

SOCIAL SUPPORT SOURCES AND ITS IMPACT ON DEPRESSION AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract Depression is considered one of the most common health problem worldwide. It also causes disabilities and affects both males and females globally. Young adults experience university life to develop the latest skills, capabilities, and proficiencies, analyze social networks, and attain knowledge. Due to changes in lifestyle, relationships, and community, and many students feel stress while attending university. This study addresses such issues by evaluating the impact of various social support sources on mental health symptoms and quality of life among university students. This was a cross-sectional survey conducted on university students of Larkana for 6 months. Students of universities were included. Online questionnaire was prepared and was circulated among students. Informed consent was taken from all participants before filling out the questionnaire. The data was entered and analyzed using SPSS 24.0. Mean and standard deviation were measured for quantitative variables (i.e., age). While for qualitative variables (i.e. sociodemographic parameters), frequency and percentage was measured. A total of 360 responses were collected from university students. The mean age of participants was 23.03 ± 3.91 years. Number of female students was higher (214/59.44%). The majority of the students responded the availability was in a moderate ratio. Most students (165/45.8%) said that they previously experienced depression symptoms, while reminder said they are currently facing symptoms or never faced any symptoms. Majority of students had moderate impact (115/31.9%), followed by severe impact (90/25%), mild impact (88/24.4%), and no impact (67/18.6%). It was observed that social support makes a good impact on the quality of life and depression among university students as it helps in improving mental health and preventing depression. There is the significant role of friends and family social support in the minimization of depression symptoms. Enhanced awareness of specified social support sources will prevent psychological diseases and mental illness among university students.

Keywords: Social support; sources; depression; university students; quality of life

Introduction

Depression is considered one of the most common health problems worldwide. It also causes disabilities and affects both males and females globally (Singh et al., 2022). Previous research shows that depression accounts for the higher prevalence in university students as compared to the general population (Gao et al., 2020). A study in United Kingdom shows that stress, anxiety, and depression were common among university students (Campbell et al., 2022). Young adults experience university life to develop the latest

skills, capabilities, and proficiencies, explore social networks, and attain knowledge. Due to changes in lifestyle, relationships and community, many students feel stress while attending university (January et al., 2018). Period of transformation i.e. adolescence to adulthood, leads to sufficient encounters including management of life and independence (Backhaus et al., 2020). During this phase, the individual is capable of exploring and testing on themselves as well as their companions.

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Many students face this challenge as their first life experience as they have to live away from their homes for a particular period. An increase in the number of students who attend University for their Higher Studies leads them to face new challenges as academic demands increase over time (Weiss et al., 2022). Due to these reasons, many students suffer from mental health issues which cause social, financial and academic stress (Weiss et al., 2022). Symptoms related to depression in university students are directly associated with decision-making independently i.e., self-reliability, daily life management, and financial burden. Increasing academic demands also cause the risk of mental health issues (Moses-Payne et al., 2019). Mental health is promoted by social support to students as it plays role as barrier against stressful events. Social support is adapted from a wide network, including friends, family, and community individuals (8). Lack of social support leads to mental disorders and negatively influences university students' quality of life. Research shows a negative association between mental health disorders and social support (Prieler et al., 2021). Friedlander et al. (2021) show in their study that students with higher social support were well-adapted in university life (Laura J et al., 2007). It was also evident that academic stress and its impact on psychological health rely on levels of social support received by individuals (Campbell et al., 2022). Awang et al. (2014) postulated that social support from friends and family has a significant impact on academic, social, and emotional feelings in university students (Awang et al., 2014). Much research has been performed to see the impact of social support on mental health status in the general population. Although, students from university life face different problems as they experience the transition phase. Previous research did not explore the impact of social support sources on mental health problems and quality of life. Therefore, our study aims to address such issues by evaluating the impact of various social support sources on mental health symptoms and quality of life among university students.

Methods and Materials

This was a cross-sectional survey conducted on university students of Larkana. The duration of the study was 6 months. Students of universities were included in the study with a minimum age of 18 years and a maximum age of 35 years. Both male and female students were included. The online questionnaire was prepared and was circulated among students. Informed consent was taken from all participants before filling up the questionnaire. Demographic measures included age, gender, year of

study, living status etc. The questionnaire further contained questions regarding depression symptoms, social support and quality of life. The data was entered and analyzed using SPSS 24.0. Mean and standard deviation were measured for quantitative variables (i.e., age). While for qualitative variables (i.e. sociodemographic parameters), frequency and percentage were measured.

Results

A total of 360 responses were collected from university students. The mean age of participants was 23.03 ± 3.91 years. Number of female students was higher (214/59.44%) than male students (146/40.55%) (Figure 1). Demographic data shows students from various study years and living status (Table 1). Various questions were asked university students regarding availability of various support sources (Table 2). Majority of students responded the availability was in a moderate ratio. Depression symptoms were also evaluated among students. Most students (165/45.8%) said that they previously experienced depression symptoms, while reminder said they are currently facing symptoms or never faced any symptoms (Figure 2). The impact of depression on academic performance and daily life was also observed. The majority of students had moderate impact (115/31.9%), followed by severe impact (90/25%), mild impact (88/24.4%), and no impact (67/18.6%) (Figure 3).

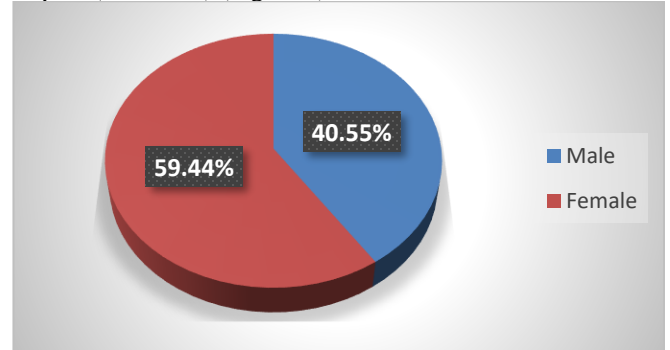


Figure 1: Gender distribution among participants (n=360)

Table 1: Demographic parameters of university students (n=360)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year of study		
First year	87	24.16
Second year	92	25.55
Third year	90	25
Fourth year	35	9.72
Final year	56	15.55
Living status		
On-campus	140	38.88
Off-campus	220	61.11

Table 2: Availability of support in university students (n=360)

Question	Rating (1 = not at all, 5 = fully available)
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	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of social support	50 (13.9%)	50 (13.9%)	105 (29.2%)	73 (20.3%)	82 (22.8%)
Instrumental support	88 (24.4%)	81 (22.5%)	89 (24.7%)	65 (18.1%)	37 (10.3%)
Informational support	34 (9.4%)	57 (15.8%)	88 (24.4%)	94 (26.1%)	87 (24.2%)
Appraisal support	43 (11.9%)	67 (18.6%)	114 (31.7%)	78 (21.7%)	58 (16.1%)

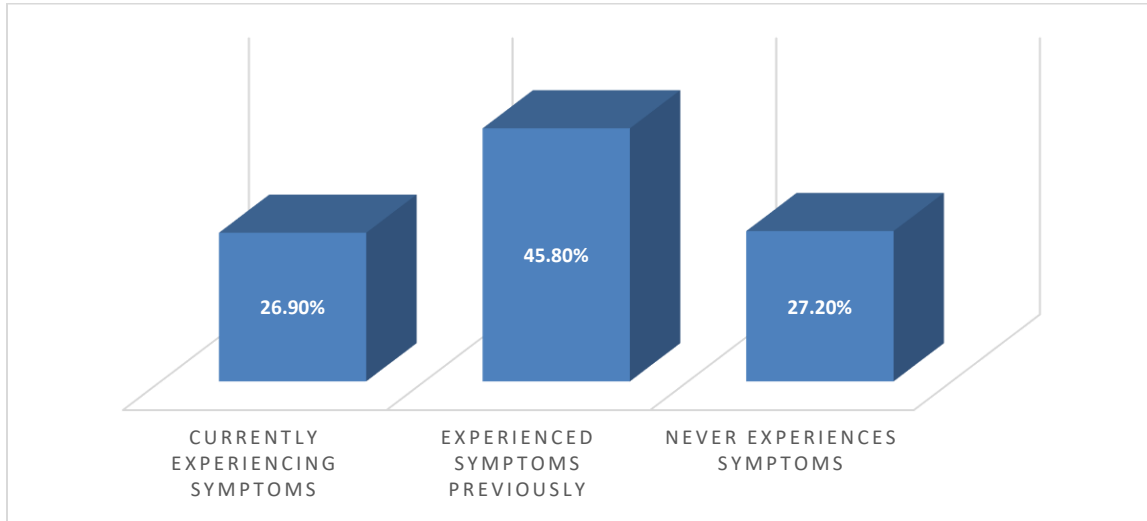


Figure 2: Depression symptoms among university students (n=360)

Table 3: Evaluation of depression symptoms among university students (n=360)

Question	Category			
	Not at all	Several days	Most of the time	Almost every day
Bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things	97 (26.9%)	180 (50%)	49 (13.6%)	34 (9.4%)
Thoughts of being dead or hurting myself	192 (52.3%)	111 (30.8%)	33 (9.2%)	24 (6.7%)
Feeling down or hopeless	100 (27.8%)	174 (48.3%)	45 (12.5%)	41 (11.4%)
Poor appetite or overeating	138 (38.3%)	145 (40.3%)	40 (11.1%)	37 (10.3%)

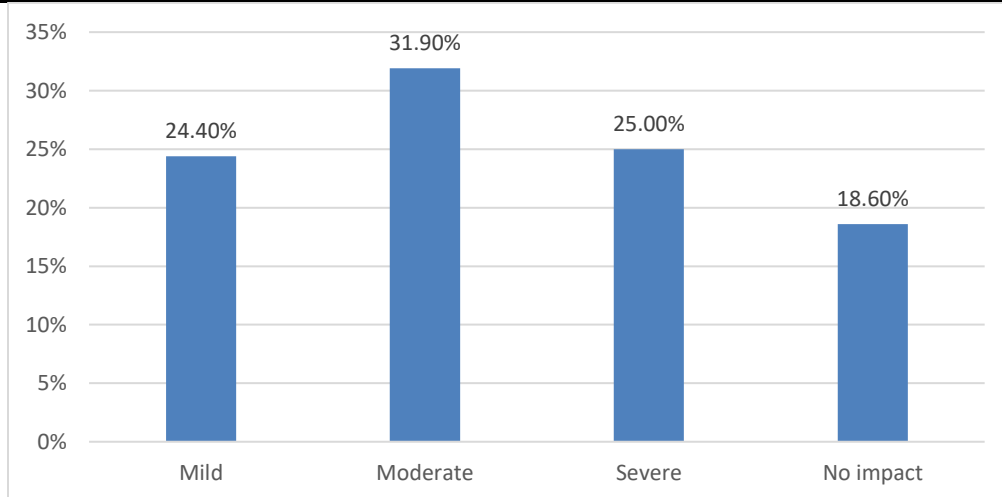


Figure 3: Impact of depression on academic performance and quality life (n=360)

Discussion

In current study, depression was observed in 26.9% of university students. This rate is comparable with

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other studies by Ibrahim et al and Othieno et al. (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Othieno et al., 2014) Findings in our studies are slightly higher than other studies. (Goebert et al., 2009; Roberts et al., 2010; Steptoe et al., 2007) Such variations may be because of diverse measures of self-report and collection of sample size. There is variation in the rate of depression among university students. This may be due to cultural variations, instrument types, and recruited samples. There is a positive role of social support on quality of life and mental health, facilitating the persons to sense appreciation and connection with various networks of society. Such feeling will impact mental health, reduce mental illness, and prevent depression symptoms (Perming et al., 2022; Ragab et al., 2021). In our results, it was observed that family and friends social support are predictors of symptoms of depression. Similar results were obtained by Bukhari et al and Safree et al. (Bukhari & Afzal, 2017; Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010). Various studies have explored that depression and well-being are predicted from social support by family and friends (Glozah, 2013; Kugbey et al., 2015; Ramezankhani et al., 2013). Support from friends may be justifiable due to close association, closeness and sharing of feelings in identical age groups during university life. Additionally, the university environment encourages the students to make new social connections and close relationships. Students at this age spend more time with their friends and colleagues compared to families, as many students live away from their homes (Costello et al., 2022). This is the major age of transformation for students to explore their shape and identity and develop their characteristics socially. These transitions require important support from friends and family. Our findings with family support are consistent with the study by Hamdan – Mansour et al. (Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008) The reason behind family support may be their social maturity and their life experiences especially in terms of support seeking (Bauer et al., 2021). Kugbey et al. explained that seeking social support from various groups positively affects mental health among university students (Kugbey et al., 2015). Few studies do not support this statement and their role on symptoms of depression (Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008). The changeability in the literature can be due to using different tools. Additionally, abrupt social support sources might be labelled as reliable and trustworthy. For this reason, our study reflects the specified sources not observed in literature.

Quality of life is a vast perception that characterizes the negative and positive sides of physical, social, psychological, and environmental health (Qiu et al., 2019). It is obvious from research that social support

influences the quality of life and positively influences university students (Qiu et al., 2019). Our study explored the quality of life as a predictor of social support. Our findings are supported by research conducted by Dafaalla et al. (Dafaalla et al., 2016). Various social factors and individuals enhance the quality of life, such as friends, teachers, relationships, parents' expectations etc. In literature, it is supported by the evidence that social support from family has a stronger role in quality of life than other relationships. This may be due to seeking emotional support from family in various situations as it increases well-being. However, social support obtained from others may increase social relationships. Some students reported an increased mental illness, which may be because they are being burdened with academic pressure and future responsibilities. These situations will ultimately cause a decrease in quality of life. Results of our studies show the impact of psychological and social sources on quality and daily academic life. There was also a lower number of depression symptoms among students with good social connections and support.

Conclusion

Our study shows that social support makes a good impact on quality of life and depression among university students as it helps in improving mental health and preventing the depression. friends and family social support has an important role in minimizing depression symptoms. Enhanced awareness of specified social support sources will prevent psychological diseases and mental illness among university students.

Declarations

Data Availability statement

All data generated or analyzed during the study are included in the manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Funding

Not applicable

Conflict of Interest

Regarding conflicts of interest, the authors state that their research was carried out independently without any affiliations or financial ties that could raise concerns about biases.

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