

Short Communication

Depression in Nursing Students of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Background: University students are important parts of all educational systems. They are susceptible to different psychiatric disturbances, which in turn may cause considerable problems with their course programs. Depression is among the most important indices for investigation on human mental health status. This research was planned to study the prevalence and characteristics of depression and its consequences (suicidality, hopelessness, etc.) in nursing students at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences.

Methods: All undergraduate nursing students at Fatemeh College of Nursing and Midwifery were tested with Beck Depression Inventory (BDI).

Results: This research revealed that 60% of students were depressed, 34% of them had mild depression, 18.4% moderate, 6% relatively severe and 1.6% severe depression. Mean score of BDI was not significantly different between female and male subjects (13.8 ± 9 in females vs. 15.2 ± 10 in males; total 14.1 ± 11)

Conclusions: This research shows that there is still a high proportion of University students having depression, which necessitates considerable attention to their problems.

Key words: Nursing Students, Beck Depression Inventory, Depression.

University Students comprise the fundamental part of all educational systems. The intellectual, political, cultural, economical, and human resource perspectives of every society depend mostly on training qualified students. To play their roles effectively, students must be in relatively good physical and psychological conditions. Psychological problems in particular hinder their effective learning via interfering with different mental abilities¹. Therefore, inquiry into their problems and especially into their mental state form the most basic part of any student's consultation system¹. Depression is the most common psychiatric problem in adults, and depression evaluation in students is a major index of their mental well-being². Depression in students is primarily caused by adaptive difficulties and stresses¹⁻². Disorientation regarding the university environment in the first year students together with separation from their families,

lack of interest in their courses, difficulty with teachers and other students, economic and dormitory problems may all lead to psychiatric problems and failure in academic achievement³. Multiple researches revealed that psychiatric problems such as depression are the most common causes of failure of student to gain academic achievement¹. Therefore, evaluation of depression and its characteristics in university students is an important health research topic. Several studies already evaluated depression in Iranian students. In a research on students from two faculties at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences during 1992 –1993, it was shown that 47% and 18% of students in faculties of medicine and rehabilitation respectively, had mild to severe depression with the highest prevalence among residents of the faculty of medicine (57%)⁴. These data showed an increasing trend for the prevalence of depression compared to earlier overall report of 11.5% for the prevalence of

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depression among students of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences⁵. Using a general health questionnaire (GHQ-12), Yazdi et al.⁶ showed that 30% of newly registered students in Tehran University of Medical Sciences during 1993 – 1994 had depression and anxiety. Yet another study performed during 1997 in Kerman University of Medical Sciences showed that prevalence of all psychiatric disorders was 28%, the majority of which was depression⁷. Behdani et al.⁸ in 1995 showed that more than 75% of students in Sabzevar University had mild to severe depression.

This study was performed to investigate the prevalence and characteristics of depression in Fatemeh Nursing College at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences during 2000 – 2001.

Materials and Methods

A total of 246 female and 58 male nursing students from Fatemeh Nursing College were asked to voluntarily answer a set of questionnaires in their classrooms at the beginning of their regular classes. The Persian language version of Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)⁹ was used to measure the level of depression. BDI is a 21 item questionnaire; each has four choices with scores ranging from zero to three. Therefore, total score would be 0 – 63. Scoring the questionnaire consequently subdivided them into normal (0 – 9, no depression), mild (10 – 19), moderate (20 – 29), severe (30-39), and very severe (> 40) depression. Subjects were assured of the confidentiality of procedure and the questionnaires were anonymous.

Data were presented as mean \pm SD. Comparison between male and female regarding BDI was performed. Using student t test, a P value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant. Data were analyzed using SPSS 10.0.

Results

Mean score for depression was not significantly different between female and male subjects (13.8 ± 9 in female vs. 15.2 ± 10 in males; total 14.1 ± 11). 60% of nursing

students had mild to severe depression; 34% with mild depression, 18.4% moderate and 7.6% severe depression. Those with strong interest in their major had significantly lower values for BDI scores ($P < 0.05$). The subjects' year of education was significantly and negatively correlated with the BDI score ($r = 0.4$, $P < 0.05$), with the highest value of BDI in the first year students. 25% of subjects had a feeling of hopelessness, 16% had suicidal thoughts and 45.4% of them were reluctant to have relationship with people.

Discussion

The results of this study show that more than half of nursing students have depression. This figure is relatively higher than the value reported in some previous surveys^{4,8}. In addition, mean score for depression was relatively higher than the values reported previously (14.1 in this study vs. 10.4 in the report of Ahmady et al⁵). On the other hand the report of Behdani et al. shows that 75% of students have depression. Therefore, it may be logical to conclude that the reported prevalence in this study is not significantly different from previous studies. In fact the observed increase in prevalence may be related to the simultaneous increase in the prevalence of depression among general population.

In conclusion this study suggests that depression is still a major psychological problem in university students which necessitates considerable attention to the problems of particularly newly admitted students to enhance their effective role in the future of society.

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