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Mental Health: Social Issues and Support Strategies

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Published by: - Book Rivers

Website: - <https://www.bookrivers.com>

Email: publish@bookrivers.com

First Print Edition - 2026

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Title: Mental Health: Social Issues and Support Strategies

**Authors: Dr. Divya R. Panjwani, Dr. E. Ahmad, Prof. (Dr.)
Adnan Khan Lodi**

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ISBN: 978-93-7837-877-5

MRP: 460/-INR

(Printed in India)

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CHAPTER 8

The Mental Health of First-Generation and Low-Income Students

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Abstract

The mental health of first-generation and low-income (FGLI) students has become an increasingly critical area of concern within higher education. These students often face unique and intersecting challenges that can compromise their psychological well-being, academic performance, and overall college experience. Unlike their peers, FGLI students frequently lack access to essential financial resources, familial guidance in navigating college systems, and adequate institutional support. These stressors can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and imposter syndrome, exacerbated by a persistent sense of isolation and the pressure to succeed.

This paper explores the psychological burdens faced by FGLI students through a multidimensional lens, examining how structural inequalities, cultural dissonance, and academic pressures contribute to mental health disparities. Financial insecurity remains a significant stressor, with many students balancing part-time or full-time work alongside rigorous academic schedules. Furthermore, being the first in their families to attend college often leads to a disconnect between home and academic life, resulting in emotional strain and a lack of belonging. Cultural expectations and obligations, such as the pressure to uplift one's family or act as a role model, may also increase emotional and psychological strain.

Institutional support structures, while improving, often fall short in addressing the nuanced needs of this demographic. Many FGLI

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