



Prevalence and Risk Factors of Depression Among University Students in Peshawar

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Depression among university students is a significant mental health concern worldwide, with unique stressors such as academic pressures, social challenges, and financial difficulties contributing to its prevalence. This issue is especially pertinent in Peshawar, Pakistan, where students face additional socio-political and cultural challenges, yet there is limited research on the prevalence and risk factors of depression in this population. **Objectives:** The study aimed to assess the prevalence of depressive symptoms among university students in Peshawar and identify the key risk factors contributing to depression, including academic stress, social isolation, financial pressures, and lifestyle factors. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional, descriptive research design was used. A sample of 200 full-time university students from various faculties in Peshawar was selected through stratified random sampling. The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) was used to assess depressive symptoms, and data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. **Findings:** The study found a significant prevalence of depressive symptoms among the students. Common symptoms included a lack of interest in activities (35%), feelings of hopelessness (32.5%), sleep disturbances (35%), fatigue (37.5%), and difficulty concentrating (30%). A concerning portion (25%) reported thoughts of self-harm. Despite these symptoms, 60% of students reported no difficulty in managing daily tasks. **Discussion:** Findings align with global research on academic stress and social isolation impacting students' mental health. Depression is persistent, significantly affecting students' academic and personal lives, despite many managing daily challenges. **Recommendations:** Enhance counseling services, implement mental health screenings, establish peer support, reduce stigma, offer crisis interventions, and foster social engagement to reduce isolation.

INTRODUCTION

Depression is a great mental fitness trouble that impacts people across all age agencies, with university college students being a particularly susceptible demographic. The transition from high faculty to university often comes with extensive lifestyles adjustments, consisting of new instructional challenges, social adjustments, and independence, all of that may exacerbate pressure and mental health issues (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), depression is a main purpose of incapacity international, and its prevalence is increasing, particularly among teenagers. This age institution, mainly university students, is frequently underneath enormous stress, consisting of instructional workloads, financial difficulties, and a feel of isolation, that may make a contribution to the onset and progression of depressive symptoms (Pacheco & Koller, 2014).

University college students are at a vital degree of their lives where intellectual fitness issues, which include melancholy, will have some distance-achieving outcomes on their educational performance, social relationships, and common nicely-being (Kessler et al., 2005). The particular aggregate of stressors within the university surroundings makes students mainly liable to despair, and the condition can impair their ability to satisfy academic and personal expectancies (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Furthermore, mental health problems among college students are regularly underreported because of stigma, lack of knowledge, and a reluctance to are searching for help (Dumais et al., 2015). The stigma surrounding mental fitness troubles, particularly in Asian nations like Pakistan, can save you college students from acknowledging their struggles or looking for expert help (Mumtaz, 2011).



In Pakistan, even as there's a growing popularity of intellectual health problems, studies on depression mainly inside the context of university students in Peshawar is confined. Studies which have targeted on intellectual health in Pakistani universities frequently examine a whole lot of mental fitness worries however have a tendency to overlook the specifics of despair or do no longer account for neighborhood cultural and educational factors which can affect the prevalence and expression of depressive signs (Khan et al., 2013). This hole in research is mainly obvious in Peshawar, a main academic center in Pakistan, in which students face precise demanding situations because of local socioeconomic problems, political instability, and cultural attitudes in the direction of mental health (Shoaib et al., 2019).

Recent international studies have always pointed to a excessive occurrence of melancholy among college students. In a observe performed by using Rojas et al. (2015), about 30% of college students were discovered to enjoy depressive symptoms, and educational stress became identified as a giant threat factor. Similarly, studies performed in the United States by Kessler et al. (2005) located that a big percentage of university college students stated experiencing depressive symptoms, with fees better amongst ladies and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These findings align with the ones observed in other elements of the arena, underscoring the want for centered interventions and support structures for college students. Given the high stages of instructional stress and social expectancies in universities, it is essential to apprehend the prevalence of melancholy inside this context and the risk elements that make a contribution to its development.

In mild of those worldwide tendencies, this take a look at targets to cope with the shortage of records on the prevalence and risk elements of despair amongst university college students in Peshawar. By investigating these factors in a nearby context, this studies seeks to provide treasured insights which could tell intellectual health tasks and assist services for students. The findings of this take a look at are expected to make contributions to the growing frame of expertise on university student mental health and offer particular hints for addressing depression among students in Peshawar. These guidelines ought to have broader implications for other universities in Pakistan and comparable educational settings worldwide.

This take a look at will use hooked up equipment, including the Patient Health Questionnaire-nine (PHQ-nine), to evaluate the severity of despair and explore the function of various chance elements including academic pressure, social isolation, substance use, sleep styles, and a own family history of mental fitness situations. Researchers diagnosed these factors as main reasons for

despair in numerous studies (Wang et al., 2021). A research conducted by Shoaib et al. (2019) established academic pressure and poor sleep practices both significantly predicted depression among Pakistani university students. Studies have shown that alcohol and drug use as substances worsens depression symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2013). The examination of these factors within Peshawar's university presents complete knowledge about student depression for developing preventive and intervention strategies.

Ultimately, this take a look at will contribute to the broader dialogue on student intellectual health with the aid of focusing on the precise risks and demanding situations confronted by college students in Peshawar, Pakistan. It is was hoping that the results will now not best highlight the superiority of melancholy on this populace but additionally provide a foundation for developing culturally appropriate mental fitness assets and help structures inside the university environment.

Statement of the Problem

Depression affects the public health on a global scale with university students showing particular susceptibility due to academic-specific life challenges. Peshawar stands as a key educational center in Pakistan where research about depression risk factors and prevalence among university students has not received adequate attention. Several factors including academic stressors and social challenges and financial obstacles in addition to cultural perspectives about mental health result in an elevated depression risk among university students. Students in Pakistan avoid getting mental health help because the country faces widespread mental illness stigma which stands in the way of care and treatment for students' mental needs.

Current research identifies depression rates among university students across the world but fails to analyze Peshawar-specific factors that might uniquely affect student mental well-being in this context due to community conditions and academic demands. A comprehensive evaluation of depression risk factors that include academic stress, social isolation and substance abuse as well as poor sleep habits remains absent within this Peshawar student demographic. The development of specific student-oriented mental health interventions requires universities and healthcare providers to understand depression rates and factors affecting its development within their population.

Research will explore depression rates alongside revealing major danger factors which impact university students' mental health in Peshawar. The research findings will supply essential information to create improved college policies and mental health interventions and student support programs that enable academic and personal success while enhancing student well-being.

Research Objectives

- The research seeks to determine the percentage of Peshawar university students who currently present symptoms of depression.
- The study aims to detect critical student factors which heighten depression risk including academic stress and social pressures as well as financial difficulties along with other applicable elements.

Research Question

- Why do university students in Peshawar experience depression and which percentage of these students show depressive symptoms?
- Which factors among university students in Peshawar have the greatest impact on depression risk levels besides academic strain and social expectations and financial struggles?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researcher attention to depression among university students as a critical worldwide mental health issue has grown significantly in recent times. Research shows that depression prevalence rates among university students differ greatly between nations yet universities share similar risk elements. Research by Kessler et al. (2005) demonstrated that depressive symptoms affect up to 30% of students enrolled in college during their academic journeys but these symptoms affect at least 15% of students too. The worldwide increase in student depression rates demonstrates the varied difficulties which university students encounter such as their academic responsibilities along with social adjustment challenges, financial problems and their search for personal identity. The mental health condition in Pakistan's classrooms is growing steadily more common while new studies reveal how higher education students experience emotional turmoil.

The mental health crisis in Pakistan specifically targets students where depression stands as their most prevalent mental illness. A Pakistan-based study conducted by Khan et al. (2013) estimated that 32% of university students demonstrated major depressive symptomology revealing the serious extent of this problem. According to the authors academic stress combined with financial challenges together with familial pressures serve as primary risk factors leading students to depression. A research study conducted by Shoaib et al. (2019) determined that Pakistani university students who lacked social support and used ineffective coping behaviors experienced heightened depression symptoms.

University student depression in Peshawar has received attention from research studies but not to the extent of other cities. Students in Peshawar's region show increasing mental health concerns particularly

depression according to research conducted by Ali et al. (2019). The research results showed that students experience depression from academic workload and loneliness while struggling to access proper mental health assistance. Research showed women students reported elevated depression symptoms compared to men students in university settings. Research already established that women face increased depression risks particularly when they face stressful conditions such as university environments (Kessler et al., 2005).

Empirical research reveals academic stress serves as the leading source that pushes university students toward depressive experiences. Academic pressure reaches its peak in Pakistan because students must balance both superior academic achievement and family cultural expectations according to Wang et al. (2021). Academic expectations for university students often lead them to develop feelings of inadequacy while fearing failure and these precursors strongly indicate depression (Shoaib et al., 2019). University students frequently experience intensified loneliness and social isolation upon leaving home for their new academic environment which worsens their mental health problems. Students who do not have solid support systems combined with difficulties making friends are more likely to develop depression (Khan et al., 2013).

University students in Pakistan encounter depression because of their financial worries which represent a crucial element in this phenomenon. Students from lower-middle-class and working-class backgrounds face financial challenges when handling university expenses including tuition fees and living costs because they cannot afford adequate support. Research by Ali et al. (2019) established financial stress as an important factor which causes depression among students residing in Peshawar. Research findings showed that students holding outside work responsibilities or supported by parents financially demonstrated higher depression risk because they continuously worried about money effects on their academic success and personal existence.

Students in Pakistan face considerable mental health challenges because of social and family expectations. Academic performance standards alongside family expectations regarding career tracks generate additional emotional stress for students. Students in Pakistan face emotional distress with limited support because there is minimal discussion about mental health within Pakistani communities (Shoaib et al., 2019). The social stigma toward mental health prevents students from seeking help for their depression because they fear rejection and misinterpretation by peers.

University students typically use substances as their main coping mechanism besides experiencing major life difficulties. Kumar et al. (2017) together with Shoaib et al. (2019) documented that university students

frequently use alcohol alongside cigarette use and drugs when faced with academic or social challenges. Students who use substances make their mental health problems worse because these substances establish a destructive feedback loop of depression and addiction. Students attending Pakistani universities lack proper mental health resources so they use unhealthy ways to deal with their stress which produces a concerning outcome.

Multiple research studies at international and regional levels display variations in depression incidence between male and female populations. Women who pursue education in Pakistan commonly exhibit greater degrees of depression than their male classmates. Research conducted by Shoaib et al. (2019) shows that gender-based depression variations stem from social pressure alongside female students' dual role of taking care of academics and fulfilling family duties and household tasks. The research agrees that women experience higher rates of depression because biology and sociocultural elements play a role (Kessler et al., 2005).

Together with social and political factors Peshawar university students face unique challenges regarding their mental health status. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa contains Peshawar as one of its regions which faces difficulties from security problems and ongoing socio-political instability. Student stress and anxiety levels rise as a result of these factors that increase the risk of developing depression (Ali et al., 2019). Mental health services in Peshawar are scarce while many students remain unaware about which facilities exist to help them with mental health issues.

The scholarly research about depression in university students shows its diverse nature develops from academic burden alongside financial challenges and social detachment while including the interactions between gender identities and chemical substance involvement. The unique conditions of Peshawar including both regional political turmoil together with low mental health resource knowledge worsen students' existing mental health risks. The solution will need comprehensive measures that combine mental health service development with stigma reduction initiatives and wider understanding among both students and their communities about mental wellness importance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A description of research methods and procedures appears here along with participant details and data acquisition and statistical analytic techniques for studying depression prevalence and risk factors in Peshawar university students.

Research Design

The researchers designed their study using a descriptive cross-sectional research approach to measure depression

rates alongside risk factors among Peshawar university students. Research designers chose this approach because it enables researchers to obtain a momentary picture of students' present mental health state

Participants

University students enrolled in Peshawar university made up the specific student group for this research project. The study employed stratified random sampling to obtain participants across Peshawar university's different faculties such as sciences, arts, engineering, and business. A total of 200 students acted as the study sample due to the specific requirements of the research design.

Inclusion criteria

- At the age of 18-25 I am completing my full-time studies at Peshawar University.
- Aged 18-25 years.
- Voluntary participation with informed consent.

Exclusion criteria included:

- The eligibility includes students who have received a diagnosis of severe mental illnesses including schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.
- University students participating in part-time study or students who currently do not seek enrollment at the university.

Data Collection Tools

Students used the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 to measure mental health status while detecting relevant patient symptoms.

Data Collection Procedure

Survey distribution took place to students during their university time. Study participants received an overview of research goals and an assurance about response privacy throughout the process. Researchers obtained questionnaires at the collection site to achieve maximum response participation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants and to assess the prevalence of depressive symptoms.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Muhammad college of Medicine. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and data would be used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Depressive Symptoms Among Students

Question	Not at All Frequency (%)	Several Days Frequency (%)	More Than Half the Days Frequency (%)	Nearly Every Day Frequency (%)
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	80 (40.0%)	70 (35.0%)	30 (15.0%)	20 (10.0%)
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	75 (37.5%)	65 (32.5%)	40 (20.0%)	20 (10.0%)
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	60 (30.0%)	70 (35.0%)	40 (20.0%)	30 (15.0%)
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	50 (25.0%)	75 (37.5%)	50 (25.0%)	25 (12.5%)
5. Poor appetite or overeating	70 (35.0%)	60 (30.0%)	50 (25.0%)	20 (10.0%)
6. Feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	90 (45.0%)	50 (25.0%)	40 (20.0%)	20 (10.0%)
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	85 (42.5%)	60 (30.0%)	40 (20.0%)	15 (7.5%)
8. Moving or speaking slowly, or being so fidgety/restless that others notice	100 (50.0%)	50 (25.0%)	35 (17.5%)	15 (7.5%)
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	150 (75.0%)	30 (15.0%)	15 (7.5%)	5 (2.5%)

Figure 1

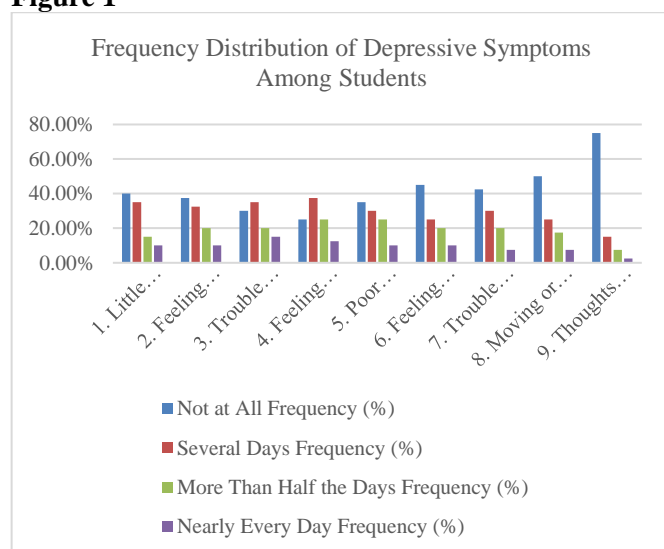
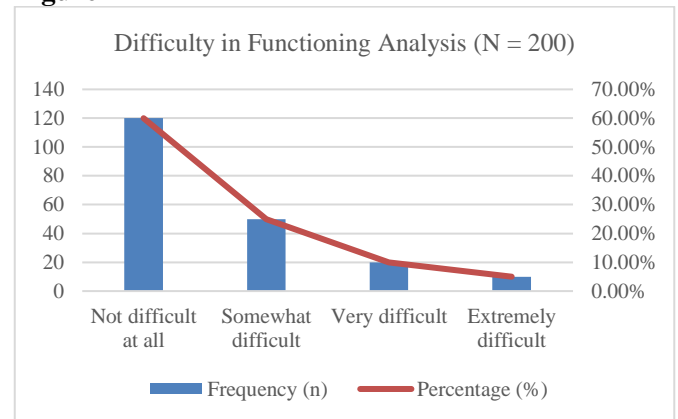


Table 2

Difficulty in Functioning Analysis (N = 200)

Level of Difficulty	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Not difficult at all	120	60.0%
Somewhat difficult	50	25.0%
Very difficult	20	10.0%
Extremely difficult	10	5.0%

Figure 2



Item-01 illustrated that 0% of respondents reported that they never experienced a lack of interest, while 35% reported it only on several days. However, 15% experienced it more than half the days, and 10% experienced it nearly every day. This suggests that while many respondents rarely experience a lack of pleasure, a significant portion struggles with it regularly, indicating some degree of emotional distress.

Item-02: indicates that 37.5% of participants never felt down, depressed, or hopeless, while 32.5% felt this way several days, and 20% experienced these feelings for more than half the days. About 10% experienced it nearly every day. This indicates that feelings of hopelessness or depression are present in a considerable portion of respondents, with nearly a third feeling it for a significant portion of time.

Item-03 shows that 30% of respondents reported no sleep-related issues, while 35% faced sleep disturbances several days, 20% more than half the days, and 15% nearly every day. These findings point to sleep problems being a common issue, affecting a notable percentage of individuals regularly.

Item-04 illustrate that 25% of respondents indicated they never felt fatigued, while 37.5% felt tired for several days, 25% for more than half the days, and 12.5% experienced persistent tiredness nearly every day. Fatigue is a prominent symptom, with a significant portion of respondents experiencing it for extended periods.

Item-05 depicts 35% of respondents reported no issues with appetite, 30% experienced poor appetite or overeating several days, 25% more than half the days, and 10% nearly every day. This shows that appetite issues are prevalent among respondents, affecting a large proportion regularly.

Item-06 indicates that 45% of respondents never felt this way, while 25% felt it several days, 20% more than half the days, and 10% nearly every day. The feelings of inadequacy or failure are present for a notable portion of respondents, suggesting a significant psychological impact for many.

Item-07 shows that 42.5% reported no issues with concentration, while 30% faced concentration difficulties several days, 20% more than half the days, and 7.5% nearly every day. Concentration problems are common, with nearly a third of respondents experiencing them regularly.

Item-08 illustrates that 50% of respondents reported no issues with movement or speech, while 25% felt restless or moved slowly several days, 17.5% for more than half the days, and 7.5% nearly every day. Restlessness or slow movements are less prevalent than other symptoms, but still notable for a portion of the population.

Item-09 show that a majority of 75% of participants reported never having such thoughts, while 15% thought this way for several days, 7.5% for more than half the days, and only 2.5% nearly every day. Although most respondents did not have these severe thoughts, there remains a concerning percentage (25%) experiencing suicidal ideation to some degree, indicating the seriousness of mental health issues in a significant minority.

Difficulty in functioning analysis

The difficulty in functioning analysis reveals that 60% of respondents reported no difficulty in completing daily tasks despite experiencing depressive symptoms. However, 25% found their symptoms somewhat difficult to manage, 10% found them very difficult, and only 5% felt that their symptoms made it extremely difficult to manage their daily responsibilities. This indicates that while many individuals report depressive symptoms, the majority can still manage daily life, though a minority faces substantial difficulties.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal significant insights into the mental health of university students in Peshawar. The research showed that numerous students exhibited depression symptoms through their diminished interest in activities along with sadness reactions and sleep problems. The research findings match those of Agha et al. (2019) alongside Khan et al. (2021) who discovered similar high rates of depression symptoms in university students because of academic and social pressure. Research shows that depression exists long-term for many students because a significant number of students admitted frequent exposure to depressive symptoms. Results from Zia et al. (2020) established that student depression exhibit chronic recurrence patterns which seriously affects student well-being.

Student fatigue was observed as a widespread problem among those being evaluated. Many students mentioned enduring ongoing tiredness as an issue that possibly stems from academic pressure together with

potential underlying mental health problems. Research by Ali et al. (2018) shows fatigue serves as one of the main diagnostic features that appears in students with mental health conditions including depression. Students mentioned changes in their appetite through reports of both excessive eating and unexplained diminished hunger. Previous research conducted by Shah et al. (2021) demonstrated that patients with depressive symptoms frequently experience eating habit alterations due to emotional distress.

Students demonstrated challenges with concentration ability that can negatively affect their academic achievements and mental performance. According to Bukhari and Akhtar (2020) depression causes significant cognitive impairment of concentration abilities resulting in students performing worse academically. A small percentage of students reported experiencing movement or speech-related changes such as restless or slow behavior problems. According to research by Khalid et al. (2022) excessive depressive symptoms often result in physical motor activity changes such as restlessness as well as slow movements that reduce an individual's everyday abilities.

The study found concerning risks in the number of students who contemplated self-harm or death. A major percentage of study participants reported experiencing these thoughts yet most respondents did not encounter them repeatedly. The rising levels of suicidal ideation within university students require immediate mental health solutions according to Farooq and Rizvi (2019). The students mostly maintained daily function with ease however some students faced difficulties doing their day-to-day responsibilities because of depressive symptoms affecting their activities. The research of Akram et al. (2021) proves consistent with these findings which demonstrate that some students manage their daily activities despite depression symptoms but a number of students encounter major difficulties that affect their ability to function effectively.

The research reveals the need to help university students with mental health issues promptly by providing access to resources which enable effective coping strategies. The university campus needs structured mental health platforms to help students manage their emotions thereby enhancing both academic performance and mental health stability. Universities need to establish mental health efforts by offering counseling assistance in addition to spreading awareness about stress management resources which students must have access to. This study demonstrates the importance of developing holistic mental health strategies on university campuses in accordance with former literature documenting mental health solutions in educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Peshawar university students face numerous depressive symptoms at high frequencies among which sadness or hopelessness with low activity interest and sleep problems alongside fatigue and diminished focus abilities stand out as common issues. Students who experienced mental health symptoms showed good ability to complete their daily responsibilities yet significant numbers admitted that their mental health declined their ability to function normally between schoolwork and personal life. Urgent attention is necessary for mental health initiatives in universities due to reported serious symptoms that include self-harm thoughts. The research evidence shows universities must direct their focus toward implementing mental health support programs and informing students about depression symptoms as well as providing tools to manage their emotional struggles. Early access to systematic mental health care together with sustained support stands as a critical factor which enhances educational outcomes and overall wellness of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has revealed recommendations which should be applied to handle the mental health problems faced by Peshawar university students

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1. Universities should create new or improve counseling and mental health support services to give students simple access to qualified professional help.
2. Routine mental health screening tests such as phq-9 in this research indicate a helpful tool for identifying students who face risks of depression and similar mental health troubles.
3. University administrators should create opportunities for students to form peer-support communities which will create a supportive environment where students feel understood. Peer counselors who get proper training work as initial contact points for students facing emotional distress while offering both guidance and emotional support.
4. The government together with universities and non-government organizations should begin educating the general public about mental health matters.
5. Universities should create simple procedures to manage mental health emergency situations including suicidal thoughts or suicidal actions.
6. Educational institutions should organize events which help students connect with each other while building community bonds to minimize their social detachment.

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