

DEPRESSION AMONG COLLEGE GOING STUDENTS: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

SOMA LAHIRI MALLIK

Research Scholar, Department of Ph.D in Psychology, NIMS School of Humanities and Social Science, NIMS University, Rajasthan, Jaipur, India. Corresponding Author Email: somalahirimallik@gmail.com

Dr. NIRMALA SINGH RATHORE

Associate Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, NIMS School of Humanities and Social Science, NIMS University, Rajasthan, Jaipur, India.

Dr. TUSHAR JAGAWAT

Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry, NIMS Hospital, Rajasthan, Jaipur, India.

Abstract

Depression is a common health issue that college students frequently face. It can be debilitating, and if left untreated, it can lead to significant psychological, emotional, and physical consequences. Additionally, it adversely affects interpersonal relationships and academic performance. The occurrence of depression among college students has risen in the past decade, and many students consider mental health problems as major barriers to their academic success. According to a 2017 survey, around 16 percent of college students attributed depression as a factor affecting their academic performance (Lam 48). In today's society, depression is more prevalent among young people compared to adults. Consequently, it is crucial for higher education institutions to offer support and resources to help students address the challenge of depression. Depression has severe repercussions for college students, such as decreased academic achievement, the emergence of suicidal thoughts, social isolation, difficulties in relationships, and loss of motivation to accomplish goals.

Keywords: Depression, Dysthymic Disorder, Self-Worth, Self-Concept, Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Depression encompasses a wide spectrum of emotional lows, ranging from simple sadness to a severe, life-threatening state of suicidal thoughts. It is a prevalent mental health issue that often arises in our stress-filled daily lives. Normally, feelings of sadness or unhappiness should subside and return to emotional stability within a reasonable timeframe. However, there are instances when this prolonged state of sadness surpasses the triggering factor in significance and duration. The individual remains persistently sad and withdraws from personal, social, and occupational activities. In such cases, a diagnosis of depression should be considered.

There are individuals who experience periodic or chronic depression despite having social privileges and material comforts, severely impacting their functioning, and tragically leading to suicide in approximately 15% of cases, resulting in about 1 million lives lost worldwide annually. According to the 1998 World Health Report, around 39% of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) lost in low and middle-income countries were attributed to non-communicable diseases, with neuropsychiatric conditions accounting for 10% of the disease burden. A significant portion of this burden is attributed to major depression. Among adults aged 15-44

years, neuropsychiatric conditions are the primary cause of DALYs lost globally. The disease burden associated with depression is projected to increase in both developing and developed regions. Adolescence, a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, is characterized by emotional instability, making young people vulnerable to depression. This emotional instability arises from challenges in establishing self-identity and self-esteem, leading to conflicts within family and peer groups. In adolescents, this may be a natural part of the developmental process as they relinquish childlike security in pursuit of independence and separation.

We reside in a dynamic society that undergoes constant change, and as a result, we frequently encounter various challenges in meeting our needs. When we fail to fulfill these needs, we may experience depression, which is a common mental illness affecting both the mind and body. Presently, depression is recognized as a widespread and debilitating issue among students, impacting their motivation, concentration, mood, and sense of self-worth. The occurrence of depressive symptoms among university students ranges from 10.2% to 71.2%.

Students with depression often face significant impairments in various aspects of their lives, including social interactions, academic performance, and occupational pursuits (Field et al., 2012). Depression among college students is a highly prevalent and pervasive problem across the nation. College students represent a unique group undergoing a critical transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, which can be one of the most stressful periods in an individual's life. Undergraduate education is considered a sensitive period for developing interventions and systems to prevent or reduce mental health problems (Gjerde, 1993). Depression is a common disorder, particularly among students, and its causes hinder students' opportunities for success, career growth, and a promising future (Avison&McAlpine, 1992; Bhave&Nagpal, 2005).

According to a study conducted by the government of India, one in every five Indians is suffering from depression, with a significant increase in depression rates of five percent of the population. This is evident through the prevalence of suicides, stress-related incidents, and students resorting to self-harm. Depression can be caused by various factors that differ from person to person, such as life events (neglect, physical abuse, financial difficulties, job problems, medical issues, loss of loved ones, relationship troubles, and social rejection). Depression poses a major challenge for many college students today.

Depression manifests in different forms among college students, including major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, minor depression, psychotic depression, and seasonal affective disorder. Each type has distinct characteristics, although they share common signs and symptoms. Major depressive disorder involves persistent feelings of despair for most days and throughout a significant portion of the day. Individuals with this type often experience difficulty sleeping, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, suicidal thoughts, restlessness, and agitation. Dysthymic disorder refers to a milder but chronic form of depression, characterized by less severe symptoms that persist over extended periods. It is not as severe as major depression but can still interfere with daily functioning. Minor depression is less severe than major depression and dysthymia, but if left untreated, it can progress to more severe forms.

Psychotic depression exhibits very severe symptoms, which may include experiences of hallucinations and delusions. Seasonal affective disorder is a type of depression commonly occurring during the winter season, but it typically resolves during spring and summer and does not pose significant health risks.

Factors that contribute to depression among college students

Feelings of sadness, loss of interest in daily activities, and fatigue are commonly experienced by individuals. However, when these feelings persist for extended periods and significantly impact one's life, it may indicate depression. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes depression as a leading cause of disability worldwide. It affects people of all ages and genders, and its exact causes are not fully understood. Various factors have been identified as potential contributors, including genetic features, psychological and social factors, environmental factors, changes in neurotransmitter levels in the brain, medical conditions, drug use, and early childhood trauma.

Depression among college students can stem from factors such as homesickness, loneliness, financial stress, academic pressure, excessive social media use, drug and alcohol abuse, and poor body image and self-esteem. Although these factors are common among college students, they may also contribute to depression in the general population. Many students enter college with excitement for new experiences, friendships, and increased freedom, often overlooking the magnitude of the changes they will face and the need to develop coping strategies. However, as time progresses, they may find themselves overwhelmed by demanding schedules, social pressures, and the challenges of balancing various responsibilities. Leaving home and adapting to a new city without the support of family can lead to homesickness and feelings of loneliness. A survey conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA) in 2017 revealed that approximately 62% of college students identified loneliness as a challenge. The transition from childhood to adulthood can also contribute to depression if individuals struggle to cope effectively.

Financial stress is a significant cause of depression among college students. The rising cost of education has made it increasingly difficult for many young people to afford higher education. A 2015 report from the National Student Financial Wellness Study showed that finances were the primary source of persistent stress for 70% of college students. Additionally, 32% reported having to interrupt their studies due to financial difficulties. These situations can lead to prolonged periods of worry, anxiety, and stress, eventually culminating in depression. The pressure to succeed academically in college is closely tied to future career prospects. Academic pressure is intensified by parental expectations, highly competitive environments, and a lack of resilience in the face of challenges. The demands of critical thinking, commitment, research, and time management in college can contribute to depression among students who lack the necessary coping skills.

Negative body image and low self-esteem can also contribute to depression among college students. The National Eating Disorders Association has found that students with a negative body image are at a higher risk of developing depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders

compared to those with a positive body image. Depression and alcohol abuse are often intertwined, as reported by Mental Health America (MHA). Depressed students may turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism, while excessive drinking can exacerbate feelings of depression. Moreover, alcohol abuse can lead to risky behaviors and serious mental health issues. Uncontrolled use of social media has been associated with depression, low self-esteem, and negative body image due to constant comparisons with others, exposure to unrealistic body standards, sleep disturbances, and consumption of stressful content.

Common signs and symptoms of depression among college students include persistent sadness, loss of interest in daily activities, difficulties concentrating, feelings of guilt, emotional detachment, insomnia, fatigue, bodily aches, suicidal thoughts, changes in appetite, and disrupted sleep patterns. The demanding nature of college schedules, combined with the challenges of adjusting to new lifestyles and cultures, can be overwhelming and contribute to these symptoms. Depressed college students often struggle with focusing on schoolwork, finding simple tasks difficult to complete. The loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities can lead to persistent feelings of sadness, impacting academic and social engagement. A disconnection from one's own emotions is another common indicator of depression, characterized by an inability to express one's feelings. This can result in feelings of despair, hopelessness, helplessness, and apathy. Guilt may arise as students experiencing challenging times perceive their behaviors as burdensome to others. This feeling of helplessness can hinder lasting change and generate overwhelming guilt. Depression can also manifest through chronic headaches or body aches that do not respond to common remedies. Other signs include irregular sleep patterns, suicidal thoughts, and social isolation.

Students with chronic illnesses, combined with stressful academic obligations and feelings of loneliness, may experience exacerbated depression symptoms. However, research has shown that university students with disabilities do not differ significantly from their peers in terms of depression symptoms. Students with disabilities often enter higher education with coping strategies for emotional challenges, and their difficulties and psychological problems are similar to those of their non-disabled counterparts. Stereotypes and perceptions about students with disabilities can contribute to misperceptions, as both groups may hold biased views about each other. Depression can have detrimental effects on college students' overall well-being and academic performance. It can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as alcohol or substance abuse, and increase risky behaviors. Depression is also a significant risk factor for suicide, which is the third leading cause of death among individuals aged 15 to 24. Recognizing the presence of depression symptoms and seeking help and treatment is crucial for students facing these challenges.

Academic performance and Depression

The psychological challenges associated with adapting to the academic environment can significantly impact students, affecting their academic performance, intellectual development, and social growth. Factors beyond intellectual abilities, such as motivation, effective study strategies, studying habits, self-confidence, perception of social support, and satisfaction with student life, play a vital role in academic success (Bezinović et al., 1998). Successful students

are distinguished not solely by their intellectual abilities but also by higher self-esteem, clear focus, superior learning skills, efficient time management, and a sense of confidence in their chosen study program. While some studies have shown a correlation between depression and lower academic performance, this relationship is not straightforward (DeRoma et al., 2009). Students prone to depression often exhibit ambition and perfectionism, which may enable them to excel academically despite their depressive symptoms. However, these students may become overly fixated on their academic performance, neglecting other aspects of life, such as spending time with friends. Research has confirmed that a perfectionistic mindset is associated with difficulties in academic adjustment and emotional distress, including depression and anxiety (Chang and Rand, 2000). Perfectionism can have positive aspects as it motivates students to set clear goals and work hard to achieve them. However, when goals become unrealistic, it can lead to a persistent sense of failure, excessive self-criticism, negative self-image, and subsequently, depression. A study conducted among university students in Croatia found that the larger the gap between one's desired and attained goals, the higher the likelihood of experiencing depression.

For many students, their academic performance is closely tied to their self-worth and self-concept. Research has indicated that university students with low self-esteem and self-concept are more susceptible to depressive reactions in stressful situations. Receiving poor grades, failing a test, or struggling to meet academic obligations can threaten their self-esteem and increase the likelihood of depressive symptoms. Students who experience symptoms of depression and academic failure can become trapped in a cycle where these experiences mutually reinforce each other, exacerbating their difficulties.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Singh and Joshi (2008) investigated the correlation between suicidal ideation, depression, life stress, and personality traits, aiming to identify a linear combination of predictors for suicidal ideation. The findings showed a positive association between suicidal ideation and depression, stressful life events, as well as two personality dimensions: extraversion and psychoticism. Through stepwise multiple regression analysis, the study determined that the linear combination of three main predictors of suicidal ideation was depression, extraversion, and stressful life events.

In a study conducted by Joseph (2011) in Mangalore city, the prevalence of depression among pre-university college students was examined. The research revealed a high prevalence of depression in the surveyed colleges, with older students exhibiting higher levels of depression. Students from the commerce stream were significantly more prone to depression compared to those from the science stream. Additionally, depression levels were slightly higher among males and students attending government colleges.

Al-Qaisy Lama M. (2011) conducted a study at Tafila Technical University to investigate the impact of mood disorders, particularly anxiety and depression, on students' academic achievement. The study also explored gender differences in the levels of depression and anxiety, as well as variations in depression and anxiety levels across different colleges. The

results indicated that females experienced higher levels of anxiety than males, while males had higher rates of depression. Furthermore, Sharma et al. (2011) found a significant difference between males and females regarding depression measures.

Moreira and Furegato (2013) conducted a study to identify the presence of stress and signs of depression among students in the final semester of two undergraduate nursing courses. The research aimed to compare these variables and establish associations between them. The findings showed that 69.8% of the participants had no depression, 18.2% experienced dysphoria, 6.8% had moderate depression, and 5.7% had severe depression. The prevalence of depression was relatively low compared to the general population. Medium stress levels were most common (76.9%). There was no significant difference in stress scores between the two groups of students. The data indicated a relationship between stress and the presence of signs of depression, particularly severe depression.

Kaur (2014) examined depression levels among rural and urban secondary school students in relation to their achievement motivation. The study revealed that there was no significant gender difference in depression among secondary students. Moreover, there was no significant difference in depression and achievement motivation between rural and urban students. Additionally, the study found no significant correlation between depression and achievement motivation among rural and urban male and female secondary students.

In a study by Manjari (2016), the depression level among college students was measured and analyzed according to age and gender. The findings showed no significant difference in the level of depression between male and female college students, but female students tended to experience higher levels of depression.

Objective of the study:

- ♦ To ascertain the level of depression among the college students.
- ♦ To find out the difference between male and female college students on the criteria of depression.

Hypotheses of the Study

The null hypotheses for the present study are as follows:

H₀₁: There will be high level of depression among the college students in Rajasthan.

H₀₂: is no significant difference between male and female college students on the criteria of depression.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on survey method, particularly, the normative survey research method.

Population of the Study

All the college students (UG level) in Rajasthan (India) are comprised the population of this study.

Sample and Sampling

Three Colleges in Rajasthan were selected randomly. The researchers selected 160 students randomly (Male 68 and Female 92). Here stratified random sampling technique was adopted. The sample profile is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Profile

Male	Female	Rural	Urban	Science	Arts	Hindu	Muslim
68	92	93	67	66	94	150	10
Total 160		Total 160		Total 160		Total 160	

Tool of the Study

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was used for screening of depression among the College students. Where 21 items and each of items have some alternative answers are present. When the test is scored, a value of 0 to 3 is assigned for each answer and then the total score is compared to a key to determine the depression's severity. Higher score is the indication of severe depression. The standard cut-off scores are as follows: 0–9: indicates Minimal Depression, 10–18: indicates Mild Depression, 19–29: indicates Moderate Depression and 30–63: indicates Severe Depression.

Statistical Techniques

Mean, Standard Deviation, ANOVA and 't' test were used to analyze the collected data and verify the hypotheses.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

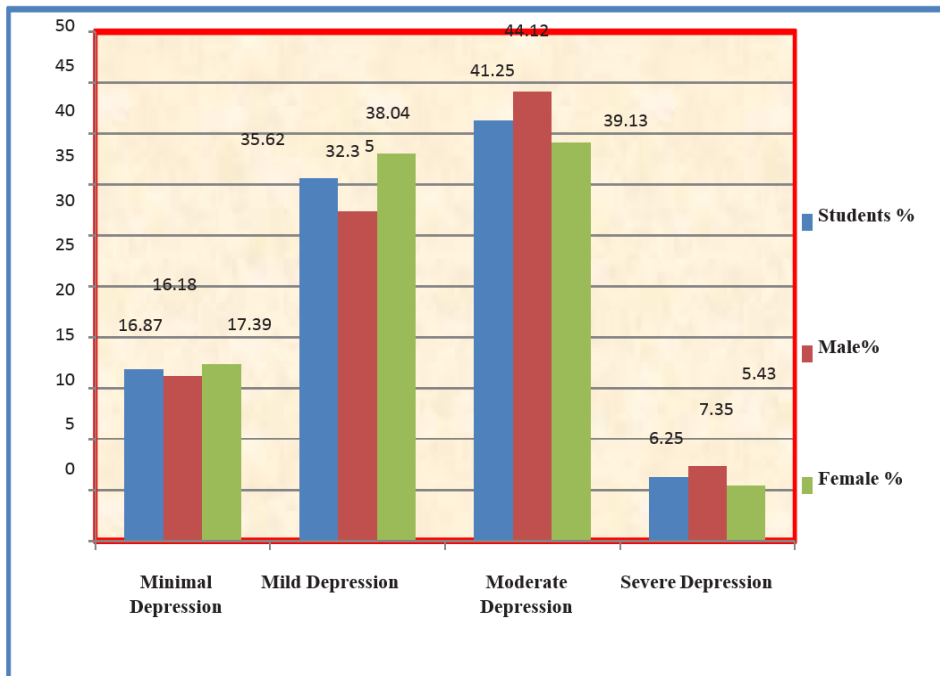
Testing of H₀₁

From the Table 1 (A) it is found that out of 160 college students 27 students (16.88%) have Minimal Depression, 57 college students (35.62%) have Mild Depression, 66 students (41.25%) have suffer from relatively Moderate Depression and finally 10 college students (6.25%) are affected by Severe Depression. It is also found that maximum percentage of students (41.25%) have Moderate level of depression. It may be said that there is moderate level of depression among the college students. So, the H₀₁ is rejected. From the above table it is also found that maximum percentages of Male college students (44.12%) have Moderate Depression and in case of female students 39.13% have Moderate Depression.

Table 1(A): Levels of Depression among the College Students & Male-Female Students

Depression Level	Scores	No. of Total Students	%	No. of Male	%	No. of Female	%
Minimal Depression	0-09	27	16.88	11	16.18	16	17.39
Mild Depression	10-18	57	35.62	22	32.35	35	38.04
Moderate Depression	19-29	66	41.25	30	44.12	36	39.13
Severe Depression	30-63	10	6.25	05	7.35	05	5.43
N		160	100%	68	100%	92	100%

Total Students & Male-Female Students



Graph 1: Showing Graphical presentation on Levels of Depression among the College Students & Male-Female Students

Minimal Depression, 57 college students (35.62%) have Mild Depression, 66 students (41.25%) have suffer from relatively Moderate Depression and finally 10 college students (6.25%) are affected by Severe Depression. It is also found that maximum percentage of students (41.25%) have Moderate level of depression among the college students. So, the H_{01} is rejected. From the above table it is also found that maximum percentages of Male college students (44.12%) have Moderate Depression and in case of female students 39.13% have Moderate Depression.

Testing of H_{02}

The mean depression scores for male college students is 18.45 (S.D= 8.70) and for female college students is 17.35 (S.D=8.37) respectively. From Table 2, it is observed that the calculated ‘t’ value (0.80) is smaller than the table value (2.61 at 0.01 level & 1.98 at 0.05 level). That is to say that, the difference between the two groups (Male and Female) is not significant at 0.05 levels. Hence, the H_{02} is accepted and the researcher’s H_2 is rejected; that is to say that, there is no significant difference exists between Male and Female College students with regard to depression. The result corroborates with the findings of the study done by Manjari (2016). It is also found that the male college students are comparatively more depressed than female college students. It is also found that the male college students are comparatively more depressed than female college students

Diagnosis

The early identification of depression among college students is crucial in preventing its progression to debilitating levels. Given the high stress levels in the college environment, especially for newcomers, it is vital for parents, counselors, faculty members, and friends to be vigilant and take action if they notice signs of depression in a student (Keyes 68). Due to the stigma associated with depression, particularly among men, many students may hesitate to seek professional help. Therefore, faculty members should pay attention to each student and monitor their responses to assignments and class projects. Regular absences from classes, incomplete assignments, and sudden changes in behavior may indicate depression (Keyes 69). In terms of relationships, social withdrawal and loss of interest in enjoyable activities can be early indicators of depression, warranting professional assistance. Students should visit counselling centres and health facilities to seek expert mental health support. The diagnosis of depression involves an evaluation of the student by a mental health care provider or physician. The physician may inquire about the student's symptoms, personal history of depression, family history of depression, medical history, alcohol or drug use, and any thoughts of death or suicide (Ahmed et al.). Additionally, the physician may ask about the student's mood, level of activity, appetite, sleep patterns, and thought patterns. It is important for the healthcare provider to confirm the presence of depression, as other medical conditions can mimic its symptoms. Therefore, a physical examination and blood tests may be conducted to rule out alternative conditions. Research has shown that vitamin D deficiency and thyroid problems can present similar symptoms to depression ("Depression"). Students should remain observant because while it is normal to experience fluctuations in mood, a lack of improvement over an extended period may indicate mental health problems. If left unidentified and untreated, depression can lead to various complications, including physical pain, panic attacks, social isolation, self-harm, significant weight changes, and even suicide.

Treatment

Early detection and treatment of depression are crucial for college students and typically involve three key components: support, psychotherapy, and medication. Support includes various activities such as educating family members about the disorder and exploring practical solutions like dietary changes and lifestyle adjustments (Haddad and Boyce 65). For instance, healthcare providers can teach students stress-relieving techniques like mindfulness, meditation, and breathing exercises, which have been shown to effectively reduce stress levels. Engaging in physical exercise, reading, and journaling are also helpful strategies for stress alleviation. Psychotherapy is a treatment method that involves talking with individuals to modify their behaviors or thought patterns. Several forms of psychotherapy have proven to be effective, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (Haddad and Boyce 69). CBT is a psycho-social intervention that aims to change patients' thinking patterns and behaviors by addressing cognitive distortions, regulating emotions, and providing coping strategies. Specifically, therapists help individuals challenge and replace negative automatic thoughts with objective, realistic, and positive ones (Landau 61). Such negative thoughts can have a significant impact on mood and emotional stability. CBT encompasses

various approaches such as cognitive therapy, dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), multimodal therapy, and rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) (Haddad and Boyce 71). Interpersonal therapy (IPT) helps students address relationship conflicts that may contribute to their stress and depression. Research indicates that a combination of medication and psychotherapy is the most effective treatment approach for depression in college students. Antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, and antipsychotics are the three types of drugs commonly prescribed (Landau 68). Antidepressants are often prescribed as they have demonstrated effectiveness in treating mild to severe depression. Different classes of antidepressants are available, including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), tricyclic antidepressants, atypical antidepressants, and selective serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) (Lam 97). Each class of drugs acts on specific neurotransmitters or groups of neurotransmitters to alleviate depressive symptoms. It is important to follow the prescribed usage of SSRIs and SNRIs as they may cause side effects such as nausea, weight loss, sexual dysfunction, low blood sugar, diarrhea, and constipation. In severe cases where therapy and medication may not be effective, alternative treatment modalities may be recommended, including electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), and vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) (Haddad and Boyce 87). These treatments aim to stimulate specific brain areas to improve mood regulation. ECT utilizes electrical pulses to alleviate severe depressive and psychotic symptoms, primarily for the treatment of psychotic depression. TMS is a commonly used approach that applies magnetic fields to specific nerve cells in the brain to stimulate mood improvement. VNS is an invasive procedure in which weak electrical pulses are delivered to the brain through the vagus nerve via an implant.

Management and the Improvement of Mental Health

College life can be highly demanding, and it is crucial for students to prioritize self-care in order to prevent stress and anxiety that may lead to depression. Engaging in activities such as regular physical exercise, maintaining a healthy diet, refraining from alcohol and drug abuse, building a support system, ensuring sufficient sleep, and practicing mindfulness are all beneficial for improving mental health and overall well-being (Heitler 101). In particular, sleep deprivation is a risk factor for depression, as approximately 70% of individuals with depression experience sleep problems (Landau 71). It is recommended for students to aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night to reduce the risk of mental health issues. Physical exercise is a powerful strategy to prevent depression among college students. Exercise releases endorphins, which help break negative thought patterns and alleviate stress. Students can participate in various activities such as gym workouts, swimming, sports, and jogging. Healthy eating habits also play a significant role in promoting well-being and reducing the risk of depressive symptoms. Research has shown that substance abuse, including drugs and alcohol, can exacerbate depression symptoms. Therefore, it is essential for college students to avoid engaging in substance abuse that can have detrimental effects on mental health. Mindfulness practices aid in recognizing early signs of depression and effectively managing them before they escalate ("Depression"). Activities like meditation and breathing exercises foster mindfulness, enabling individuals to combat depression. Creating a support system is another vital aspect of enhancing mental health. This support system can include roommates, peers, or

faculty members. Research indicates that having a support system significantly improves mental well-being by reducing stress associated with managing crises, addressing everyday challenges, and making important decisions (Landau 87). Technological advancements provide convenient communication channels for seeking support from family and relatives. Additionally, students can join online support groups and participate anonymously if they are concerned about potential stigma.

CONCLUSION

The major findings of this study revealed that the twenty seven students have developed minimal depression, fifty seven students have developed mild depression, sixty six students have suffer from relatively moderate depression and finally ten students are affected by severe depression. It is found that there is no significant difference exists between Male and Female College students with regard to depression. The result corroborates with the findings of the study done by Manjari (2016).

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