

A Qualitative Study on Emotional Dissonance and Toxic Positivity among Postgraduate Psychology Students

Sivashankari M

M.Sc. Counselling Psychology, Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College

Abstract

The pressure to be positive and Differences in the emotions of what they feel inside and what they show outside, especially in terms of postgraduate psychology students is what this research explores about. Toxic positivity talks about the pressure to be positive, and emotional dissonance talks the discrepancy between what they feel inside and what they show outside. This qualitative study uses phenomenological approach to study the lives experiences of people and semi structured telephonic interview was conducted on 19 participants including both male and female across India. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis , the data were analysed and 8 themes such as societal expectations, family beliefs, personality of the person, stigmas and misconceptions about psychology, emotional labour, authenticity and the experiences oneself went through in life, expectations from professional and academic settings and their own sense of responsibility and beliefs of postgraduate psychology influences the regulations of emotions leading to pressure of being positive or faking the emotion they felt inside. The need for authenticity and support to hear out the issues can reduce the vulnerability and stress that psychology students going through, the study also highlights the personality differences and that contributes to the important aspect of emotions that one can go through in life.

Keywords: Emotional dissonance, toxic positivity, Postgraduate psychology students, emotional regulation

1. Introduction

Overview

Over the past few years, across different academic and professional settings the term mental health plays a very important and vital role. Different areas like employees, teachers, health care workers were all focussed researching on emotional dissonance and toxic positivity (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Zapf, 2002) But then very or no attention has been given to psychology students who are getting trained to be mental health professionals one day. The emotional difficulties that are being faced by the psychology students can be different since the factors includes personal, academic and also professional. Toxic positivity and emotional dissonance are very important concerns that people in mental health professions research on. Emotional dissonance talks about the discrepancy between what you felt inside and what you show outside (Hochschild,1983), Whereas toxic positivity talks about the pressure to be positive. The review exploring toxic positivity examined and explored the relationship with anxiety, rumination, emotional dissonance and alexithymia stating overlooking positivity leads to

the suppression of emotions and authenticity of a person (Sonia,2025). Emotional dissonance leads to negative effects and the emotional work that is emotional labour causes both positive and negative effects in terms of health (Zapf, 2002). When one suppresses the emotions to look positive outside or to be positive, the other way the person is faking the emotions, stating emotional dissonance and toxic positivity are positively correlated, but exploring these factors with the postgraduate psychology students are very low, specifically in terms of Indian context.

Background of the study

The idea of emotional dissonance was introduced by Arlie Hochschild in her classic text *The Managed Heart* (1983). Hochschild explores how people often suppress or do not express their true feelings in keeping with social or work role demands. She called this “emotional labor.” Emotional dissonance, which is the discomfort produced by the discrepancy between felt and expressed emotions, can be an unintended consequence of extended acting, and it is related to increased surface acting. As she was focusing on emotional labours and all of its negative impact, from there where the term called emotional dissonance emerges. Emotional labour focus more on the emotion regulations to meet the emotional criteria or the emotional expectations of the job and it is also very related with the word called “mental load”. But then emotional dissonance focusses more on the discrepancy of emotions between what you felt inside and what you show outside (Hochschild, 1983).

Then as year progress, the work of Hochschild has been expanded and research has been conducted. Emotional labor had two core components: surface acting (in which we pretend to feel an emotion) and deep acting (in which we try to induce an actual emotion). The study conducted by Zapf (2002) explored concepts of surface acting, deep acting and regulation of emotion were covered and discussed in the perspective of action theory consist of three different levels of regulations such as planning, execution and feedback level. Studies covered has reported that emotional labour has both positive and negative impact on health whereas emotional dissonance has negative effects.

There are studies that has been conducted as time progresses regarding emotional dissonance, they found out emotional dissonance is not something for a momentarily discomfort, this has the ability to lead a psychological strain for a longer time, linking emotional dissonance with emotional exhaustion.

The term called toxic positivity has first appeared on the work called “the queer art of failure” by Halberstam (2011), but then other terms such as unrealistic Optimism has been researched by psychologists since 1980 (Lecompte-Van Poucke,2022). The idea of toxic positivity starts from the roots of history in the 19th century, the New Thought movement.

Quimby stated that being positive and expressing positive emotions can cure illness and emotional suffering. Then, awareness about how society discourages people from acknowledging or validating the negative emotions has been brought up. Halberstam was one among them. Very recently, Goodman (2021) talked about the impact of toxic positivity and how that leads to hiding one’s true feelings (Premlal & Jose, 2024; Goodman, 2021)

Being positive is good; yes, it has its advantages, but going to the extreme of suppressing one’s emotions and faking happiness is where the problem arises, and that’s what’s known as toxic positivity. Toxic positivity is all about faking happiness even when one feels extreme sadness, anger, or some other

emotion, leading to suppression of emotions, which creates trauma and depression. Toxic positivity is defined as *“the excessive and ineffective overgeneralization of a happy, optimistic state across all situations, which can result in the denial, minimization, and invalidation of genuine human emotional experiences”* (Wyatt, 2024).

Time progresses, toxic positivity has become very prevalent online. The covid 19 pandemic paved the way for people to use internet prominently that leads to an increase of communication. Toxic positivity and emotional suppression become very significant in Instagram (Dietze et al., 2022). Authentic expression of emotions can be disrupted by even hearing phrases like ‘You’ve got this’ or ‘always stay positive’ has been discovered by creating a dataset for toxic positivity classification in twitter and then a website of inspirational quote (Upadhyay, Srivatsa, & Mamidi, 2022).

Human emotions and psychology are interrelated with each other. It is basically related with understanding human emotions, thoughts and behaviours. Years before getting into the context, psychologists explored consciousness and emotions of humans. Each of the study were trying to explore how people feel and explore emotions and as time passes there were certain qualities are started to be seen the face quality of the psychologist or rather say “good psychologist”. As postgraduate psychology students people feel so much of stress, self-doubt and burnout, and to cope up having strong social connection and belonging can help as coping mechanisms. Being a student, the academic stress is positively correlated with psychological wellbeing in the college students, Postgraduate psychology students were more affected by stress than other fields. From an Indian postgraduate psychology students, it

states many factors coexist together that causes or influences the well-being psychologically and professionally like some existential queries, stress in academic wise and feeling emotionally fatigue or tired (Dokania & Tripathi, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Emotional labour theory. It was first coined and proposed by Arlie Hochschild (1983), talking about how people are controlling or managing the emotions that they actually feel just to meet the expectations of the role of a job holds. Here people who works, tends to show the emotions that they actually feel is really appropriate for the job and it focus more on the emotional regulation, and it’s not really forced, it’s more of an characteristics and responsibilities that a job holds or has. When this occurs constantly, sometimes people don’t really express what they feel and there comes a discrepancy of what they really felt and what they expressed, sometimes causing stress, exhaustion and sometimes they also feel an inner conflict of confusion if it is positively correlated with high confusion, low awareness about self and lack of social support (Hochschild, 1983). This theory in terms of postgraduate psychology students can helps us to figure out how do they handle emotions, feelings, and certain expectations being set by profession both socially and also academically. Two important types that’s been explored are surface acting talking about emotions that is being faked and deep acting stating emotions whatever is felt is actually experienced and from a research perspective deep acting actually leads positive growth in a self and more level of satisfaction (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

Cognitive Dissonance theory. Leon Festinger came up with this theory in 1957 saying that people feel restlessness and stress when the thoughts, the actions that they do and the belief that they have hold has a discrepancy. So, to just reduce that discomfort and uneasiness people either would

adapt themselves according to the situation or mismatch prolongs causing a conflict and leading to emotional exhaustion and suppression just to reduce the conflict that arises. The behaviour was observed by Festinger during early 1950s in a cult study done by him and other researchers and that becomes the very first evidence proving how cognitive dissonance takes place and how much discomfort it could cause (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956)

Self Determination theory. Being a theory of motivation, self-determination theory has been developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985, 2000) explaining people do things but why do they actually do things. The theory also states that when the needs called Autonomy, Competence and relatedness are not met, people will not be motivated or emotionally will not feel good. As per the saying from Maslow, it is not just physiological nervous systems or tissues needs, but also the psychological innate needs. As per the abstract from the recent Research by Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013) it was stated that when a person feels more supported in terms of authenticity, they feel more intrinsic motivation and resilience. But then when the person feels judged or unauthentic they become unstable emotionally and also anxious.

Person Centered Theory. Rogers (1951) Stated that how people go through discomfort and distress when there is an incongruity between ideal self and real self. Ideal-self talks about they actually wanted to be, Real-self talks about who they really are as person. So, when the person's growth and self-actualisation get directly blocked due to various factors, it leads to inner struggling. Bodenstern and Naude (2022) research studies the aspects of interpersonal, intrapersonal and cognitions aspects. In postgraduate psychology students these can be related with emotions, self-awareness, connections and empathy. Person centered specifically talks about the differences between the ideal and real, whereas pressure of being positive talks about the false self (Salopek, 2024).

Philosophical Framework

From the research, it can be seen that the reality is not really fixed, it is being shaped and differed based on the perceptions and the views of the individuals. The individuals here, on the basis of personal perspectives and social circumstances, hence this study is relativist ontology and phenomenological epistemology. Phenomenological approach suits more in terms of studying the meaning being attached to the lived experiences of people and this makes it more suitable for this research. Through this framework, we can see that instead of learning or understanding one objective truth, this study focus on exploring the very subjective experiences, understanding in more of contextual perspectives and deriving meaning out of lived experiences of postgraduate psychology students.

Statement of the problem

Although there are studies that talk about emotional dissonance and toxic positivity in terms of mental health professionals, there are very less study that focus postgraduate psychology students on their emotional regulations and pressure to be positive. This study is more of an exploration identifying role of emotional dissonance and toxic positivity in postgraduate psychology students and identifying the factors that causes this influence from individual perspectives and their lived experiences since much studies haven't explored this particularly in Indian context.

Aim and Objectives of the study

This study aims to explore if the postgraduate psychology students feel a discrepancy between what they are expected to show from what they really felt and to see if there is pressure to be positive and how does that affect their emotions. This study also explores about how they handle their emotions in terms of regulations and what helps them to cope up with those emotional struggles if they face.

Significance of the study

This study is very important to explore since postgraduate psychology students will be the future mental health professional and very less studies focused on this particular category of people, during this transition talking about the emotional struggles, exploring if they feel any kind of discrepancy in the emotion or are they pressured to be positive in any terms of aspects, all this can help in creating more awareness about mental health, support systems that are required, wellness programs in handling and regulating the one's own emotions.

Operational definition of variables

Emotional dissonance. Dissonance happens when there is a difference, a discrepancy. So emotional dissonance is all about the discrepancy of emotions between what they felt inside and what they have expressed outside. This comes under the broader terms called emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting), focussing more on the regulation, but in emotional dissonance more of conflict arises in terms of expressing the emotions.

Toxic Positivity. Being positive is helpful in certain aspects, but being pressured to be positive is not really leading to emotional suppression and stress. Toxic positivity talks about the pressure to be positive despite of any other emotion that a person goes through. The pressure to be positive is very major issues in mental health profession already. So exploring these aspects particularly for Postgraduate psychology students can contribute more in terms of regulating emotions and these are hardly addressed.

2. Review of literature Overview of the Review of Literature

The review explores existing studies on emotional dissonance and toxic positivity, focusing on how individuals experience and manage emotions in personal and professional settings. It examines theories and research connected to emotional regulation, cognitive conflict, and well-being among postgraduate psychology students.

Empirical Review

The research focussing on postgraduate psychology students were mostly about the emotional regulation and stress they would in terms of stress, much broader concepts are not really explored with this particular area of group. Emotional dissonance in the conflict and difference between the genuine feeling and outward emotional expression, which is often linked to stress and the burnout (Johannessen et al., 2025; Indregard et al., 2018). Toxic positivity involves denying of negative emotions, leading to emotional suppression and reduced well being of the individual (Quinto et al., 2021; Sonia, 2025; Wyatt, 2024).

Toxic positivity has been studied, and it caused a major social (Internal and external causes) and psychological (Emotional suppression, ambivalence, frustration, isolation, academic demotivation)

impact on students which also leads to the unhealthy coping mechanisms like bottling up the emotions and feelings. Students also got confused to differentiate between toxic positivity and genuinely being positive even if they rely on positivity as a coping strategy (Quinto et al., 2021).

Nowadays social media also play a very important role in pressuring that constant happiness is needed and expectations beyond reality is also a cause intending to toxic positivity.

The pressure from both the contexts of culture and professions complicates the emotional wellbeing of the person, this can be counteracted through validating the emotions, differentiating positivity from toxic positivity and identifying the reality and also prioritizing mental health and creating safe space for an individual (Wyatt, 2024).

Positive outlook has both advantages and disadvantages, where excessive use of positivity removes the aspect called negativity itself for peoples own personal win. The research was conducted and stated on how people show the fake self in terms of promotion causing to believe what others post and this causes more comparisons and themselves sharing their own fake version (Salopek & Eastin, 2024).

There is also a study that explores Malaysia works who is young confirms the existence of toxic positivity, which is motivated by the urge to show themselves happy and good, This occurs because of the environment that is unsupportive and unavailability of the awareness. Risk factors also include traits of personality, social pressure and the reinforcement of constant positivity being a behaviour that is learnt (Lau Ung Mui & Saili, 2024).

Research was studies to find how emotional dissonance and self-efficacy is associated with mental distress, exhaustion and sickness absence, involving 937 health and social workers from various profession. There emotional dissonance was positively correlated with mental distress ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), and sickness absence ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and sickness absence ($r = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$). But they were negatively correlated with self-efficacy ($r = -0.11$, $p < 0.01$). Resulting that health and social workers facing emotional dissonance tends to experience increased sickness absence, exhaustion and mental distress, whereas with self-efficacy being high, they are resilient. Low self-efficacy, they are vulnerable to emotional dissonance (Indregard et al., 2018).

There was the other study talking about the association between emotional dissonance, mental distress and leadership behaviours, which is conducted in 2019 among 1426 home care workers, with a follow up of 8 and 14 months. Here, emotional dissonance is positively correlated with mental distress (adjusted $P < 0.05$). Fair, supporting and empowering leadership also lessens the positive relationship between emotional dissonance and mental distress, acting as a buffer. However, leadership behavior (adjusted $P < 0.05$) did not really moderate the reverse association between mental distress predicting emotional dissonance, (adjusted $P > 0.05$) showing reverse positive associations (Johannessen et al., 2025).

Emotional dissonance and the well-being of the Turkish retail employees was also investigated through a theoretical model, stating emotional dissonance can have a positive impact on emotional exhaustion and a negative impact on the job satisfaction, with the moderating effects of authenticity of an individual and the self-efficacy also can have influence on the well being of the employee (Yozgat et al., 2011).

A study has explored the harmful effects of toxic positivity, excessively neglected the negative emotions and only promoted the growth of positive ones leading to emotional suppression. This also increases and intensify the burnout psychological distress. The review also integrates research from different contexts like workplace, personal relationships, social media highlighting how the reinforcement to be positive toxically enhances and affected the authenticity and resilience of an individual. Being toxically positive also reduces the humans introspections leading to Alexithymia (feeling difficulty to identify and express emotions). Toxic positivity can also lead to emotional dissonance (Specifically in work setting). When the pressured emotions contradict the genuine feelings of an individual, this leads to illness related to stress and also reduce the workplace efficacy, contributing to low job satisfaction and burnout (Sonia, 2025).

Research has been conducted in academic field of mathematics and explained how people in that field have emotional labor, telling the subject is not just about doing a research or teaching. The job role requires lots of emotional support, but it sometimes oversee that particular aspect and that cause issues in the regulations of emotions were explored in the research (Karaali, 2018).

There was qualitative research conducted with 20 nursing students who works face to face communicates with the clients exploring all three aspects of emotional labour and stated that this approach affects the way student interact with the clients in the clinical setting (Degirmenci oz, Karadas, & Baykal, 2022).

There is study research conducted on teachers to see how stress, anxiety and difficulty in terms of regulating emotions (difference in what you have and what you express to fit in a job role) affect the satisfaction of job. The research analysed and found that teachers do go through all oh these emotions and they have very low satisfaction less happy in their jobs, support and motivation were suggested to increase the satisfaction level in the job (Okoiye, Okezie, & Onah, 2023).

AI-Kubaisi and AI-Azzawi (2022) did an research and found that having a difference in terms of one's thoughts and beliefs is affiliated with regulations of emotions such as controlling one's actions and thoughts, gender difference was also studied (university students). Resulting the research stating that there a weak relationship between the two factors.

Another research with context of university students studying about the differences in terms of ones thought and belief were explored and studied how it is related with the behavior and attitude of the person stating that the differences in ones thoughts and belief for each individual is totally different and it can be perceived in the way how strongly a person go through those differences (Abdulfattah, 2021).

Tarantul and Berkovich (2025) explored and researched on how regulate and handle the emotions they feel when handling the problems of students, more like discipling. There were 24 teachers, and it is a semi structed interview, the finding states that the teachers do express some sort of emotional distress when they were handling students. There were also the concepts of differences in what they feel and what they express in terms satisfying job needs and emotional works stating that's how they cope up with the negative emotions. They were also some aspects of personal values involved.

With all the focus more on regulations on emotions and differences, Lecompte-Van Poucke (2022) studied how the pressure to be positive becomes a very vital role in terms of the social media and online platforms such as Facebook. There are posts higher specifically on positive thinking, which

makes someone who is already going through illness or some negative emotions to oversee and avoid what they were going through, especially negative emotions. Here the research links the pressure to be positive can also be out of social context and terms already being set in society.

Dietze, Dzenick, and Halcro (2022) explored how the pressure to be positive is linked towards social media like Instagram, stating people feel the pressure to always be positive and happy. The study also explored how the pressure to be positive is related with suppression of the emotions just to fit into the theme that is created in society. The research suggested that being true and showing the real emotions can reduce the pressure to be positive.

As per the abstract, Psychology postgraduate students often face high stress from the studies, personal life, internships and the personal life. That's s national study which found that 49% had high anxiety, and 39 % had other psychological issue, and 35% had both. Physical issues were also seen, talking about the emotional burden postgraduate psychology students carry silently which needs more attention to explore in areas of concerns (Rummell, 2015).

Synthesis of literature

There were studies that were conducted highlighting pressure of being positive and hiding real emotions can affect the mental health of a person. Faking emotions as in existence of difference in emotions of what they feel inside and what they show outside can specifically cause burnout, stress and one can also feel emotionally exhausted specifically in jobs that highlights mental health and control of emotions (Indregand et al., 2018; Johannessen et al., 2025; Yozgat et al., 2012). Pressure to be positive on the other hand is more about invalidating the negative feeling one feel, it is more like a tendency of a person to always trying to be positive and neglecting the negative emotion despite of the situation especially in painful times (quinto et al.,2021; Lau Ung Mui & Saili, 2024; Sonia, 2025; Wyatt,2024). Studies so far conducted on postgraduate psychology students talks about the struggle in regulating emotions and such pressures end up giving them burnout and stress, reducing their originality and in recent years it just worsened stating how important it is exploring these key areas (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Salopek & Eastin, 2024).

Research gap

While the emotional dissonance and toxic positivity were researched in a multiple of professions, there have been few inquiries considering students for psychology in training. Most of the current research are quantitative and the lived emotional experiences of pupils tend to be ignored. Not yet very well appreciated is the collusion of emotional dissonance with toxic positivity in young psychologists (Postgraduate Psychology students)in India. This research attempts to redress that balance through the use of a qualitative study which examines their individual stories.

3. Method

Overview

The third chapter talks about the methodology that presents the procedures and the methods which are used in the research to select samples, identify the tools used and in terms of analysis. The research methodology also gives a holistic perspective in finding what the research is all about, what is analysed, with whom it is done and how it is done.

Research design

Qualitative research design is being used in this research, with phenomenological approach to understand the lived experience of postgraduate psychology students.

Research question

1. How does postgraduate psychology students experience emotional dissonance?
2. How does postgraduate psychology students perceive and respond to the pressure to stay emotionally positive?
3. What are the ways does emotional dissonance and toxic positivity affect the emotional well-being of postgraduate psychology during the academic journey?
4. How does postgraduate psychology students cope with differences of what they feel and what they are expected to show?
5. What are the coping strategies when postgraduate psychology students experience the pressure to be positive?

Participants

Population of this study are 19 psychology students doing their master education, and among them 15 are female and 4 are male from colleges or universities in India. They were enrolled in programs such as Clinical psychology, Counselling psychology and Applied psychology and were enrolled in either the first or second year of their programs.

Samples

Purposive sampling techniques was used, and the data were collected using Semi Structured Telephonic interviews making it comfortable for the participants to share their thoughts and views in their own phase. The interviews approximately took 25 to 45 minutes, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was ensured.

Inclusion criteria

1. Postgraduate students currently pursuing a master's degree in psychology or anything related to psychology, particularly in India.
2. Aged between 20 to 23 years.
3. Willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent.
4. Able to communicate in English or Tamil.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Undergraduate students or psychologists, mental health professionals working in the field.
2. Students from non-psychology courses or from different backgrounds.
3. Individuals currently diagnosed with a mental health condition or undergoing psychological treatment.

Procedure

Google form was shared getting the demographic details and consent was asked. Then, data were collected through semi structured telephonic interview from the participants who filled the form and given consent. The participants were explained about the aim and procedure of the study;

They all were informed about the confidentiality and also anonymity of the participation. Right to withdraw from the study, not to answer questions they are uncomfortable with, clarification of questions was clearly explained to the participants and then informed consent was obtained. Semi structured interview was conducted using telephone where each participant took duration of 25 to 45 minutes. The transcriptions were further analysed.

Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis given by Braun and Clarke is used to analyze the themes and pattern of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Aim and procedure about the study was clearly stated to the participants. Willingness to participate and the rights to withdraw the interview at any point during the interview was also clearly explained to the participants before getting informed consent. Then confidentiality about the information's and personal detail anonymity was also explained. In terms of very personal information permission to include the incident for the data was also obtained.

4. Results and Discussion

Overview

This study presents the personal telephonic semi structured interview with 19 postgraduate Psychology students in India, exploring about their lived experiences of toxic positivity and emotional dissonance. All the participants shared their experiences in personal and professional (same) context, and all were interviewed for the same. 8 major themes were stated from the experiences the participants shared, and short verbatims were also included supporting the themes.

Results Table 1

Theme and Subthemes

Theme and subthemes	Example quote
Suppression of emotion and societal expectation Due to societal factors hiding negative emotions.	“When someone says some sort of encouraging words I would feel like they didn’t even try hearing me properly then what’s the use, I just stop sharing whatever my pain is. They don’t understand it anyway” (P7)
‘Staying positive’- family and culture expectation	“There is always an unspoken rule. We should always be strong. You are not supposed to show too much sadness.” (P2)
Judgement from people	“...It... it... feels frustrating when people say things like you are a psychology student, you should handle this better. You know everything was going on in your mind, you have the solution to every problem. What, you are a magician or what? All of this, all of the statements, you know,

Academic and Professional Expectations
Studying psychology – Role pressure

Self-control and overthinking empathy

Despite being hurt, pressure to understand other people

Persona vs Authenticity
Emotional draining and feeling fakeness

it is frustrating.

Sometimes it makes me feel like I am not allowed to have emotional struggles or difficulties. So yeah, that's it's frustrating. It's very exhausting, like after a certain point you, you don't have energy for anything like even for faking a smile, you, you won't have any energy left. So it is very emotionally exhausting hearing all that judgemental thoughts.”

“Teachers in class sometimes tell us to behave in a certain way since you are psychology students and all that, its not like we don't have bad days or we cant behave normally.”

“I I didn't feel pressure to know to express my emotion but like for me as I study psychology like I I will be giving importance more about other other peoples emotions rather than mine. Its not that I am not expressing but even if I express I will be thinking 1000 times whether whether it will be affecting the other person in any way. If I say this word will that be triggering? Or if I do this will that be OK for them? Like I will be thinking that again and again and again, like if it if it's OK kind of way. So like it's not yeah it is some kind of to an extent it is controlling the expression of my emotion. Like even if I am angry I can't expressing that completely OK considering other peoples emotions in mental state. All of these things and there is a pressure to as psychology students there is a pressure. I feel like there is a pressure to understand other peoples behaviour even though they are they are hurting us. Like sometimes the mistakes will be on their side but then they are to understand their situation and emotions and justify them even though they have done mistake towards us. So I feel that pressure.” (P12)

“Even if they hurt me, but they expect me to understand their emotion, behavior... and I do that, I do that as expected” (P6)

“Yeah, many times. Like for example, if if I feel emotionally drained or sad, but I still have to smile and interact, you know, in a good way, in a positive way to others with others. It it feels very fake to some extent. But but its, you know, sometime its, its are necessary to be like that. Its not always you, you don't have that space

Coping mechanism by masking emotions	everywhere, right? Or with, with everybody who you meet in your life. So those are the moments, those are some. There are incidents in life like that.” (P11) “I just smile and move on, it triggers me sometimes. but I will never show it on my face.” (P15)
Emotional growth and Awareness about self High understanding about emotion because of course	“It feels like you are wearing a mask.” (P9) “This psychology actually helped to process emotion in a better way, I can understand my own emotions, and I got more self-awareness.” (P14)
Learning to set boundaries	“I have actually learned when and where to express emotions and where not to do that. So yeah, actually setting boundary helps...” (P11)
Two sides of empathy	
Insight and reflection	“Every day I learn something new about myself, and I also learn through experiences mmm yeah its constant self-awareness would say” (P11)
Boon and bane	“Too much of being empathy and all that it can tire us, so sometimes because of this what we will do is that we start taking care of others mental health more than ours.” (P12)
Helplessness and self-blame cause of empathy	“It feels like really overwhelming... and sometimes helpless that I can’t help myself while trying to help others.” (P13)
Misunderstanding and Stigmas from other people Perfectionism (expectation)	“Family people says, ‘you are study psychology only right, why are you being so emotional, you are studying psychology right, don’t even know how to handle it then?’ they think what are we some robots, they think we should always be strong and always calm, composed and act all good? Aren’t we also humans with normal emotions then.” (P19)
Isolation because of misunderstanding	“I felt really helpless and alone for months, my family didn’t get what I was going through, they didn’t really understand.” (P19)
Support systems and coping Comfort in safe space	“Whenever I feel low I always talk to my mom, its like she is my support system and really help me to cope up with things. Anything that I feel and there is a need to share, I will always call her and then I will be okay.” (P17)

Adaptation and acceptance

“At first and all I felt really bad, it would be so hurtful but now as time goes, I started accepting those judgements, like understood these how people will be and now focus on my peace.”,

Support needs

“I don't have to explain everything to everyone”,
” I usually need 2 things mainly. First would be someone to talk to, someone to let it out and I would not expect anything from them, just to just to be there and just to listen. That is it.

I would not expect any reply from them or any solution from them or anything but just be there and listen. That is all. That would be one and the second I think would be a good cry. Like a good, good cry would make me feel a lot better.” (P11)

Individual characteristic and Resilience
Personality differences in coping

“I am sensitive okay, very sensitive that small things triggers me but then I have learned to handle to better now.”, “I cry, I cry a lot. But nowadays, I, I, I, I started to accept everything and moving on, whatever happens, OK, Then we will see, OK?” (P15)

Maturity

“Around that time I was, I felt really helpless and I was felt like I was left alone during that time. I was in that phase for an entire around a period of may be 5 to 6 months around over that phase of span. After that I was bit matured enough to handle that situation on myself itself. So after that I was matured enough to handle all those things.” (P19)

Motivated by oneself

“I, I love my goals a lot. So so I came into the field of psychology. I love psychology a lot. So it does not mean that I just wanted to be that positive, silent show positive right. But I, I learnt to handle the negative side of it.” (P10)

Responses to emotional dissonance and toxic positivity Suppression of emotion and societal expectation

Due to societal factors hiding negative emotions. Participants stated that sometimes they used to suppress the emotions that they feel because of others dismissing their feelings or not really understand their feelings.

“When someone says some sort of encouraging words I would feel like they didn't even try hearing me properly then what's the use, I just stop sharing whatever my pain is. They don't understand it anyway” (P7)

Staying positive-Family and cultural expectations. Many participants stated that they were being told to be positive or to think positive even during some painful or difficult situations and experiences stating sadness is meant for weakness.

“I know someone being abused and stated how wrong it is, they said you are a psychology student only right, see the positive side.” (P15)

“There is always an unspoken rule. We should always be strong. You are not supposed to show too much sadness.” (P2)

“Again, not with it has not pressured me but as an individual I just said that some my childhood had been its like in a culturally you have been taught to be a positive person or a positive to show a positive side. I think I would say its culturally you have to be in such such way” (P10)

Judgement from people. Participants said that they felt really judged and exhausted when they express emotions normally, because people have their own understanding about psychology and they really expected them to always stay calm and composed since participants are from psychology backgrounds.

“...It... it... feels frustrating when people say things like you are a psychology student, you should handle this better. You know everything was going on in your mind, you have the solution to every problem. What, you are a magician or what? All of this, all of the statements, you know, it is frustrating. Sometimes it makes me feel like I am not allowed to have emotional struggles or difficulties. So yeah, that's it's frustrating. It's very exhausting, like after a certain point you, you don't have energy for anything like even for faking a smile, you, you won't have any energy left. So it is very emotionally exhausting hearing all that judgemental thoughts.”

Academic and professional expectations

Studying psychology giving Role pressure. Participants stated that the teachers and peers expected them to always be positive, behave maturely and also handle all the emotions very professionally, making no mistakes ensuring the characters of calm and being composed.

“Teachers in class sometimes tell us to behave in a certain way since you are psychology students and all that, its not like we don't have bad days or we cant behave normally.”

Self-control and overthinking empathy. Many participants experienced some fear, in expressing the anger or sadness. They are afraid what if the emotions might hurt other people or they take it in wrong way.

“Sometimes even if I am angry, I don't express it. I keep thinking if my words will trigger or hurt someone.” (P12)

“I I didn't feel pressure to know to express my emotion but like for me as I study psychology like I I will be giving importance more about other other peoples emotions rather than mine. Its not that I am not expressing but even if I express I will be thinking 1000 times whether whether it will be affecting the other person in any way. If I say this word will that be triggering? Or if I do this will that be OK for them? Like I will be thinking that again and again and again, like if it

if it's OK kind of way. So like it's not yeah it is some kind of to an extent it is controlling the expression of my emotion. Like even if I am angry I can't expressing that completely OK considering other peoples emotions in mental state. All of these things and there is a pressure to as psychology students there is a pressure. I feel like there is a pressure to understand other peoples behaviour even though they are they are hurting us. Like sometimes the mistakes will be on their side but then they are to understand their situation and emotions and justify them even though they have done mistake towards us. So I feel that pressure.” (P12)

Despite being hurt pressure to understand other people. Participants stated that they stay understanding and they also felt they had to justify others hurtful behavior.

“Even if they hurt me, but they expect me to understand their emotion, behavior... and I do that, I do that as expected” (P6)

Persona vs Authenticity

Emotional draining and feeling fakeness. Here participants explained many times how exhausting emotionally it is to act like all fine but when they were struggling inside.

“If I have to smile when I am actually feeling something else, it is so fake, it feels really fake. Its also not like everywhere you can be you or there is space to be real.” (P8)

“Yeah, many times. Like for example, if if I feel emotionally drained or sad, but I still have to smile and interact, you know, in a good way, in a positive way to others with others. It it feels very fake to some extent. But but its, you know, sometime its, its are necessary to be like that. Its not always you, you don't have that space everywhere, right? Or with, with everybody who you meet in your life. So those are the moments, those are some. There are incidents in life like that.” (P11)

Coping mechanism my masking emotion. Sometimes participants stated that they used to mask the emotion that they were feeling to avoid any criticisms or to avoid biased confrontation.

“I just smile and move on, it triggers me sometimes. but I will never show it on my face.” (P15)

“It feels like you are wearing a mask.” (P9)

Emotional growth and awareness about self

High understanding about emotion because of the course. Many participants explained that studying psychology helped them in more positive ways, they stated that it really helps them for better self-understanding and also explained how helpful it is regulating their emotions.

“This psychology actually helped to process emotion in a better way, I can understand my own emotions, and I got more self-awareness.” (P14)

Learning to set boundaries. They explained that they learnt where it was appropriate the emotion and where not to. They also clearly stated explained the need to set a boundary between personal and professional life.

“I have actually learned when and where to express emotions and where not to do that. So yeah, actually setting boundary helps...” (P11)

Insight and Reflection. Participant stated how reflection as a part of their growth in a journey, this helps them learn and manage the pressure and emotions more effectively.

“Uhh so every day I learn something new about myself, its like having more self-awareness I would say”

Two sides of empathy

Insight and Reflection. Here participants stated they had gone through so much in life and that acts as more of self-awareness and knowledge that they would carry through out life. They also stated what kind demand that the job (psychology) and awareness were built more through the experience they gain.

“Every day I learn something new about myself and I also learn through experiences mmm yeah its constant self-awareness would say” (P11)

Boon and bane. Participants they explored and shared that being an empathetic person actually helped them connect really with people, but it also comes with certain negative aspects with its own boundaries, it often makes them very emotionally drained.

“Too much of being empathy and all that it can tire us, so sometimes because of this what we will do is that we start taking care of others mental health more than ours.” (P12)

Helplessness and self-blame cause of empathy. Participants stated how they felt helpless sometimes when they couldn't apply certain concepts to themselves and they question their capability because of that.

“It feels like really overwhelming... and sometimes helpless that I can't help myself while trying to help others.” (P13)

“Yeah, could be like lot of because as I mentioned before, like I was a people play. So may be that was my nature. Like I am a person who used to be very adjustable but right now I am becoming a person who started discounting my own feelings meaning that I started over empathising with people. Even if people make mistakes like there were like few people in my life, they made like terrible mistake and I still choose to forgive them or forget or either forget or whatever. But that I started like OK its because they are where they were in that position. OK. What could have pushed them to make them do this? And, and even they could have regretted it, right? I started discounting my own feeling and I started over empathising. And when I came back to my sense that I. That's when I realised, OK, may be my course and studying psychology has like fully affected my I would not say my personality, but my entire thinking, the way I think or the way I put up things differently have changed.” (P9)

Misunderstanding and stigmas from other people

Perfectionism (expectation). Participants explored and reported that other people specifically family or society assumes they should always be mentally stronger and also emotionally stable.

“Family people says, ‘you are study psychology only right, why are you being so emotional, you are studying psychology right, don’t even know how to handle it then?’ they think what are we some robots, they think we should always be strong and always calm, composed and act all good? Aren’t we also humans with normal emotions then.” (P19)

Isolation because of misunderstanding. Participants explained how even with close relationships their chances are of getting misunderstood and that leading to the extremity of emotionally isolating oneself and having the feelings of loneliness.

“I felt really helpless and alone for months, my family didn’t get what I was going through, they didn’t really understand.” (P19)

Support systems and coping

Comfort in safe space. People reported that its not every people that they go and share things with, its only limited and trusted people who made them feel really heard and supported.

“Whenever I feel low I always talk to my mom, its like she is my support system and really help me to cope up with things. Anything that I feel and there is a need to share, I will always call her and then I will be okay.” (P17)

“Yeah, I am trying my level best to make sure I am expressing everything at least to my friends, they are safe space, even if I hesitate sometimes” (P14)

Adaptation and acceptance. There was a point where participant started telling that they don’t have safe space to share any of this personal feeling, even with the person they feel safe to share things with at a point they feel suffocation, they don’t even know why they feel that, they learned to accept judgements from people and focus more on themselves rather than those words.

“At first and all I felt really bad, it would be so hurtful but now as time goes, I started accepting those judgements, like understood these how people will be and now focus on my peace.”,

“I don't have to explain everything to everyone”,

“People used to judge with their with profession what we are pursuing. So, I started to accept the thing.” (P15)

“Yeah, I have many peoples I know they will listen to me, they will support me. What I want, they will give. But still, at some point something is pulling me back from expressing things with them. Carrier suffocation. I don't know why this word is relatable, but I think suffocation, for now I am just accepting things.” (P14)

“No, I don't have anyone.” (P13)

Support needs. Maximum participants openly shared that all they need is someone just to listen, not to verbalize back or anything, focusing on the self-more, some ways they also stated people getting awareness about the course and how it works will also be helpful.

“Sometimes we need someone just, just to listen silently not to like advice and tell anything, just space to share and talk” (P7)

“More than other people coming and helping them, it is more of like they understanding their own emotions and they are giving time for themselves.” (P8)

” I usually need 2 things mainly. First would be someone to talk to, someone to let it out and I would not expect anything from them, just to just to be there and just to listen. That is it.

I would not expect any reply from them or any solution from them or anything but just be there and listen. That is all. That would be one and the second I think would be a good cry. Like a good, good cry would make me feel a lot better.” (P11)

“OK so so correct me if I am wrong, but you are telling that personally you are a person who loves being with people. So even though even with the profession, even with the course that you are studying in, you would love to have people who can listen to you actually can, you can actually take care of you because somewhere you are tired taking care of people, somewhere you are tired listening to people, where you need someone who can listen. Yes, yes, yes. Personally, you want someone who can acknowledge your emotions, someone who can listen to.

Yeah. Yeah, I need someone to rely on.” (P15)

Individual Characteristics and resilience

Personality differences in coping. Participants accepted and stated the personality of a person is very important and it also affects in terms how a person handle stress and emotions despite studying this course.

“I am sensitive okay, very sensitive that small things triggers me but then I have learned to handle to better now.”, “I cry, I cry a lot. But nowadays, I, I, I, I started to accept everything and moving on, whatever happens, OK, Then we will see, OK?” (P15)

“Yeah, maybe it depends upon the person also. You know someone some people get easily gets triggered of that. You know, they will not be in that way. Like maybe I am taking in this funny way, but my friend will not be sure that she could take that in a sarcastic way and other friend can take in a revenge mood way. So everything will be different because the triggering response matters, right? So it depends upon the person and their personality for sure, yeah.” (P17)

“Despite studying psychology, personality of a person actually matters, kandipa” (P16)

“I don't know, I mean it depends on that individual” (P11)

Maturity. Some of the participant stated that maturity and ability to take control over the emotions are developed better after more of experiences and self-reflection.

“Around that time I was, I felt really helpless and I was felt like I was left alone during that time. I was in that phase for an entire around a period of may be 5 to 6 months around over that phase of span. After that I was bit matured enough to handle that situation on myself itself. So after that I was matured enough to handle all those things.” (P19)

“If the person has gone through some sort of tough times before, it is like the person got certain amount of awareness already and also the personality and the experience that they already

have. Its easy for them to handle the pressure or handle the emotion sometimes where they don't feel like it is like pressure itself. Yeah" (P17)

Motivated by oneself. Participant also discussed that taking this field has helped them to understand themselves better and they choose it genuinely with lots of passion to find purpose.

"I need to take the course that I am doing, the job that I am going to be doing in a proper way that helps people and invites them to seek help." (P8)

"I, I love my goals a lot. So so I came into the field of psychology. I love psychology a lot. So it does not mean that I just wanted to be that positive, silent show positive right. But I, I learnt to handle the negative side of it." (P10)

"In the field that talks about humans and human behaviours and all of that. So feeling inside low and showing positive outside is like a common part that comes in the study itself. We been very devoted to the study and you totally get into it. It is something that that is very natural." (P18)

Overview

The analysis of the participants semi structured interview helped in figuring out 8 themes (Suppression of emotion and societal expectation, Academic and Professional Expectations, Persona vs Authenticity, Emotional growth and Awareness about self, Two sides of empathy, Misunderstanding and Stigmas from other people, Support systems and coping, Individual characteristic and Resilience) and each views and experiences of participants are unique but with one common need, having someone to listen and understood by people. With discussing about the inability to manage emotions, it can be clearly seen from the results that personality of the person also matters despite a person studying psychology involving emotions and human behaviour. With clearly views, about family and culture it can also be seen how the expectations without knowledge by people outside can pressurize people doing the course of study.

Discussion

The aim of the study is to explore the emotional dissonance (discrepancy in what you feel inside and what you show outside) and toxic positivity (the pressure to stay positive) specifically in postgraduate psychology students. The findings of the research says that people do feel some sort of conflict in expressing the emotions they truly felt and sometimes people do feel the pressure to act all calm, composed and positive even during painful situations. The causal factors are different for some of the participants, but the common factor is because of the societal expectation and stigmas that is associated with psychology and one among them is "the person is doing psychology, he/she can manage all emotions". There is also this family expectations with different terms one, when family really don't understand what the concept and course is about and believing the myths about psychology. Second, family themselves have these unsaid rules to be strong and manage emotions (not to cry- seen as weakness) and this pressurizes participants either to suppress the emotions more or participants stated after coming to master's and studying psychology helped them to develop greater awareness about emotions and regulating those emotions. The struggles are because of the family beliefs, expectations from cultural factors and the professional picture attached in terms of being a psychology student.

Many participants shared how they suppress emotions just to meet this social and cultural expectations that has been kept, not sometimes in terms of the study or not always in professional

context. Sometimes the expectations to appear all fine or positive leads to emotional suppression and frustrations. Some participants shared even if they were hurt, angry or sad, the expectations forced them to “act all fine” or “put on mask”, they stopped letting other people know what they are feeling because others reminded them they are psychology students and “they should have known things better anyways” or “they will be positive anyways”, this adds to the burden of being positive always and not show the emotions what they truly felt being the reflection of emotional dissonance and toxic positivity.

Beyond those societal and cultural expectations that can be seen, the emotion pressure of academic and professional setting can also be contributed here. Participants reported that being the psychology students and a trainee, they feel this responsibility to be matured and empathetic at all times. The need to be this matured and composed was there even when they are going through some personal struggles. Some of the participants mentioned that the teacher expects them to be like a psychology student or to act like professional stating they are going to be mental health professionals soon or the pressure from peers and judgmental talks makes them to suppress the emotions (suppress true feelings to meet the standard of professionalism) leading to emotional labour.

With all these constant expectations and thoughts, all these leads to questioning of authenticity of a person, sometimes not showing how they felt is truly draining and it also talks about the concept called as emotional labour which can be seen in jobs of helps professions. Participants stated this form of state either make them feel disconnected, regret the choice of taking this profession and feeling fake or even with all these struggles they identify such regulations of the emotions are the role genuinely expected as students in the context of mental health professionals creating contradictory views.

Participants also mentioned experiencing a significant change in terms of personality, also described the feeling of losing the identity. One student mentioned how was a very different person before joining the course but now she feels like she is masking the emotions, and she is only acting calm. Some students reflected and questioned their capacity of studying the course, stating they couldn't manage their own problems, whatever they study in the field they couldn't apply and help themselves, they couldn't regulate their own emotions then how they could help other people when are in need of help. So there were terms of self-doubt , identity change and also loneliness.

Despite all these emotional struggles, certain students also gained knowledge about the deeper sense of self. Other participant stated he also went the identity change for good, he expressed how doing psychology helped him regulate his emotions better. Studying psychology helps them in building insights and introspection. They shared that emotions are not really flaws as people said, that is one important aspects that a human experiences. They also shared that when an individual learnt to have clear cut boundaries from personal and professional and not personalise certain factors it can help them in terms of acceptance rather than avoidance. They also share that understand certain aspects of why they felt the way they do. So, whatever felt like more of a burden before was changed more into being emotionally matured and being able to regulate the emotions they feel.

Empathy is a very important aspect in terms psychology and other helping professions as well. But here, it plays a dual role of the coin in the emotional exploration of the psychology students life. So, here empathy helps us to understand what others were going through, emotionally it deepens the connection, but the participants stated the negative impact is as equal as the positive side. Sometimes the

pain they feel was intense that they couldn't empathise what other person was going through, but because of the practise and expectations because of the field from society, they feel very overloaded with emotions and leading to the feelings of being emotionally tired/fatigue, helplessness or not knowing how to handle, what to do, and sometimes guilt when not be able to help the person in need in terms of emotions.

Certain participants also stated, empathy requiring more boundary, if yes then that would be a very powerful tool in managing human emotions. Empathy can be sometimes overloaded to the extent of not being able to be close with someone in terms of personal relationships

because of the rules that's being followed in professional setting where the student get used to the norms and that affects the student from forming personal relationship was stated. Again it talks about the importance of boundary setting and how powerful it is in both professional and personal aspects.

With all the stigmas and misconceptual statements, the participants feels that their emotional needs are not met or not validated is due to the miscommunication and misunderstanding between the psychology student role and society view about the role of psychology student. They also stated that this leads to isolation of emotions and whatever they feel appears to be minimized struggles Infront of all the expectations that people carry and this factor also contributes to the aspect of toxic positivity.

To cope up with all these pressures, participants stated that they depend on certain techniques and sometimes people. Participants described that some of them prefer friends from the same background of study so then their friends could relate what they are going through, and some of them of friends from different backgrounds of studies, mentioned mentors where they could go and get suggestions and help sometimes, some stated hearing music, being in nature, journalling and all that. Certain people also stated that they help themselves by thinking about the problematic situation and acknowledging emotion they were going through then they will get back to the track of seeing positivity.

A participant also stated that he has no safe place to share his feelings and emotions and other students also gave their opinions about the support systems they think would be helpful. They acknowledged that peoples are different and the support they need might be different. But having someone who just listens without any kind of judgements were stated by most of the participants. People having awareness about all these mental health professions and how all these works would also help them in not being to be pressured and this could help them to express the emotions however they felt without judgements were also stated. Some said acknowledging them as a normal human would also be a greater help, psychology students getting professional supports now can help them in future was also recommended in terms of having boundaries and regulating emotions.

Overall, psychology students described how impossible it is to be calm and positive when they themselves deal with their own struggles. Some said despite the struggles, being in the profession helps them to cope better. In filling out the forms, some stated no for experiencing toxic positivity and emotional dissonance, but then the statement in the interview contradicts their response proving the fear of judgements, personal responsibility they feel because of the course they are doing, family expectations, and the beliefs that the society has. Many talked about pretending and some talked about how this study helps them to understand themselves better. Some talked about the dual role of empathy and how important it is to set boundary.

Being real in the emotions and expressing emotions in a safe space is as important as being strong for the profession were also explored in terms of well-being and growth.

5. Summary and conclusion

Summary

This study explores how postgraduate psychology students experiences toxic positivity and emotional dissonance. Factors such as societal expectations, family beliefs, personality of the person, stigmas and misconceptions about psychology, emotional labour, authenticity and the experiences oneself went through in life, expectations from professional and academic settings and their own sense of responsibility and beliefs influences how psychology student express and regulate the emotions.

Conclusion

The study shows that postgraduate psychology students often face emotional dissonance and pressure to maintain positivity, which can lead to inner conflict and fatigue. However, these experiences also promote reflection, resilience, and self-awareness. When supported by understanding mentors and open discussions, students can learn to balance authenticity with professionalism. Recognizing and addressing these emotional challenges is essential to help future psychologists sustain both personal well-being and professional growth.

Implications of the research

From studies that talks about emotional dissonance and toxic positivity exist, this is the research that can added since there very limited studies to explore among postgraduate psychology students in India. The findings can help universities and colleges to include some psychological awareness programs for emotional support. This also emphasis on the need to have proper mentors to help psychology students understand and acknowledge the emotions they are going through. Some reflections groups and creating more awareness about the field of psychology can help the students process the emotions healthily and can also reduce the stigma. By acknowledging and implementing all these factors can help psychology students personally and professionally.

Limitations of the study

This study includes 15 female and 4 male participants in total of 19 postgraduate psychology students, limiting the balance in gender and generalizations. So, exploring large set of people or longitudinal research can help in identify the transitions at each stage people go through since participants talked about personal experiences as well.

Recommendation for future research

Future studies can also focus on undergraduate psychology students and their experiences, the gender differences in expressing and experiencing emotional dissonance and toxic positivity can also be explored in future studies, it could include participants from different regions, specializations, and academic levels. Exploration in terms of support systems and coping strategies can also be studied in detail which may help in terms of academic settings and personal lives.

References

1. Abdulfattah, F. H. (2021). Empirical analysis of cognitive dissonance levels validation in 3-dimensional relationship between attitude and behaviour (3D-RAB) model among students of King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 14(4), 194–204 DOI:10.5539/ijbm.v14n4p194
2. Bodenstein, R., & Naudé, L. (2022). *The experiences of postgraduate psychology students regarding the development of multicultural competence*. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(2), 31–46. DOI:10.20853/31-3-1039 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318701087_The_experiences_of_postgraduate_psychology_students_regarding_the_development_of_multicultural_competence
3. Brotheridge, C. M., & Grandey, A. A. (2002). *Emotional labor and burnout: Comparing two perspectives of “people work.”* *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60(1), 17–39. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1815>
4. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
5. Değirmenci Öz, S., Karadaş, A., & Baykal, Ü. (2022). Emotional labour behavior of nursing students: A qualitative study. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 66, 103503. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2022.103503>
6. Dietze, E., Dzenick, E., & Halcro, S. (2022, August 31). *Does influencer culture promote toxic positivity on Instagram? Online emotional suppression and mental well-being*. Student Research Day Proceedings, 7(1). Retrieved from <https://journals.macewan.ca/studentresearch/article/view/2359>
7. Dokania, N., & Tripathi, M. (2024). *The lived experience of Indian post-graduate psychology students*. *Indian Journal of Indian Psychology*. Retrieved from <https://ijip.in/articles/postgraduate-psychology-students/>
8. Tarantul, A., Berkovich, I. Self-determination theory and teachers’ motivations to perform emotional labor and emotion work: qualitative study of narratives about coping with students’ discipline problems. *Soc Psychol Educ* 28, 39 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-024-09997-x>
9. Fried, L., & Mansfield, C. F. (2020). Teachers’ motivation to manage emotions: Relations with emotional labor and emotion work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 88, 102968. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102968>
10. Goodman, W. (2021). *Toxic positivity: Keeping it real in a world obsessed with being happy*. TarcherPerigee.
11. Hamid, M., Hussein, A. R., & Ibrahim, S. A. (2022). Cognitive dissonance and its relationship to self-regulation among university students. *Lark Journal*, 2(50). <https://doi.org/10.31185/lark.Vol2.Iss50.3157>
12. Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.
13. Indregard, A.-M. R., Knardahl, S., & Nielsen, M. B. (2018). Emotional dissonance, mental health complaints, and sickness absence among health- and social workers: The moderating role of self-efficacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 592. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00592>
14. Johannessen, H. A., Nielsen, M. B., Knutsen, R. H., Skare, Ø., & Christensen, J. O. (2025).

- Emotional dissonance and mental health among home-care workers: A nationwide prospective study of the moderating role of leadership behaviors. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 51(1), 15–25. <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.4197>
15. Karaali, G. (2018). Emotional Labour in Mathematics: Reflections on Mathematical Communities, Mentoring Structures, and EDGE. *arXiv Preprint*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1808.03838>
 16. Lau Ung Mui, & Saili, J. bt. (2024). *Toxic positivity and its role among young adult workers* Journal of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, 10(1), 50–71. <https://doi.org/10.33736/jcshd.6437.2024>
 17. Lecompte-Van Poucke, M. (2022). “You got this!”: A critical discourse analysis of toxic positivity as a discursive construct on Facebook. *Applied Corpus Linguistics*, 2(1), Article 100015. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acorp.2022.100015>
 18. Okoiye, O. E., Okezie, N. E., & Onah, T. (2021). Teaching Anxiety, Emotional Labour and Job Stress as Correlates of Job Satisfaction among Teachers in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Education and Society*, 12(1), 24-41.
 19. Premlal, D., & Jose, A. (2024). *Conceptualizing toxic positivity: A scoping review protocol*. Qeios <https://doi.org/10.32388/YHXAFAZ.2>
 20. Quinto, K. L. M., Villarez, A. L., Bermejo, M. S., & Eleazar, E. C. (2021). *Toxic positivity and its role on college students' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic* [Undergraduate thesis, Rizal Technological University]. ResearchGate. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.21244.26249>
 21. Rummell, C. M. (2015). An exploratory study of psychology graduate student workload, health, and program satisfaction. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 46(6), 391–399. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000056>
 22. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
 23. Salopek, A. H., & Eastin, M. S. (2024). *Toxic positivity intentions: An image management approach to upward social comparison and false self-presentation*. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 29(3), Article zmae003. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmae003>
 24. Sonia (2025). The Dark Side of Positivity: How Toxic Positivity Contributes to Emotional Suppression and Mental Health Struggles. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 1155-1163. DIP:18.01.104.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.104
 25. Upadhyay, I. S., Srivatsa, K. V. Aditya, & Mamidi, R. (2022). *Towards toxic positivity detection*. In Proceedings of the SocialNLP 2022 Workshop (pp. 1-7). ACL. <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2022.socialnlp-1.7>
 26. Vansteenkiste, M., & Ryan, R. M. (2013). On psychological growth and vulnerability: Basic psychological need satisfaction and need frustration as a unifying principle. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 23(3), 263–280. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032359>
 27. Wyatt, Z. (2024). *The dark side of #PositiveVibes: Understanding toxic positivity in modern culture*. *Psychiatry & Behavioral Health*, 3(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.33425/2833-5449.0016>
 28. Yozgat, U., Caliskan, S. C., & Uru, F. O. (2012). Exploring emotional dissonance: On doing what you feel and feeling what you do. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 58, 673–682. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.1045>

29. Zapf, D. (2002). *Emotion work and psychological well-being: A review of the literature and some conceptual considerations*. Human Resource Management Review, 12(2), 237–268. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822\(02\)00048-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-4822(02)00048-7)

Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION SHEET

This informed consent form is for the participants, who have been invited to participate in research on the title **“A Qualitative Study on Emotional Dissonance and Toxic Positivity among Postgraduate Psychology Students.”**

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR & DEPARTMENT: Sivashankari M, Department of Psychology

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR: Ms. Devika S. Krishnan

NAME OF ORGANIZATION: Kristu Jayanti College, Bengaluru, Karnataka- 560077

I am Sivashankari M, studying as a postgraduate student in the Department of Psychology at Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore. I am Exploring The Relationship Between Trauma-Related Guilt And Religious Coping Strategies among young adults. I will give you adequate information and invite you to be a part of this research. You can decide whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, Please feel comfortable talking to me about the research.

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them, I will be providing my contact details for the same.

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of postgraduate psychology students in relation to emotional dissonance and toxic positivity. It aims to understand how these students navigate and express their emotions within academic and personal contexts, and how such emotional regulation influences their well-being, self-perception, and professional development.

For experimental factors (*if any*): Nil
For demographic factors: Nil

- *Age, Gender and socio-economic status.*

You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel that your responses will aid as a very important tool to help us identify the factual details of the concerned experiment.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your role here. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

The information recorded is confidential, your name will not be included in the data collected, and no one else except me and my supervisor will have access to the form. Nothing that you share today or

with me will be made public with anybody outside the research, and nothing will be attributed to you by name.

Participation in this study does not pose any risks. There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation will help us identify the factual details of the concerned experiment.

I am now available to answer any questions.

If you have any questions you would like to ask later, you may contact me at Email ID:

24mpsc51@kristujayanti.com

2nd Year of MSc Counselling Psychology, Department of Psychology

This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Psychology which includes the research scholar and the supervisor at Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bangalore. The rights of the research participants are protected.

CERTIFICATE OF INFORMED CONSENT

I have been invited to participate in research on the title “A Qualitative Study on Emotional Dissonance and Toxic Positivity among Postgraduate Psychology Students.”

I have read the foregoing information, and it has also been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and any questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that participation is voluntary, and it has been explained that choosing not to participate will not cause any consequences. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any point during the data collection.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

By proceeding with the survey, you indicate your informed consent to participate in this study. Your responses will remain strictly confidential and anonymous in accordance with research ethics guidelines. Data collected will be used solely for academic purposes, and no personally identifiable information will be shared or published.

Appendix B

Screening process

Demographics details Name:

Age:

Sex:

Educational qualifications:

Currently pursuing master's in psychology (yes/no) Postgraduate psychology major in...

Language preference:

Consent to take part in an interview:

A Qualitative Study on Emotional Dissonance and Toxic Positivity among Postgraduate Psychology Students

Thank you for taking the time to review this form.

This form is part of a research study conducted by **Sivashankari M.**, currently pursuing M.Sc. Counselling Psychology at Kristu Jayanti (Deemed to be University), under the guidance of **Ms. Devika S. Krishnan, M.Sc. Clinical and Counselling Psychology, NET.**

The study aims to understand how postgraduate psychology students experience

The purpose of this form is to identify participants who are willing to take part in a **one-time confidential interview.**

It will only take a few minutes to complete.

All the information you share here will be kept **strictly confidential** and used **only for academic purposes.**

Your participation is **voluntary**, and you may **withdraw at any time.** There are **no risks or direct benefits**, but your input will help us better understand emotional well-being among psychology students.

Contact: 6374875087
Email: 24mpsc51@kristujayanti.com

sivashank09@gmail.com [Switch accounts](#)

Not shared

☐ Female
☐ Prefer not to say
☐ Other

Currently Pursuing Masters in Psychology *

☐ Yes
☐ No

Postgraduate Psychology major in: *

Your answer

Contact Number (available on emotions like sadness or anger because others might judge you? *

☐ Yes
☐ No

Do you consent to take part in a confidential interview for this study? *

☐ Yes
☐ No

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate!
All information collected will remain **confidential and used strictly for academic research purposes only.**

Interview questions

Qualitative research method questions

1. When someone says encouraging words, do you ever felt like not sharing your negative emotions anymore, what do you think is the reason?
2. Can you describe how will you feel if someone tells you “always look at the positive side or be positive”?
3. Have you ever encountered any incidents where what you feel inside doesn’t match with what you show outside. How do you feel about that?
4. When did you first notice the pressure to always act positive or the difference between how you felt inside and what you show outside?
5. If you share your true feelings and the other person links it to your profession, how does that make you feel?
6. During tough times, in what ways do family or societal expectations put pressure on how you express your emotions?
7. Have you encountered any incidents where you are pressured to stay positive or not showing the emotions out because of the profession, you are studying? How do you feel about that?
8. As a student in a field about emotions, how has it affected you when you feel low inside but have to appear positive outside? How do you feel about that?