

Research Article

Symptoms of Depression in Emerging Adults

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Abstract

The period of emerging adulthood is considered as the period of instability and fluctuation, with more transitions and life-decisions than at any other stage of life, since changes in this period are usually more rapid. This present study examines the symptoms of depression in university students of biological and social sciences. 300 undergraduates, aged 18-25, were taken as a sample and CESD scale was used to examine the symptoms of depression. The symptoms of depression were more prevalent in students of social sciences as compared to biological sciences and males were more depressed than females, while symptoms of depression were more prominent in students of social sciences between 18-20 years of age, this might be due to more uncertainty regarding future prospect of social sciences students.

Hence it may be concluded that apart from the overwhelming burden of education and uncertainty of future prospects in university students in the ages between 21-25 triggers stress which if continued can lead to depression.

Keywords

- Depression
- Social sciences
- Biological sciences
- Emerging adults

INTRODUCTION

Depression is a common mood disorder, categorized by grief, loss of interest or desire, low self-worth, feelings of tiredness, disturbed sleep or appetite and poor concentration. Depression greatly reduces individual performance and may vary in intensity ranging from mild symptoms of morbidity to severe psychotic symptoms including delusions.

Major depression is categorized by feelings of extreme sorrow, decelerated mental activity and lack of attentiveness. Physical alterations also take place mainly in severe depression which include sleeplessness or hypersomnia; changed eating patterns, with anorexia and weight loss or occasionally overeating; decreased energy and libido; disturbance of the normal circadian rhythms of activity, body temperature and various endocrine functions.

There are many causes of depression such as biological factors that involve reduction in biogenic amines, specifically serotonin, which directly or indirectly influence mood and selected social behavior in a way that may cause depression [1].

Social causes like unhealthy relationship and changes in a family environment due to parental depression affect mental health which may lead to depression [2,3]. The university years often have more adverse effects on emotional and intellectual working of an individual than any other period of education thus depression is most prevalent among university students throughout the world [4].

Arnett projected that period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25 is neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is rather emerging adulthood hypothetically and practically distinct from them both. The young adult goes through severe conflicts and issues and develops mental disorientation and disarray, resulting in depression, generalized anxiety disorder, social disorder etc. For many people, the late teens through the mid-twenties are the utmost volitional years of life [5].

Alvi et al [6] in a study revealed that anxiety was found to be 47.7% and depression 35.1% in medical school students from Pakistan, whereas incidence of both anxiety and depression was found to be in 24.37% students, another study on symptoms of depression in students of medical school in China including 335 undergraduate students reveals that nearly half of them were found to be depressed with 2% having severe depression [7].

In UK, the prevalence rate of depression was found to be in the range of 14-24% [8] and in Turkish medical students prevalence of depression was estimated to be 21.9% [9]. While in 35 studies conducted in Iran from 1995 to 2012 on 9743 university students, frequency of depression was assessed to be 33% [10].

The mental health of university students is a point of increasing concern worldwide since this population have been mostly susceptible to depression and stress due to factors like academic pressures, difficulties to achieve goals, environmental changes and life challenges such as transition from school to university and the change in role from student to educated person [11,12].

Thus present study was specifically design to explore the symptoms of depression in emerging adults engaged in studies at university level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This epidemiological study was designed to collect data regarding symptoms of depression in the undergraduate students of Social and Biological Sciences, University of Karachi. Data was collected from 300 undergraduate students randomly selected between 18-25 years of age from both faculties.

Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) was used as a device to measure the symptoms of depression, which is a 20-item measure originally published by Radloff in 1977 [13].

CES-D asks care providers to rate how frequently during the past week they faced symptoms related to depression, such as restless sleep, reduced appetite and feelings of loneliness. Response options range from 0 to 3 for each item where 0 = seldom or none of the time, 1 = some or little of the time, 2 = moderately or much of the time, 3 = maximum or almost all the time. Scores range from 0 to 60, with high scores indicating greater depressive symptoms. The data collected was analyzed on the basis of gender, age and educational field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 reveal the data of undergraduate students showing

symptoms of depression based on gender, results demonstrate that 77.14% male students in social sciences and 57.14% in biological sciences had symptoms of depression which was higher than the rate of depression in female students in either faculty, Present findings seems to be different from previous studies which reveals higher rates of depression in females [14,15]. This might be due to lack of sleep, poor eating habits and lack of hope about future prospects among this group of students, since 40% of them complaint about poor sleep, 31% about poor appetite and 23% not very hopeful about future prospects.

When anticipating the causes behind these results, it seems apparent that Pakistani society is a male oriented society where men are responsible for earnings of their families, hence bringing them under pressure to better educate themselves for better earnings.

Table 2 reveals another interesting result that student of social sciences between the ages 18-20 were more depressed since 65.51% students in this age group had shown symptoms of depression as compared to 45.61% students in biological sciences of same age group. Previous studies also revealed higher incidence of depression in individuals 18-25 years of age [16-18]. This might be due to more stress regarding studies and future prospects, since it is evident from the fact that 33% students in social sciences were not very hopeful regarding their future as compared to 24% students in biological sciences.

Table 1: Symptoms of Depression according to Gender.

Undergraduate Students	Social Sciences		Biological Sciences		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Number & Percentage of Depressed Students	27 77.14%	54 46.95%	8 57.14%	73 53.67%	162 54.00%
Number & Percentage of Non-Depressed Students	8 22.85%	61 53.04%	6 42.85%	63 46.32%	138 46.00%
Total Number & Percentage	35 11.66%	115 38.33%	14 4.66%	136 45.33%	300

Table 2: Symptoms of Depression according to Age.

Undergraduate Students	Social Sciences *Age Group (Years)		Biological Sciences *Age Group (Years)		Total
	18-20	21-25	18-20	21-25	
	Number & Percentage of Depressed Students	38 65.51%	51 57.30%	26 45.61%	
Number & Percentage of Non-Depressed Students	20 34.48%	38 42.69%	31 54.38%	34 42.50%	123 43.30%
Total Number & Percentage	58 20.42%	89 31.33%	57 20.07%	80 28.16%	284

*13 female students from biological and 3 from social sciences did not reveal their age

Table 3:

Symptoms of Depression	Percentage of Students			
	Social Sciences		Biological Sciences	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Lack of Sleep	40%	38%	21%	19%
Lack of Appetite	31%	22%	21%	18%
Lack of Interpersonal relationship	40%	22%	36%	21%
Lack of Hope Regarding Future	23%	10%	14%	10%

Hence depression seems to be a serious issue in undergraduate students at university level, since they face numerous problems apart from the overwhelming burden of education, all of this add to the stress which if continued can lead to depression, thus it may be concluded that stress triggers depression.

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