# Education and Depression: Side by Side or Far Apart

***Purpose:****To highlight and quantify the prevalence, severity, and effects of depression on the academic performances as well as the daily lives of undergraduate students at the National University of Science and Technology Islamabad, Pakistan.****Methods:****In this cross-sectional study, the Random Sampling method was used where 2% of the total strength of undergraduate students of NUST completed a questionnaire that highlighted the effects of depression in their everyday lives and academic performances. Data was collected and analyzed irrespective of their socio-demographic characteristics. The survey was presented in multiple-choice format, which used a 4-point response scale.*

***Results:****It was concluded that 22.2% of students always had anxiety when they were depressed while only 17.9% did not. Moreover, for 16.1% of students, exams triggered a depressive phase. 20.2% of students claim to have depression all the time due to continuous study stress and they do not know how to cope with it further confirms this conclusion. 47.6% preferred an open environment where depression can be talked about easily. Most students preferred engaging in activities that gave them solace and getting close to religion.*

***Conclusion:****The findings of this study indicate that depression and anxiety affect the academic performances of undergraduate students regardless of socio-demographic variables and that society can become more understanding and aware of this illness.*

***Keywords:****Depression, Undergraduate students, Random Sampling, 5-point response scale, Mental health, NUST.*

# INTRODUCTION

# Depression is a common mental disorder and will be one of the foremost causes of mental infirmity soon. Mental dissatisfaction and anxiety are the two major root causes of depression. There may be different levels of depression and in some cases, they even result in suicidal thoughts. Students in high school and college are susceptible to depression possibly because of the depressive load they face. Other causes include financial pressure, workload, domestic violence, social media, etc.

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# Depression affects the way you feel, act, and think. It is a common diagnostic among students, but clinical depression is not a normal part of growing up and shouldn't be seen as such either.

# It is noticed that depression, among students generally and undergraduate students particularly, is rising at a very fast rate with the rise of social media and academic pressure. To prevent the loss of young generations that will affect our country's future, it was necessary to conduct proper research into this topic to come up with a solution for this issue.

# To diagnose and assess depression in undergraduate students of NUST specifically, we conducted a cross-sectional survey.

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# The study aims to investigate the prevalence and factors associated with depression and anxiety among undergraduate students in Pakistan.

# For our study, we used a self-administered 16 item self-assessment questionnaire inventory, presented in multiple-choice format, which uses a 4-point scale, designed to detect the presence of depression in undergraduate students of NUST.

# Additionally, it measures characteristics, attitudes, and symptoms of depression. This inventory is based on BDI (Beck Depression Inventory). The survey covers the factors leading to depression and correlates them with the occurrence and prevalence of depression in undergraduate students.

# We aim to evaluate if depression and anxiety are both triggered together, and if so, does educational stress have a role to play in this. We believe that inadequate facilities and the idea of mental health being taboo, or a joke discourage the youth from getting help.

# We have also added questions that ask for an explanation of various circumstances that helps students overcome their phases of depression.

# METHODS

A survey of NUST undergraduate students was used as the research method. We used Google Forms to collect anonymous feedback, and our target sample was picked at random from 2% of NUST's overall population. There were around 147 pupils in all. The goal was met, and we had a total of 152 responses.

We shared the survey link with other WhatsApp group chats from various courses and different departments. As we prioritized the distribution of our online forms at SEECS, we received the most answers from students there.

Although we cannot be certain because it was anonymous and we did not inquire about the respondent's affiliation. We restricted access to our Google Form to official NUST emails to ensure that only NUST students filled it out.

The survey's questions prompted respondents to select one response from a Likert Scale. Finally, there was an optional question that asked for a qualitative response based on the respondents' own experiences.

In general, the questions questioned students if they had ever been stigmatized for talking about their mental health. Furthermore, students were asked if they had ever felt anxious or depressed as a result of their studies. It also inquired as to whether or not their mental health had an impact on their grades and performance at university.

There were no private or personal questions asked, such as GPA, degree, or even graduation year. By ensuring students would not feel criticized, it was thought that anonymity would lead to more honest and accurate responses. Students were asked to discuss their personal experiences and how they have dealt with anxiety or sadness in the past in an open-ended question at the end.

The survey included 16 questions in all, and it was decided that it could be completed in a reasonable length of time. The total number of responses received was 169, which was higher than our initial goal, therefore we stopped taking responses to examine the data we had previously collected.

# DISCUSSION

## Findings

Among the 169 undergraduate students, 11.2% claimed to have self-diagnosed clinical depression, 14.8% of the students considered themselves mildly depressed. The score for severe depression adds up to 18.79% and the score for moderate depression encompasses 21.08%. 23 students believe that the depression they encounter is an adverse effect of the anxiety that comes with the uncertainty of their future. 32 of them believe that where depression goes, anxiety follows.

15.4% of the students have had depression affect their grades, 16.0% think that it is triggered by examinations and only 21.3% of the students feel that their teachers help lessen the mental load. 47.9% believe that they are unable to communicate this. 7.9% have thought about self-harm as shown in Table 1.

20.1% believed that anxiety and depression came together and 16% claimed that this was triggered due to educational stress. This helped us conclude that this hypothesis is correct for the most part.

**Table 1:** Results of questionnaire as per BDI

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Normal**  **State (%)** | **Moderate**  **Depress-ion (%)** | **Mild**  **Depress-ion (%)** | **Critical**  **Depress-ion (%)** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Depressed is a word I associate myself with? | 25.0 | 14.9 | 49.4 | 10.7 |  |
| Depression has affected how I view the world. | 20.2 | 39.9 | 26.2 | 13.7 |  |
| Depression has had a negative effect on how I treat the people close to me. | 21.4 | 32.7 | 33.9 | 11.9 |  |
| Depression comes in the form of waves for me; sometimes it's there sometimes it's not. | 14.9 | 39.3 | 28.0 | 17.9 |  |
| I always get anxiety when I am depressed. | 17.9 | 39.3 | 22.6 | 20.2 |  |
| I feel like the burden of what my life will be leads to depression. | 25.6 | 45.2 | 14.9 | 14.3 |  |
| I feel alone even when I have people around me. | 26.2 | 39.3 | 16.1 | 18.5 |  |
| Depression has had a negative effect on my grades. | 30.4 | 29.8 | 25.0 | 14.9 |  |
| My anxiety and depression are usually triggered when exams are near. | 26.2 | 35.7 | 22.0 | 16.1 |  |
| My grades would be better if I had easy access to therapists. | 34.5 | 38.1 | 14.3 | 13.1 |  |
| I feel judged if I ever mention I need to go to C3A on the campus of NUST. | 49.4 | 22.6 | 15.5 | 12.5 |  |
| My teachers have never helped lessen the burden of studies. | 21.4 | 33.3 | 22.0 | 23.2 |  |
| Continuous stress of studies gives me depression and anxiety that I do not know how to tackle. | 8.30 | 19.0 | 25.0 | 47.6 |  |
| I would prefer an open environment where depression can be talked about easily. | 17.9 | 22.6 | 28.0 | 31.5 |  |
| I have thought about harming myself due to educational stress and depression. | 60.7 | 22.0 | 8.90 | 8.30 |  |

# CONCLUSION

The results concluded that a high percentage of undergraduate students within NUST associate themselves with self-diagnosed clinical depression. It is no longer a taboo or a matter that is not to be discussed or acted upon. We concluded this as quite a handful of students claimed to have thought about harming themselves physically due to inadequate ways of helping them overcome this mental illness. Moreover, it is clear from our survey that even within NUST, a place aimed at higher education and awareness, students are not comfortable talking about their mental health. They still fear being judged when seeking help from places dedicated to sessions like C3A.

A lot of the students at NUST identify themselves as mildly depressed. They may suffer from it periodically or it may have become a continuous part of themselves. We must ensure that they receive the proper care and that they are saved before this mild problem turns into a critical one.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

We need to aim for a system where help is easily accessible without fear of confidentiality leaks or unbiased social norms, as explained in the open-ended question by some of the students. We can provide therapy sessions to students once a month. Furthermore, we need to work towards a society where talking about mental health isn’t considered taboo and people seeking help are not judged, rather helped.

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