



Analyzing and evaluating the problem of depression, its causes and coping mechanisms available to the University students; A sociological study

Dr. Kajal Sharma

Department of Sociology

Panjab University

Chandigarh

Abstract

Globally, mental health disorders are now considered chronic illnesses among students. Academics find themselves perplexed by the paradoxical situation of students whose mental health is constantly declining while their physical health is at its peak. The present study tries to assess undergraduate and graduate student's mental health. How much students have been affected by depression. The present study also determines the potential causes of undergraduate and graduate students feeling sad, lonely, unhappy or depressed. The study also emphasizes the importance of social support groups for maintaining mental health in general and preventing or lessening the onset of depression in particular.

Key words: depression, mental health, coping mechanism.

Introduction

Depression is a common mental illness that manifests as low energy, an unhappy mood, a loss of interest or pleasure, guilt or low self-worth, trouble sleeping or eating, and difficulty concentrating. An individual may experience significant harm from these issues if they become chronic or recurrent and impair their ability to perform daily duties and responsibilities. There are various forms of depression that a person may experience; however, the most common kind is depression in individuals who have experienced manic episodes in the past or not (WHO; 2012¹). Mild, moderate, and severe depressive episodes can be distinguished based on the quantity and intensity of symptoms. A person experiencing a moderate depressive episode may find it difficult to carry on with daily tasks and social interactions, but they most likely won't completely stop functioning. On the other hand, it is quite

¹ www.who.int/mental_health/management/.../who_paper_depression_wfmh_2012

improbable that the person experiencing a major depressive episode will be able to carry out social, occupational, or household tasks, with the exception of very limited activities. The purpose of a study by Tripkovic et al. (2015) was to ascertain the spectrum of emotional issues (mostly depression and low self-esteem) among primary school students. The writers have talked on how younger age groups are being affected by the rise in depression prevalence over the past few decades. It was long held that since depression has historically only been one of the symptoms of developmental stages, children and adolescents cannot suffer from depression as a clinical condition.

The way that people think about depression has evolved as it is now recognized as a serious illness that can start in infancy. To put it another way, the youth and early adult years are crucial for the social, emotional, and physical growth of an individual. Young people push boundaries, assume new roles and responsibilities, and depend more and more on their friends and less on their parents and caregivers at this time. Although the majority of young people manage these obstacles well, many do not, and around this period there is a rise in the rates of substance abuse, mental health issues, driving while intoxicated, suicide, accidental deaths, and STDs. According to Howell (1954) crucial views regarding crucial topics are created at this same stage. This stage of life is where one acquires all perspectives on life processes, whether they are healthy or dysfunctional. Sociology is widely recognized as an academic study that examines the social origins and consequences of human behavior, spanning across various nations, genres, and schools of thought. Scholarly discourse has long focused on the impact of an individual's social surroundings on their health. These days, it is abundantly clear that social variables have a significant impact on an individual's mental and physical wellness. Research indicates that risky behavior and an unhealthy lifestyle provide the greatest threat to an individual's health (Cockerham, 2011). The present paper tries to focus on the problem of depression among young students of union territory of Chandigarh.

Sociological research on mental health is an important component of the topic of the sociology of health and sickness. The WHO defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease," and this term refers to a wide range of activities that are directly or indirectly related to the mental well-being component of that definition. It has to do with enhancing wellbeing, preventing mental illnesses, and treating and rehabilitating those who are afflicted with mental illnesses (WHO; 2015²). The most obvious question that has to be addressed when a mental disease like depression becomes the focus of a sociological investigation is how and why it is related to sociology. In this study, depression is seen and analyzed as a disease caused by numerous social circumstances rather than as a psychological crisis. Some of the most important research results about the connection between major depressive disorder and nutrition were covered by Popa and Ladea (2012). Fast food intake has been shown to raise the chance of developing and exacerbating depression, while a Mediterranean diet is linked to a low prevalence of the illness.

² http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GBD_report_2015update_full.pdf

The authors came to the conclusion that a poor diet is associated with a higher incidence of depression. Wiebe et al. (2012) investigated the connection between depression and sleep patterns. There is proof that having sleep issues raises the chance of acquiring depressed symptoms. Additionally, experiencing depressive symptoms throws off one's sleep schedule even more. Therefore, there is a reciprocal association between this disease and sleeping habits. Depression in youngsters might result from parental pressure to succeed.

According to Wolford (1964), people seek for jobs that are above their skill levels and parents frequently choose certain professions for their children because of the high status associated with them. Such pointless effort is likely to lead to disequilibrium states like defeatism, disengagement, and feelings of rejection and failure. A 2016 study by Phan, Ngu, and Alrashidi examined the relationship between students' academic and social self-efficacy beliefs and their overall school wellbeing, academic engagement, and achievement outcomes. It was believed that a student's happiness in the classroom would affect how social and academic self-efficacy beliefs affected engagement and performance.

Risks to Student's Mental Health

According to a study by Zunhammer et al., (2013) examination-related psychological stress might generate physical signs of anxiety and depression in otherwise healthy college students. These results support the theories that suggest the impact of psychological stress on sensory integration during academic exam periods. (Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2012) also mentioned that medical students identified ragging as a major stressor and had greater rates of depression than the general population. In her research, Kajavinthan (2013) examined the degree of depression experienced by first-year college students and discovered that their pre-semester depression was greater than their post-semester depression. However, empirical research on law school distress indicates that compared to the general population, law students often experience higher levels of anxiety and depression (Dammeyer and Nunez, 1999).

Wilson et al. (2014) sought to identify behavioral and social traits linked to depression as well as the prevalence of depression among students enrolled at a women's college. The results of this cross-sectional study suggested that among women attending women's colleges, depression may be predicted by factors such as inadequate sleep hygiene, having no strong social support network in one's life, and a prior history of mental illness. According to McFarland, Murray, and Phillipson (2016) children's self-concept is impacted by teacher-student relationships. For each gender, a distinct equation has been found. Boys' self-concept was not significantly predicted by how close they were to their professors. However, self-concept is badly impacted in this teacher-student connection when there is disagreement. Intimacy and conflict both predicted girls' self-concept. It is also discovered that conflict, or unpleasant interaction, has a bigger impact on one's self-concept than intimacy. Girls from divorced homes were less likely to experience depression when they had a close relationship with their father (Palosaari, Aro and Laippala; 1996). According to the phenomenological perspective, awareness constitutes and shapes our experience of the universe, which includes everything from our ability to perceive objects to our understanding of scientific concepts. We must set aside our existing understanding of the world and focus on the processes that lead to the

creation of that knowledge. As a result, various persons have varied conscious worldviews. Thus, to comprehend the significance of an action or perception, the researcher must cultivate empathy and observe the situation from the respondent's perspective. According to this study, depression is defined as a depressing mental state brought on by a variety of social circumstances. The purpose of this study is to determine how and by what method the idea of being depressed, unhappy, or sad is initially formed.

Objectives

1. To assess undergraduate and graduate student's mental health. How much students have been affected by depression.
2. To determine potential causes of undergraduate and graduate students feeling sad, lonely, unhappy or depressed.
3. To emphasize the importance of social support groups for maintaining mental health in general and preventing or lessening the onset of depression in particular.

Sampling and techniques for data collection

Undergraduate and graduate students from Punjab University Chandigarh were the respondents for the present study. The sample for the study was chosen using the convenient sampling and simple random sampling methods. Likert scale was used to analyze the results of the study. The students chosen for the study were those who were available and free when the researcher arrived. One hundred respondents in all were interviewed, which were further divided into fifty undergraduate students and fifty graduate students. A questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions was given to the respondents. Most of the time, the interview was completed in a single session. Two sessions were scheduled for some. For every respondent, and at all costs, confidentiality was upheld.

Table 1: Do you feel sad, lonely, unhappy or depressed?

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Always	7(14)	13(26)	20(20)
Often	22(44)	25(50)	47(47)
Sometimes	16(32)	7(14)	23(23)
Rarely	3(6)	3(6)	6(6)
Never	2(4)	2(4)	4(4)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

Table 1 displays the percentage of respondents who report feeling depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad. It was discovered that 47 percent of all responders 'often' experienced these mental health problems. Of the respondents, 23 percent said they 'sometimes' deal with these problems. Twenty percent of the participants reported feeling sad, lonely, miserable, or depressed 'always.' The percentage of respondents who said they had 'never' experienced mental health problems such as depression, loneliness, or feelings of sadness was a mere 4 percent. It was discovered that more graduate students than undergraduate students experienced these kinds of mental health problems.

Table 2: Whom do you talk to at the time when you feel depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad?

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Father	20(40)	32(64)	52(52)
Mother	37(74)	42(84)	79(79)
Siblings	28(56)	24(48)	52(52)
Grandparents	18(36)	10(20)	28(28)
Friends	43(86)	27(54)	70(70)
Boyfriend/ girlfriend	39(78)	42(84)	81(81)
Teachers	12(24)	10(20)	22(22)
None	5(10)	8(16)	13(13)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

**The respondents have given multiple answers. Total percentage was calculated from the total number of both undergraduate students and graduate students separately (i.e., 50 each).*

Table 2 displays the social support of the respondents. The respondents were asked that whom do they talk to at the time when they feel depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad. It was found that 81 percent of the respondents talk to their Boyfriend/ girlfriend when they suffer such mental problems. 79 percent of the respondents talk to their mother. While there were 70 percent of the respondents who talks to their friends in times of need. 52 percent of the respondents talk to their father and siblings. There were 13 percent of the respondents who do not have anyone to talk to when they feel depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad. Counselors and psychologists today generally agree that social networks and connections that are supportive of one another have therapeutic benefits for both mental and physical health (Pearson, 1986).

Table 3: Do you find your social support helpful in dealing with your emotional state?

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Always	7(14)	8(16)	15(15)
Often	10(20)	6(12)	16(16)
Sometimes	10(20)	17(34)	27(27)
Rarely	15(30)	14(28)	29(29)
Never	8(16)	5(10)	13(13)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

Table 3 shows how helpful the respondents find their social support while dealing with the emotional states such as feeling depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad. The respondents were asked that do they find their social support helpful when they suffer from such mental issues. It was found that there were 15 percent of the respondents who 'always' find their social support helpful. There were 16 percent respondents who 'often' finds their social support helpful. There were 27 percent of the respondents who 'sometimes' feel their social support helpful. There were 29 percent of respondents who 'rarely' find their social support to be helpful. There were 13 percent of respondents who 'never' find their social support to be helpful when they feel depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad. Numerous studies have discovered that while quantity of interactions is significant, quality of relationships is a superior indicator of wellness (Ozbay et al., 2007).

Table 4: Do you feel stressed during examination?

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Always	30(60)	33(66)	63(63)
Often	8(16)	8(16)	16(16)
Sometimes	11(22)	8(16)	19(19)
Rarely	1(2)	1(2)	2(2)
Never	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

Table 4 shows the stress faced by the students during examination. It was found that there were 63 percent of the respondents who 'always' feel stressed during examination. There were 16 percent of respondents who 'often' feel stressed. While there were 19 percent who 'sometimes' feel stressed during examination. It was found that there were only 2 percent of the respondents who 'rarely' feel stressed. The study finds that there was no student respondent who 'never' felt stressed during their examination. The study concludes that examinations are a biggest contributor of stress to the students.

Table 5: Reason for your stress during examination?

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Lack of preparation	8(16)	5(10)	13(13)
Afraid of failing in exam/ scoring less	19(38)	28(56)	47(47)
Pressure from parents	42(84)	30(60)	72(72)
Afraid of getting less marks than your classmates/ friends	39(78)	47(94)	86(86)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

**The respondents have given multiple answers. Total percentage was calculated from the total number of both undergraduate students and graduate students separately (i.e., 50 each).*

Table 5 highlights the reason of stress students face during examination. It was found that 86 percent of total respondents are afraid of getting less marks than their classmates/ friends which causes them stress. There were 72 percent of respondents who said that their parents pressure gives them stress. The students who said that they are afraid of failing in exam/ scoring less were 42 percent. While, there were 13 percent of respondents who face stress because of lack of preparation.

Table 6: Views about getting counselling from a professional

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Must for everyone suffering from mental health issue	43(86)	48(96)	91(91)
Wastage of time and money	7(14)	2(4)	9(9)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

Table 6 highlights the views of respondents about getting counselling from a professional. It was found that 91 percent of respondents believe that professional help is must for everyone suffering from mental health issue. While, there were 9 percent of respondents who believe taking professional help is mere a wastage of time and money.

Table 7: Do you take professional help when you feel depressed, lonely, unhappy, or sad?

	Undergraduate students	Graduate students	Total
Always	2(4)	4(8)	6(6)
Often	9(18)	5(10)	14(14)
Sometimes	8(16)	4(8)	12(12)
Rarely	3(6)	5(10)	8(8)
Never	28(56)	32(64)	60(60)
Total	50(100)	50(100)	100(100)

According to Rudnick (2002) people with serious depression may benefit from receiving psychiatric assistance, although they may occasionally decline such care due to their depression. Table 7 similarly seeks to determine whether the respondents themselves seek professional assistance while experiencing mental stress of any kind. Six percent of respondents said they 'always' seek assistance from professionals. Of those surveyed, 14 percent said they 'often' seek professional assistance. However, 60 percent of those interviewed said they 'never' seek professional assistance when they're depressed, lonely, unhappy, or depressed. The research backs up Rudnick's (2002) conclusions. Even while the respondents, as indicated in table 6, think that anyone with a mental health problem should seek professional assistance, they themselves do not seek professional assistance when they experience the same problems.

Conclusion

Globally, mental health disorders are now considered chronic illnesses among students. Academics find themselves perplexed by the paradoxical situation of students whose mental health is constantly declining while their physical health is at its peak. However, academics have demonstrated that healthy behaviors can significantly reduce the risk of developing depression. To conclude, this study aims to emphasize the importance of social support groups for maintaining mental health in general and preventing or lessening the onset of depression in particular. Depression ought to be seen as a prevalent, incapacitating condition. However, researchers have shown that healthy behaviors can significantly reduce the risk of developing depression.

Recommendations

It is important to treat depression like an illness. It is important to educate family members on the signs and symptoms of depression. Action must be made if a young adult member of the household exhibits any concerning behavior. Like any other illness, depression needs to be treated. Family members need to realize that the patient's attitude has changed and that encouraging him to think positively won't improve his condition. Administering medication and counseling requires first consulting a qualified physician.

Bibliography

- Castaldelli-Maia Joao Mauricio, Silvia Saboia Martins, Dinesh Bhugra, Marcelo Polazzo Machado, Arthur Guerra de Andrade, Clovis Alexandrino-Silva, Sergio Pedro Baldassin and Tania Correa de Toledo Ferraz Alves. (2012). Does ragging play a role in medical student depression – cause or effect? *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 139 (3), pp. 291–97.
- Cockerham, William C. (2011). *Medical Sociology*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Dammeyer, Matthew M. and Narina Nunez. (1999). Anxiety and Depression among Law Students: Current Knowledge and Future Directions. *Law and Human Behavior*, 23 (1), pp. 55-73.
- Howell, Roger Wm. (1954). Is Mental Health a Problem of Youth? *The High School Journal*, 37 (5), pp. 139-42.
- Kajavinthan, K. (2013). Depression among fresh college hostellers during Pre and Post Semester. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 3 (1), pp. 1-3.
- McFarland, Laura, Elizabeth Murray and Sivaness Phillipson. (2016). Student–teacher relationships and student self-concept: Relations with teacher and student gender. *Australian Journal of Education*, 60, pp. 5-25.
- Ozbay, Fatih, Douglas C. Johnson, Eleni Dimoulas, C.A. Morgan, Dennis Charney and Steven Southwick. (2007). Social Support and Resilience to Stress: From Neurobiology to Clinical Practice. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*, 4 (5), pp. 5–40.
- Palosaari U, Aro H, Laippala P. (1996). Parental divorce and depression in young adulthood: adolescents' closeness to parents and self-esteem as mediating factor. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 93(1), pp. 20-6.
- Pearson, Judith E. (1986). The definition and measurement of social support. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 64 (6), pp. 390-5.
- Phan, Huy P., Bing H. Ngu and Oqab Alrashidi. (2016). Role of Student Well-Being: A Study Using Structural Equation Modeling. *Psychological Reports*, 119 (1), pp. 77–105.
- Popa, T. A., and M. Ladea. (2012). Nutrition and depression at the forefront of progress. *Journal of Medicine and Life*, 5 (4), pp. 414-9.
- Rudnick, A. (2002). Depression and Competence to Refuse Psychiatric Treatment. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 28 (3), pp. 151-5.
- Tripkovic, Ingrid, Romilda Roje, Silvana Krnic, Mirjana Nazor, Zeljka Karin and Vesna Capkun. (2015). Depression and Self-Esteem in Early Adolescence. *Central European Journal of Public Health*, 23 (2), pp. 166-9.
- Wiebe, Sabrina T, Jamie Cassoff and Reut Gruber. (2012). Sleep patterns and the risk for unipolar depression: a review. *Nature and Science of Sleep*, 4, pp. 63-71.

Wilson, Katherine T., Ashley E Bohnert, Alex Ambrose, Destiny Y Davis, Dina M Jones and Matthew J Magee. (2014). Social, behavioral, and sleep characteristics associated with depression symptoms among undergraduate students at a woman 's college: a cross-sectional depression survey. *BMC Women's Health*, 14 (8), pp. 1-9.

Wolford, Jack A. (1964). Mental Health and Occupation. *Public Health Reports* (1896, 1970), 79 (11), pp. 979-84.

Zunhammer, Matthias, Hanna Eberle, Peter Eichhammer and Volker Busch. (2013). Somatic Symptoms Evoked by Exam Stress in University Students: The Role of Alexithymia, Neuroticism, Anxiety and Depression. *Public Library of Science*, 8 (12), pp. 1-11.

