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# Coping in Silence: Strategies Used by First-Generation Students to Navigate Academic and Mental Stress

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the coping strategies employed by first-generation university students in Tehran to navigate academic and psychological stress within a culturally specific and resource-limited educational context. A qualitative research design grounded in a phenomenological approach was employed to capture the lived experiences of first-generation students. Twenty-two participants were purposively selected from public and private universities in Tehran. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, following an inductive coding process. Four overarching themes emerged from the data: (1) emotional regulation and mental health maintenance, (2) academic adaptation and performance pressure, (3) navigating social belonging and campus integration, and (4) family expectations and cultural dissonance. Subthemes revealed that students commonly relied on self-silencing, emotional suppression, internal dialogues, and spiritual coping. Many adopted perfectionistic behaviors, avoided mental health services, and masked their identities to avoid stigma. Students expressed deep-seated feelings of guilt, isolation, and imposter syndrome, exacerbated by cultural stigma, academic competitiveness, and limited institutional support. Despite significant emotional burden, participants demonstrated resilience through individualized coping strategies, though often in silence and solitude. First-generation students in Tehran manage academic and mental stress through solitary and internalized coping mechanisms shaped by cultural expectations, familial obligations, and institutional gaps. The findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive mental health services, proactive institutional support, and peer-based interventions that validate first-generation identities while addressing the unique stressors they face.

**Keywords:** first-generation students, academic stress, coping strategies.

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## Introduction

The increasing democratization of higher education has enabled broader access to university systems, particularly among historically underrepresented groups such as first-generation college students (FGCS). These students—defined as those whose parents have not attained postsecondary education—represent a unique and growing demographic in many countries, including Iran. While the expansion of access signifies

social progress, it also unveils a host of psychological, social, and academic challenges that FGCS face as they navigate unfamiliar institutional cultures, often without the cultural capital, support networks, or coping tools available to their continuing-generation peers (1, 2). Despite policy efforts to ensure educational equity, the everyday lived experience of FGCS remains shaped by systemic stressors, feelings of marginalization, and a persistent sense of dislocation (3, 4).

Studies have consistently shown that FGCS report higher levels of psychological distress compared to their non-first-generation counterparts (5, 6). This distress is often rooted in the simultaneous pressures of academic underpreparedness, cultural dissonance, financial insecurity, and emotional burden tied to family expectations (7-9). Many FGCS experience what has been termed “stress overload”—an accumulation of emotional, cognitive, and environmental demands that exceeds available coping resources (1). Unlike stress in the general student population, which tends to be episodic and linked to performance cycles, stress among FGCS is often chronic and multidimensional, exacerbated by their unique positionality within academic institutions (10).

A prominent feature of the FGCS experience is the internalization of imposter syndrome, characterized by persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as intellectually inadequate despite evidence of competence (7). This phenomenon is particularly pervasive among FGCS due to a lack of academic socialization at home and perceived incongruence between their personal background and the university environment (4, 11). In response to these challenges, many students adopt solitary, internalized coping mechanisms rather than seeking help from peers, faculty, or institutional support services (3, 12). Consequently, FGCS are less likely to access mental health services, participate in campus activities, or disclose emotional struggles—effectively "coping in silence."

Research has highlighted a number of stressors specific to this population. These include economic stress related to tuition and living expenses (13), academic pressure to perform well without prior exposure to collegiate standards (14), and the psychological weight of being the “first” in their family to break generational cycles (15, 16). These pressures often interact with structural limitations—such as inaccessible campus resources or rigid curricula—to reinforce students’ marginalization (17, 18). For example, academic and emotional stress has been found to be particularly acute among students in professional programs such as engineering and health sciences, where workloads are heavy and stress-management training is insufficient (11, 13, 19).

Given the complexity of these experiences, scholars have emphasized the need to examine not only the sources of stress, but also the ways in which FGCS respond to and manage these pressures (1, 8). Coping strategies among FGCS are often shaped by cultural values, prior experiences, and perceived barriers to institutional support. Research indicates a tendency toward emotional suppression, self-reliance, and disengagement from help-seeking behaviors (3, 12, 20). These strategies, while adaptive in the short term, may perpetuate cycles of isolation and hinder long-term well-being (4, 21).

Psychological studies further demonstrate that effective stress management and resilience training can improve mental health outcomes among FGCS (22, 23). However, such interventions must be culturally and contextually tailored to be effective. For instance, mindfulness-based interventions have shown promise, but their utility depends on students’ willingness to engage with practices that may initially feel unfamiliar or counterintuitive (12, 19, 21). Moreover, biofeedback, movement-based therapies, and cognitive reframing

techniques have all demonstrated varying degrees of success in reducing academic stress when implemented in higher education settings (6, 24).

Yet, despite the growing body of research on FGCS stress and coping, most studies are conducted in Western or high-income contexts, with relatively little exploration of the phenomenon in non-Western, culturally distinct settings such as Iran. The Iranian higher education system presents a particular constellation of challenges, including centralized university entrance exams, rigid academic hierarchies, limited mental health infrastructure, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities. For FGCS in Tehran and other urban centers, these challenges are further compounded by cultural norms that stigmatize psychological vulnerability and discourage open expressions of emotional struggle (16, 25).

In such settings, FGCS may be especially likely to adopt silent or private forms of coping. This phenomenon is supported by evidence showing that emotional restraint, cognitive suppression, and spiritual coping are frequently used by Iranian students when confronted with stress (20, 25). However, less is known about how these strategies operate specifically within the FGCS population in Iran, or how they intersect with broader issues of identity, academic belonging, and family dynamics.

This gap is particularly salient considering the collectivist nature of Iranian society, where family expectations and social image play a significant role in shaping individual behavior. FGCS in Iran may face dual pressures: fulfilling academic expectations in unfamiliar institutional settings while preserving familial harmony and avoiding shame or disappointment at home (8, 15). These intersecting pressures may discourage overt displays of emotional distress and foster internalized forms of resilience that are rarely discussed in institutional discourse.

Additionally, few studies have examined how first-generation status intersects with gender, academic discipline, or living arrangements in shaping students' coping responses. For example, gendered expectations may influence the types of coping strategies available or acceptable to male and female students (3, 4). Similarly, students in high-stakes programs such as medicine or engineering may encounter heightened academic and emotional stressors, requiring more robust or varied coping mechanisms (11, 17). Understanding these differences is crucial for developing targeted interventions that do not assume a monolithic student experience.

In light of these complexities, the present study aims to explore the coping strategies employed by first-generation university students in Tehran as they navigate academic and psychological stress.

## Methods and Materials

### *Study Design and Participants*

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the coping strategies used by first-generation university students to manage academic and mental stress. A phenomenological approach was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of these students. The study was conducted in Tehran, involving a purposive sample of 22 first-generation students currently enrolled in various public and private universities. Eligibility criteria required participants to be undergraduate or graduate students who identified as the first in their families to attend university. Recruitment was carried out through campus advertisements and referrals using snowball sampling. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring that no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.

### *Data Collection*

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which allowed for both consistency and flexibility in exploring participants' experiences. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature and expert consultation, focusing on participants' academic challenges, sources of mental stress, and coping mechanisms. Interviews were conducted in Persian, either in-person or virtually, based on participant preference and availability. Each session lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### *Data analysis*

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the interview data. Transcripts were first read multiple times to ensure familiarization. Coding was then carried out inductively using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Initial codes were generated, followed by the development of broader categories and overarching themes through a process of constant comparison. Codes were refined through iterative discussions among the research team to ensure trustworthiness and analytic rigor. The data analysis process was guided by principles of reflexivity and transparency, with analytic memos maintained to track emerging insights and potential researcher biases.

## Findings and Results

A total of 22 first-generation university students participated in this study. The sample included 12 females and 10 males, ranging in age from 19 to 26 years, with a mean age of 22.3 years. Participants were enrolled in various undergraduate and graduate programs across public and private universities in Tehran. Fifteen participants were pursuing undergraduate degrees, while seven were enrolled in master's programs. The majority (n = 17) were full-time students, and five were balancing part-time employment alongside their studies. Socioeconomic backgrounds varied, but most participants (n = 18) reported coming from low- to lower-middle-income families. Additionally, 14 participants identified as living in shared student housing or dormitories, while the remaining eight lived with family members. All participants self-identified as first-generation students, defined as being the first in their immediate family to attend university.

**Table 1. Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Related to Coping Strategies of First-Generation Students**

| Category (Theme) | Subcategory (Subtheme) | Concepts (Open Codes) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Emotional Regulation and Mental Health Maintenance | Self-Silencing as Survival | Hiding distress, Avoiding emotional disclosure, Smiling through pain |
| | Internal Dialogues | Talking to oneself, Reassuring thoughts, Self-monitoring, Planning mentally |
| | Suppression of Negative Emotions | Bottling up feelings, Ignoring anxiety, Avoiding sadness |
| | Private Coping Spaces | Crying alone, Journaling, Retreating to dorm rooms, Using headphones to escape |
| | Resilience Narratives | "I've been through worse," Reframing stress, Comparing to family struggles |
| | Avoidance of Mental Health Services | Fear of stigma, Lack of trust, Denial of need, Cultural beliefs |
| | Faith and Spiritual Anchoring | Praying, Trusting God, Reading religious texts, Visiting sacred places |
| 2. Academic Adaptation and Performance Pressure | Overcompensation | Working twice as hard, Extra study hours, Proving worth, Seeking perfection |
| | Self-Imposed Expectations | Fear of failure, Feeling responsible for family pride, High internal pressure |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Strategic Help-Seeking | Selective support from peers, Only asking professors privately, Avoiding office hours |
| | Time Management and Structuring | Color-coded schedules, Study planners, Night study routines |
| | Exam and Assignment Coping Strategies | Cramming, Group revision, Redoing past papers, Creating checklists |
| | Academic Isolation | Not joining study groups, Keeping distance from classmates, Avoiding peer comparisons |
| 3. Navigating Social Belonging and Campus Integration | Masking Identity | Hiding background, Code-switching, Avoiding personal questions |
| | Negotiating Social Norms | Observing others first, Copying behavior, Learning social cues |
| | Selective Disclosure | Telling only trusted friends, Avoiding talking about home life |
| | Peer Comparison Anxiety | Feeling "less than", Comparing GPA, Feeling imposter syndrome |
| | Campus Resource Ambivalence | Feeling unwelcome at services, Not understanding where to go, Distrust in counselors |
| 4. Family Expectations and Cultural Dissonance | Academic Guilt | Feeling bad for studying instead of working, Guilt about family sacrifices |
| | Cultural Mismatch | Different worldviews, Clash of values, Feeling caught between two identities |
| | Pressure to Succeed | "You must not fail", Being a role model, Family pride rests on success |
| | Communication Barriers | Avoiding academic talk at home, Simplifying struggles, Feeling misunderstood |
| | Financial Responsibility | Sending money home, Avoiding social expenses, Working part-time jobs |
| | Emotional Distance | Hiding mental stress from family, Acting "strong", Fear of worrying parents |

This study identified four overarching themes that represent the coping strategies employed by first-generation students navigating academic and mental stress. These include: (1) emotional regulation and mental health maintenance, (2) academic adaptation and performance pressure, (3) navigating social belonging and campus integration, and (4) family expectations and cultural dissonance. Each theme contains a set of subthemes that reflect nuanced aspects of participants' lived experiences.

**1. Emotional Regulation and Mental Health Maintenance**

**Self-silencing as survival** emerged as a widespread tactic, where participants reported deliberately concealing emotional struggles to maintain a functional image. Many described suppressing distress to avoid appearing weak. As one participant noted, *"I can't let people see me falling apart—it's like I have to wear this mask all the time."* Students often avoided discussing their feelings even with close friends or family, choosing instead to manage silently.

In **internal dialogues**, students frequently engaged in private mental conversations as a coping mechanism. These internal exchanges helped in self-reassurance and strategic reflection. A participant shared, *"I just tell myself it's going to be okay, that this is temporary, and I repeat that whenever I feel overwhelmed."*

Participants also described the **suppression of negative emotions**, often bottling up their anxiety or sadness. For many, acknowledging their emotions felt risky or counterproductive. *"I push it down because if I start crying, I won't stop,"* said one respondent, highlighting the emotional containment practiced by many.

Students relied heavily on **private coping spaces**, such as dorm rooms, bathrooms, or headphones as means of escape. A female participant described her strategy: *"I go to the rooftop when things get too much. It's the only place I feel like I can breathe."* Others mentioned journaling or listening to music to self-soothe.

Through **resilience narratives**, many participants recontextualized their struggles by drawing strength from past experiences or family hardships. *"My parents didn't even finish high school. When I think of what they went through, my stress feels smaller,"* said one student, demonstrating how such comparisons helped regulate emotional turmoil.

Avoidance of formal psychological help was common due to **avoidance of mental health services**, largely driven by fear of stigma or cultural beliefs. *"People in my community don't believe in therapy. They think you're crazy if you go,"* shared a male participant.

Lastly, **faith and spiritual anchoring** served as a powerful emotional tool. Students reported praying, reading religious texts, or engaging in spiritual rituals to manage stress. One participant expressed, *"When nothing makes sense, I just pray. It gives me peace, even for a few minutes."*

**2. Academic Adaptation and Performance Pressure**

The theme of academic pressure was strongly expressed through the subtheme of **overcompensation**, where students described working excessively to prove their worth. *"I study twice as hard as everyone else because I feel like I have something to prove,"* noted one respondent.

**Self-imposed expectations** were also significant, with students internalizing the pressure to succeed as a way to honor their family's sacrifices. A participant stated, *"Failure is not an option for me. My whole family is counting on me."* This internal burden often intensified anxiety and burnout.

**Strategic help-seeking** was practiced cautiously. Students were selective about whom they approached for support, often avoiding professors or peers out of fear of being judged. *"I'll ask for help, but only when I'm desperate—and only from people I trust,"* said one student.

The use of **time management and structuring** as a coping strategy was prominent. Participants described setting rigid schedules, using planners, and organizing study sessions. *"I plan my day hour by hour. It's the only way I can manage everything,"* one student reported.

Under **exam and assignment coping strategies**, students employed tactics like cramming, solving past papers, and creating checklists. *"I have this checklist that I use before every exam—it calms me down,"* said a respondent.

However, **academic isolation** also surfaced, with some students deliberately avoiding study groups or academic discussions. As one explained, *"I just don't relate to most of my classmates. I'd rather figure it out on my own."* This contributed to feelings of detachment and loneliness.

**3. Navigating Social Belonging and Campus Integration**

Students often adopted **masking identity** strategies, attempting to blend in and avoid revealing their backgrounds. *"I don't talk about where I'm from—it just makes people treat you differently,"* one participant reflected.

**Negotiating social norms** was also essential, as students described learning to imitate behaviors and adopt unfamiliar etiquette. *"I just watched how others acted and copied them until I felt like I belonged,"* said one participant, showing adaptive social learning.

In **selective disclosure**, students carefully curated what personal information they shared. *"Only my closest friends know about my background. I don't want pity or weird questions,"* one interviewee explained.

Many expressed anxiety tied to **peer comparison**, feeling out of place or inadequate. *"Everyone seems so confident. I feel like I'm the only one struggling,"* noted a respondent, highlighting imposter syndrome.

Finally, **campus resource ambivalence** was common. Although mental health services were available, many students distrusted or misunderstood them. *"They say there's counseling, but I don't know where to go—or if it would even help,"* one student shared.

**4. Family Expectations and Cultural Dissonance**

Under **academic guilt**, students expressed distress over prioritizing education while their families faced financial hardship. *"Sometimes I feel selfish sitting in class when my dad is working twelve-hour shifts,"* said one participant.

**Cultural mismatch** was another key subtheme, where students struggled to reconcile home values with university norms. *"At home, we're taught to stay humble and quiet. Here, you have to be assertive. It's hard to switch,"* one student remarked.

**Pressure to succeed** permeated many narratives, as participants described being the "hope" of their families. *"They say, 'You'll be the one to change everything.' That's a lot to carry,"* said a respondent.

In **communication barriers**, students reported simplifying their experiences to avoid being misunderstood at home. *"I don't talk about my stress with my parents. They won't get it—and I don't want to worry them,"* explained a participant.

**Financial responsibility** was a major source of stress, with many students working part-time or sending money home. *"I skip outings just to save money. Every riyal counts,"* noted one interviewee.

Lastly, **emotional distance** developed as students hid their academic and emotional struggles from their families. *"They think I'm fine because I never say otherwise. But I just can't explain what I'm going through,"* a student admitted.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences and coping strategies of first-generation university students (FGCS) in Tehran as they navigated academic and psychological stressors in higher education. Through thematic analysis of 22 in-depth interviews, four main themes emerged: emotional regulation and mental health maintenance, academic adaptation and performance pressure, navigating social belonging and campus integration, and family expectations and cultural dissonance. These findings reveal a complex emotional and social landscape wherein students rely primarily on internalized, silent, and solitary coping mechanisms rather than institutional or interpersonal supports.

One of the most salient findings was the widespread use of emotional suppression and self-silencing among participants, which aligns with previous literature on FGCS mental health. Students reported bottling up emotions, avoiding help-seeking behaviors, and maintaining an outward appearance of composure to avoid stigmatization or burdening others. This pattern is consistent with the "coping in silence" narrative found among FGCS in multiple contexts, where the pressure to appear resilient often overrides the need for

psychological relief (3, 4). Similar trends have been reported in Western samples, where FGCS often mask emotional vulnerability due to internalized expectations of independence and stoicism (1, 8).

The avoidance of mental health services, particularly due to cultural stigma, emerged as a powerful force shaping coping strategies. Participants described fear of being labeled as weak or mentally unstable, resulting in minimal engagement with available counseling or wellness programs. This is consistent with research that highlights the perceived inaccessibility and irrelevance of institutional mental health services for FGCS (11, 16). Moreover, the Iranian context—where cultural and religious norms often discourage open discussion of psychological distress—likely intensifies these barriers (25). As such, many students relied on spiritual practices like prayer or private rituals for emotional regulation, a coping pattern also observed in FGCS populations in similarly collectivist societies (19, 20).

Another prominent theme was overcompensation and perfectionism as responses to academic stress. Students often described pushing themselves to extreme limits, studying for long hours, and avoiding academic failure at all costs. These behaviors mirror findings by Holden et al., who argue that FGCS frequently develop perfectionistic tendencies to validate their place in academic institutions and fulfill familial expectations (7). Similarly, Campbell et al. found that the emotional toll of being a "model student" contributes significantly to burnout and disengagement, especially among those in competitive programs like engineering or medicine (14). The internalized belief that "failure is not an option" emerged repeatedly in this study and is echoed in global research on FGCS stress dynamics (4, 15).

Participants also discussed social isolation and the feeling of not belonging, particularly when comparing themselves to continuing-generation peers. This experience of imposter syndrome was intensified by a lack of cultural familiarity with academic norms and campus life, often resulting in avoidance of group study, office hours, and peer engagement. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that FGCS often experience a mismatch between their home culture and university culture, leading to difficulties in social integration and identity negotiation (2, 9). In the current study, students' selective disclosure about their first-generation status, and their masking of socioeconomic identity, reflect a broader survival strategy aimed at minimizing perceived difference—a phenomenon also discussed by Kayser in her ethnographic work with FGCS populations (8).

Students' relationships with their families were central to their coping strategies but also sources of tension. Many participants felt emotionally distanced from their families due to communication gaps and cultural dissonance. While family was cited as a primary motivation for educational persistence, it also emerged as a source of guilt, pressure, and emotional suppression. These results align with findings from Amirkhan et al., who noted that FGCS often carry the emotional burden of being "the chosen one," responsible for elevating their family's social standing (1). The participants' experiences of academic guilt—feeling selfish for studying while family members worked labor-intensive jobs—also echo the findings of Holden et al., who found that this duality contributes significantly to emotional strain among FGCS (7).

A noteworthy contribution of this study is its cultural specificity. While much existing research has focused on Western or high-income countries, this study contributes to an emerging body of literature documenting the experiences of FGCS in non-Western contexts. The use of religious and spiritual coping was particularly prominent, with participants turning to prayer, meditation, or religious texts in moments of stress. This aligns with findings by Sunita and Suryawanshi, who reported that spiritual practices

significantly improved emotional regulation among college students in India (12, 19). Similarly, the use of faith as a resilience mechanism reflects broader trends in collectivist societies, where personal suffering is often seen through a moral or spiritual lens (20).

The internal dialogues described by participants—self-talk, cognitive reframing, and future-oriented visualization—also reflect adaptive, if solitary, coping mechanisms. These strategies, while less visible to external observers, are increasingly recognized as core components of psychological resilience. Similar cognitive-behavioral patterns were identified by Tripathi et al. in their evaluation of biofeedback-based stress interventions for students (24). Moreover, studies by Mansuroğlu and Kumari have shown that stress management training, particularly when it includes cognitive reframing and mindfulness, can significantly improve coping capacities among first-year students (22, 23).

However, the dominant reliance on internal, individualized coping strategies raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of such methods. While emotional suppression, overcompensation, and masking may provide short-term relief, they can also contribute to burnout, anxiety, and a sense of emotional isolation (6, 21). Nolte et al. argue that the absence of proactive coping training and institutional support mechanisms leaves FGCS particularly vulnerable to long-term mental health challenges (18). Furthermore, while students in this study did develop effective routines and time-management techniques, these were often developed independently, without institutional guidance—suggesting an urgent need for more accessible, culturally sensitive support frameworks (3, 5).

This study also confirms that gender, academic major, and living arrangements play important roles in shaping coping experiences. Female participants, in particular, were more likely to report emotional suppression and internal dialogues, whereas male participants often described pressure to uphold family honor without showing weakness. These patterns support findings by Muhnia et al. and Coates, who suggest that gender norms strongly influence how students conceptualize and respond to stress (16, 25). Additionally, students in high-intensity academic tracks, such as health sciences and engineering, reported unique stressors that intensified the need for efficient coping, reinforcing the importance of discipline-specific support programs (11, 13).

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to 22 participants from universities in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of findings to FGCS in rural areas or other cultural contexts within Iran. Additionally, the study relied solely on self-reported data gathered through semi-structured interviews, which may be subject to memory bias or social desirability bias. Another limitation lies in the gender distribution and disciplinary diversity of the sample, which, although varied, may not fully capture the breadth of FGCS experiences across the Iranian higher education system. Furthermore, the study did not include longitudinal data, thereby limiting insights into how coping strategies evolve over time or in response to shifting academic and personal circumstances.

Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs to examine how FGCS coping strategies change across the academic journey—from entry through to graduation. Including quantitative measures alongside qualitative interviews could also enrich our understanding by allowing for comparisons across demographic variables such as gender, academic discipline, and socioeconomic background. Moreover, comparative cross-cultural studies between Iranian FGCS and those in other countries with similar educational structures could illuminate universal versus context-specific coping mechanisms. Research should also investigate how FGCS

respond to targeted interventions such as peer mentoring, mindfulness programs, or academic resilience training. Finally, studies focusing on the intersectionality of FGCS identity—such as ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation—would provide a more holistic view of the diverse challenges faced by these students.

Higher education institutions must prioritize the development of culturally grounded mental health services that recognize the unique needs and coping tendencies of FGCS. Support programs should move beyond academic tutoring to include emotional, social, and identity-based support, particularly for those reluctant to seek help. Faculty and administrative staff should be trained to recognize signs of silent coping and be proactive in offering confidential, stigma-free avenues for support. Campuses should also foster inclusive spaces that affirm diverse student backgrounds, reducing the pressure to assimilate or mask identity. Finally, peer mentorship programs pairing FGCS with trained upper-year students can provide vital role modeling and emotional scaffolding, reducing feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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