

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Hidden Depressive Symptoms Among Students and Barriers to Seeking Psychological Help

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## Abstract

This article analyzes hidden depressive symptoms observed among students, their underlying causes, as well as social and psychological factors that hinder seeking psychological assistance. The results of the study indicate that students experience a high level of emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation, and increased stress levels. Based on the findings of the research, practical recommendations were developed to improve students' mental health. The importance of developing psychological counseling centers at universities, introducing anonymous consultations, and increasing psychological literacy among students is emphasized.

## KEY WORDS

Depression, student youth, mental health, psychological assistance, stress, stigma.

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues are currently one of the pressing global problems. Especially among students, stress, mental strain, and depressive states are widespread. The student age is characterized by significant social and psychological changes. Academic workload, adapting to a new social environment, concerns about the future profession, and personal life have a substantial impact on students' mental state. According to data from the World Health Organization, depression is one of the most common mental disorders among young people [1]. This condition can lead to decreased academic performance, reduced social interactions, and various health-related problems.

Among students, depression often proceeds in a hidden manner. Many students try to conceal their mental state or hesitate to seek psychological help. The reasons include stigma, i.e., negative attitudes in society toward mental health issues, a lack of sufficient information about psychological services, and time and financial constraints. Therefore, studying the factors that hinder the identification of covert depressive symptoms among students and the seeking of psychological help holds important scientific and practical significance.

**Research purpose.** The main aim of this study is to identify the prevalence of covert depressive symptoms among

students and to analyze social and psychological factors that hinder seeking psychological help.

Research objectives are as follows:

- 1.To determine the prevalence of depressive symptoms among students.
- 2.To examine students' attitudes toward psychological help.
- 3.To identify the main factors that hinder seeking psychological help.
- 4.To formulate recommendations for improving students' mental health.

## **METHODS**

The study used a sociological survey method. The survey was conducted anonymously and included questions aimed at examining students' mental state, level of stress, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Along with partnership relations in the game, conditions are created for the formation of positive personality traits.

The study involved 150 students from various faculties of Tashkent State Medical University. Respondents were recruited by random sampling. The collected data were analyzed using statistical methods. The survey questions were designed to determine students' level of mental fatigue, motivation for study, awareness of psychological help, and readiness to seek such help. Such a mother may go to her friends, leave her young children alone, and not return until the next morning. She always allows her child to try strong alcoholic beverages in the presence of her friends, finding it very amusing. By taking her children to dangerous places, she may encourage them to engage in behavior that could endanger their lives. Parents' words usually have a much greater impact on a child's future than parents would like. Therefore, they should be handled with great care. It is crucial for a child to distinguish between their attitude and their behavior.

## **RESULTS**

According to the study results, 38% of respondents reported experiencing frequent mental fatigue or depressive episodes in the recent weeks, while 42% emphasized that they occasionally notice such states. These figures indicate a high level of psychoemotional strain among students. At the same time, about 20% of respondents stated that they notice these states only rarely. The study results show a decline in

motivation for studying among a significant portion of students. Specifically, 34% of respondents noted a decrease in interest in studying over the recent months. This condition is confirmed to negatively affect academic performance in the presence of depressive symptoms. According to scientific research, psychoemotional states associated with depression can lead to reduced concentration, less active participation in the learning process, and deterioration of academic indicators [6].

Regarding seeking psychological help, only 24% of respondents reported considering contacting a specialist. Meanwhile, 76% of students indicated that they try to handle psychological problems independently or do not see the necessity of turning to a specialist.

Reasons for not seeking psychological help were identified as follows:

- stigma and shame – 31%
- lack of information about psychological services – 19%
- lack of time – 18%
- financial reasons – 17%
- other factors – 15%

Additionally, during the study, 55% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to use anonymous psychological counseling services on campus if such services were available. This suggests that students do have a need for psychological help, but are not adequately utilizing the existing system.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings are in line with international research. Eisenberg and colleagues reported that a substantial portion of university students experience depressive symptoms and psychological distress [3]. Similarly, Ibrahim and colleagues' systematic review found that the prevalence of depression among students averages around 30% [4].

Multiple factors influence the development of depressive symptoms, including academic workload, exam-related stress, uncertainties about future careers, difficulties with social adaptation, and economic problems. In Stallman's study, academic stress and social adaptation difficulties were identified as key drivers of psychological distress among students [7].

Low help-seeking among students is another important issue. Hunt and Eisenberg's work shows that a large share of students experiencing mental health problems do not seek professional help [5]. Stigma surrounding mental illness, lack of adequate information about psychological services, and social stereotypes are major contributing factors. Anxiety about somatic disorders can lead to hypochondriacal feelings, which also contribute to malnutrition. Thus, a kind of vicious circle arises in the form of anorexic cycles, when chronic starvation causes changes in the internal organs, leading, in turn, to food restrictions. In some cases, patients begin to be actively examined by various specialists, exaggerating the severity of somatic disorders and avoiding consultation with a psychiatrist. The main task of primary school educational activities is to teach students to learn. Under the influence of education, serious changes occur in the mental development of children of primary school age. In other words, the psyche affects the production of neurotransmitters, and neurotransmitters control the life activities of the whole organism.

Therefore, it is crucial to advance mental health support systems in higher education institutions. Establishing university psychological counseling centers, implementing anonymous consultation services, and conducting mental health education programs can help foster a culture of seeking psychological help among students [9].

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that covert depressive symptoms are widespread among students. A significant portion of respondents reported experiencing psychoemotional states such as mental fatigue, stress, and a decrease in motivation. At the same time, a large share of students were found to hesitate to seek psychological help for various reasons.

The results show that the main reasons for not seeking psychological help are stigma, lack of information about psychological services, time, and financial factors. This highlights the need to further improve the mental health support system in higher education institutions. To improve students' mental health, the following measures are recommended as appropriate:

- develop psychological counseling centers at universities;
- implement anonymous psychological consultations;

- conduct mental health-awareness activities among students;
- organize trainings aimed at managing stress and developing psychological stability;
- strengthen information systems about psychological help services for students.

These measures will aid in early identification of depressive states among students, increase the rate of seeking psychological help, and strengthen young people's mental health. In addition, it is important to continue broad-spectrum scientific research on students' mental health [10–11].

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