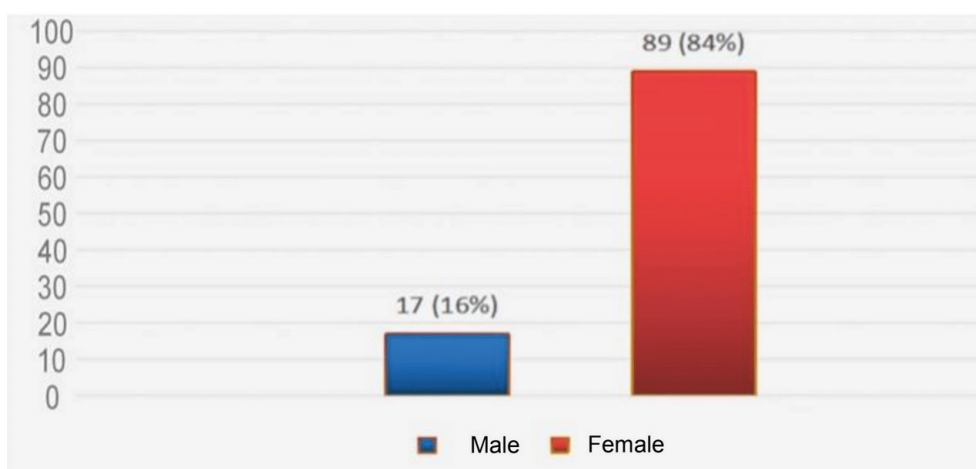


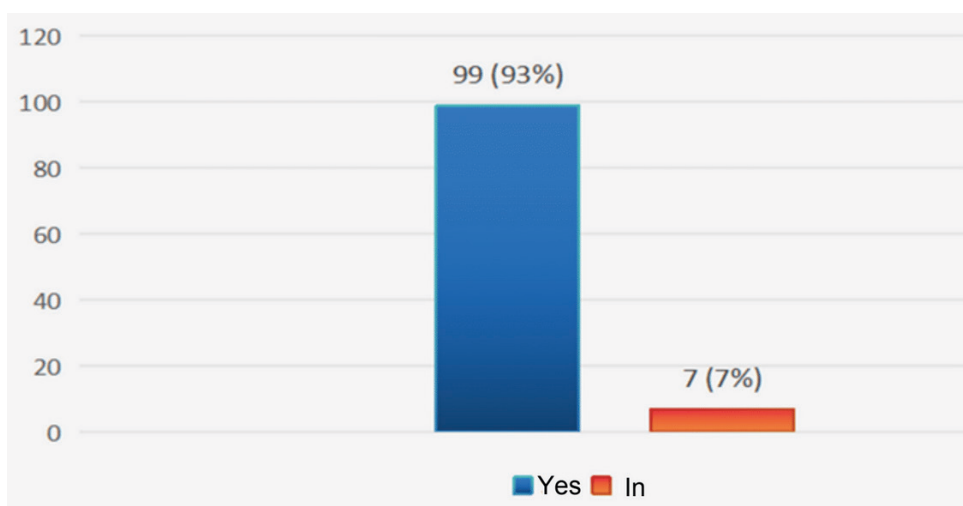
CHART 1 - AGE AGE OF STUDENTS INTERVIEWED

Source: PEREIRA, 2024



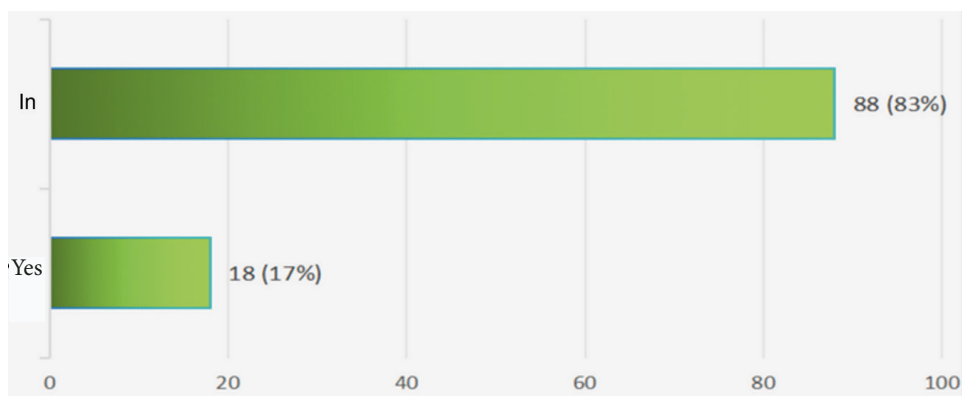
GRAPH 2- GENDER OF INTERVIEWEE

Source: PEREIRA, 2024



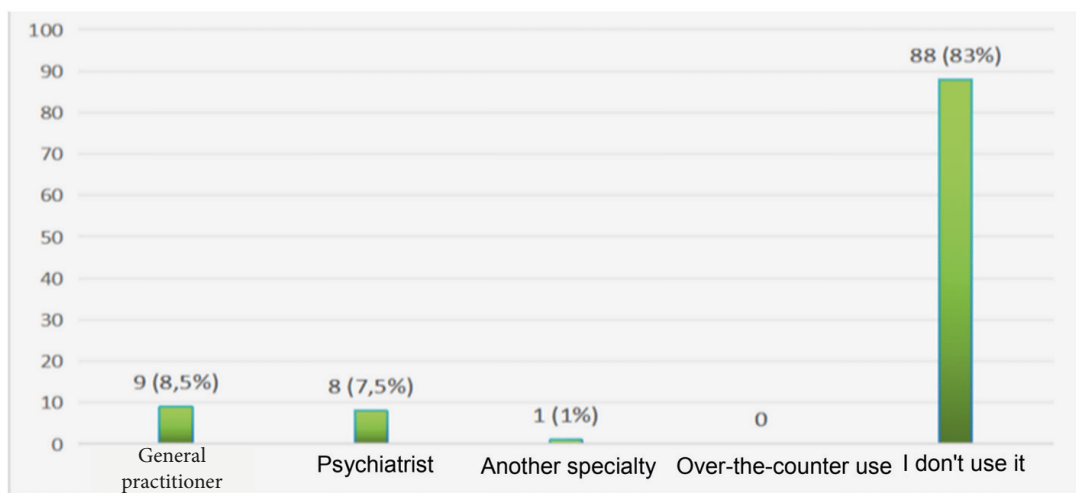
GRAPH 3- CONCILIATION OF THE ROUTINE WITH THE FACULTY

Source: PEREIRA, 2024.



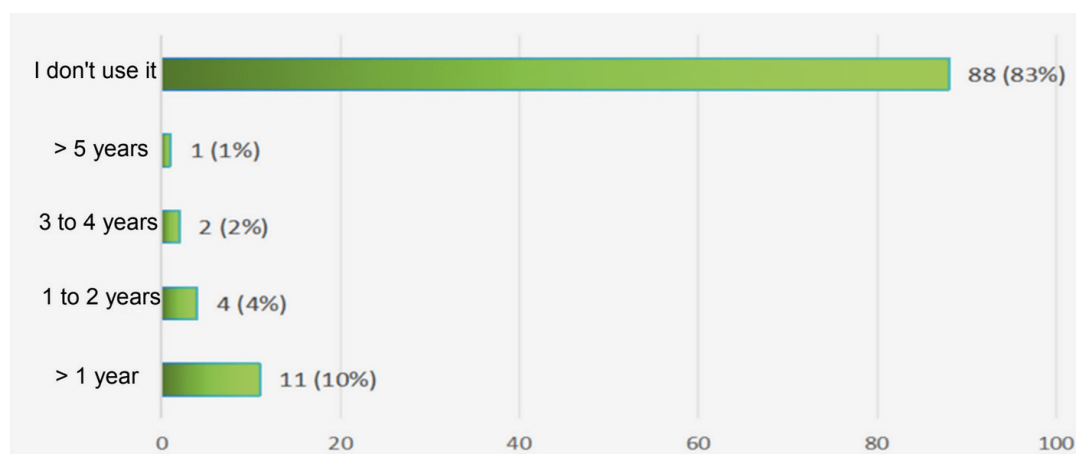
GRAPH 5 - WHICH PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS DO YOU USE?

Source: PEREIRA, 2024.



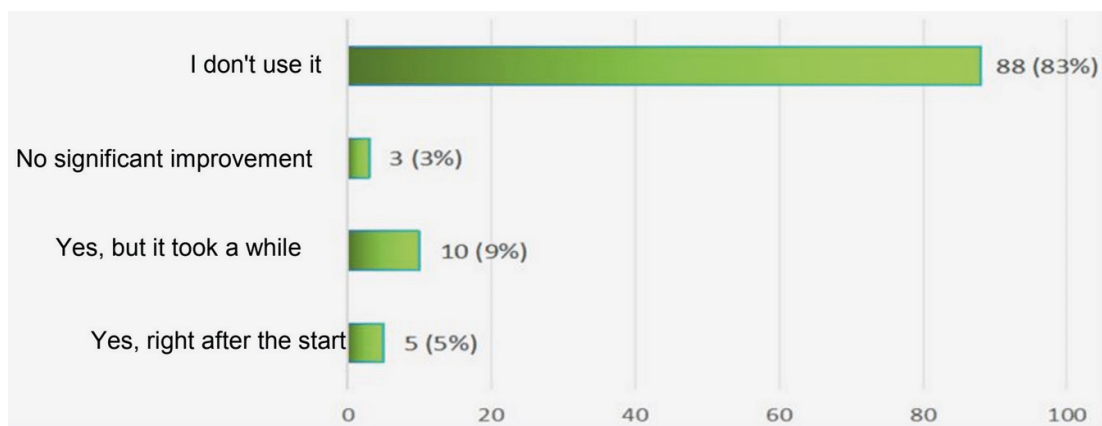
GRAPH 6- MEDICAL SPECIALTY THAT PRESCRIBED THE MEDICINE

Source: PEREIRA, 2024.



GRAPH 7- TIME OF USE OF MEDICINE

Source: PEREIRA, 2024.



GRAPH 9 - IMPROVEMENT OF SYMPTOMS

Source: PEREIRA, 2024.

Medicines Cited	N° Interviewed Who Use
Trazodone Hydrochloride	2
Quetiapine Hemifuramate	1
Bupropion Hydrochloride	2
Equilid	1
Escitalopram Oxalate	6
Diazepam	1
Fluoxetine Hydrochloride	2
Alprazolam	2
Sertraline Hydrochloride	2
Desvenlofaxine Succinate	1
Clonazepam	1

TABLE 1 - MEDICINES USED BY THE STUDENTS INTERVIEWED

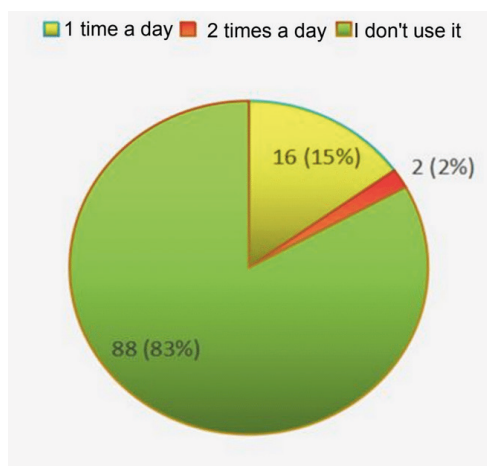
Source: PEREIRA, 2024.

A general analysis of graph 6 shows that 83% of those interviewed do not use medication, which means that a total of 17% use medication, 9 of whom are prescribed by a general practitioner, 8 by a psychiatrist and 1 by another specialist. Silva (2024) points out that only 16 of the students interviewed used medication on prescription.

Graph 7 shows that of the 17% who use medication, 10% (11 interviewees) have been using it for less than 1 year and only 1% (1 interviewee) has been using it for more than 5 years; this is in contrast to Silva (2024) who shows a rate 50% for use of medication between 1 and 5 years.

Graph 5 shows that of the 106 interviewees, only 18 (17%) use medication to treat any of the disorders mentioned in Graph 4. Silva (2024) provides equivalent data. In his recent study, he interviewed 127 nursing students and found that 24 (18.9%) of those interviewed used medication.

When analyzing table 1 referring to graph 5, the drug most used by the interviewees was escitalopram oxalate with 6 citations in the questionnaire; still citing Silva (2024), her research also affirms the predominant use of escitalopram oxalate by the nursing students interviewed by the author.



GRAPH 8 - HOW THE MEDICINE IS USED

Source: PEREIRA, 2024.

Graph 8 shows that the most commonly used form of medication is taking it once a day, with a rate of 15%, and only 2% use it twice a day. Based on these results, no authors were found addressing the issue mentioned in the graph above.

The graph above shows that among those interviewed who use medication, it took a certain amount of time for the symptoms to improve, with a rate of 9%, and that 3% of those interviewed showed no significant improvement with treatment. According to Cruz et al. (2016), each medication takes a certain amount of time for the therapeutic effect to begin, and it is always necessary to follow the prescribing doctor's advice.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to identify and analyze the factors associated with the consumption of anxiolytics and antidepressants among university nursing students at the Eduvale College in Avaré. From the data collected, it was possible to observe that 59% of students say they have some kind of mental disorder, es-

pecially as a result of the stress and emotional demands that come with academic training and clinical practice.

The results indicate that anxiety is prevalent among students, affecting 48% of the study participants. However, only 17% of the students interviewed reported using psychotropic medication. It was also observed that, in many cases, follow-up is only carried out by general practitioners. This highlights the need to reinforce actions aimed at promoting and strengthening mental health care, as recommended by Brazil's public health policies.

These findings highlight the need for greater attention to the mental health university students, proposing the implementation of psychological support programs within higher education institutions, as well as raising awareness about the responsible use of psychotropic drugs. It is believed that the study contributes to a better understanding of the impact of academic pressures on students' mental health and points to ways developing interventions that can minimize these effects and promote a healthier and more balanced academic environment.

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