

Struggles University Students Do Not Talk About

By Hlengiwe Magubane

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People say university is the best time of your life. You get freedom, new friends, a new room, and subjects you actually chose. All that sounds exciting, but what no one tells you is how quiet and heavy it can feel sometimes. There are nights when you are sitting alone at 2 a.m., staring at the ceiling and feeling empty for no reason. Most students experience that feeling during the first few months of their varsity. This feeling could be caused by small things piling up, like missed sleep, missed meals, and missed deadlines, until you start to feel like a stranger to yourself.

We spoke to a few students to hear what it is really like. Paballo, a second-year engineering student at UP, said, “I thought I was just lazy, while it turns out I was only sleeping 4 hours a night and trying to keep up with 6 modules. I did not even realize how burnt out I was until I missed a deadline and just sat in my room and cried myself to sleep.”

In high school, the pressure was less as someone was always there to check on you. Teachers reminded you about homework, and parents asked how your day went. Suddenly, you are pushing five or six modules, group work where one person ends up doing all the work, and deadlines are all in the same week. That constant pressure is one of the biggest reasons students feel stressed and overwhelmed, and that affects how they sleep, eat, and focus.

Then loneliness and money worries make things even worse. You can sit in a lecture hall with 300 other students and still feel completely alone. That kind of loneliness makes stress worse and makes it harder to stay positive. Social media does not help with boredom because it is easy to scroll through Instagram or Facebook and feel like everyone else has their life together, new outfits, new friends, fun weekends. Meanwhile, you might be skipping meals to save money and studying in your room alone.

“Everyone on Instagram looked like they had it together,” says Lerato, first year student at UJ. She added that “I was skipping meals to save money. I did not tell anyone for months because I felt guilty, because my mother was working hard just to help me push through with my studies.” That kind of financial pressure is real for a lot of students. When you are worried about money, it is hard to focus on anything else. It adds to the stress and makes you feel like you cannot talk about it, because you do not want to bother or disappoint the people who are supporting you.

The truth is that many students feel this way, but they do not say it out loud. If you are feeling like this, you are not weak, and you are not alone. Talking to a friend, close sibling or family member, a mentor, or a campus counsellor can make a difference.

Small steps like getting 6 hours of sleep, eating one proper meal a day, and reaching out to one person can help more than you think. University is a big adjustment, and it is okay if it feels hard sometimes, but one day it will all be worth it.

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