



## A Study on Depression of University Students due to Academic Stress in Sri Lanka

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### ABSTRACT

Academic stress and depression in students are complex and with multifaceted issues. Stress is an inevitable part of academic life that negatively impacts students' mental health, including depression. This study investigates depression among university students due to academic stress, identifies risk factors, examines barriers to mental health treatment access, and suggests recommendations for educators and mental health experts. An online questionnaire was used to collect data from university students in the Colombo district. Descriptive statistics and hypothesis tests were employed to evaluate the relationship between academic stress and depression. A total of 83 respondents participated in this questionnaire, out of which 55.4% were female and 44.6% were male respectively. Students' mental health negatively affects academic performance at 71.1%, with 63.9% having no access to mental health professionals at university. Uncertainty in mental health services is reported by 43.4%, while 42.2% know where to seek help for depression. According to the study, there is a significant relationship between academic stress and depression, as well as between depression and gender. Regularly, more than 40% of respondents' report experiencing difficulty concentrating, anxiety, disappointment,

sleepiness, and anger. University students' mental health and well-being require attention from mental health experts and professionals. Academic stress; Student depression; Risk factors; Treatment access; Coping techniques

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Depression is a diverse problem which is influenced by genes, experiences in life, and stressful circumstances. Academic stress, which is further increased by workload, competitiveness, and social demands, leads to depression (Fernandes et al., 2023; Mendonça et al., 2023; da Silva et al., 2023). Effective strategies for reducing the impact of academic stress on university student depression have been established, including support from peer programs, academic changes, and campus-wide mental health promotion. According to Deng et al., (2021), treatment must be particular to individual requirements and circumstances, as a comprehensive strategy addressing the complex relationship between academic stress and depression is likely to result in favourable outcomes for student mental health. Academic stress has been connected to the formation and aggravation of depression in students. This can be related to various factors, such as academic pressure, fear of failure, and a lack of social support. Academic stress has been consistently associated with depression among university students, with a potential gender difference in the relationship (Gao et al., 2019; Ping et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Research has linked depression in students to specific causes such as academic workload, difficulty adjusting to college life, and financial stress. Furthermore, the study has recommended possible treatments including increasing students' social support networks, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and providing access to mental health services. This study aims to accomplish several objectives, including identifying depression among university students, examining the association between stressful

circumstances and depression, and identifying risk factors that contribute to depression among university students in Sri Lanka.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted with a sample of 92 university students in the Colombo district. An online survey conducted via a Google form was used to collect data for this study, which included measures of academic stress and depression, as well as assessments of personality traits and social support. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of questions related to the academic level, gender, and the impact of mental health on academic performance. It also included items assessing the frequency of experiencing symptoms such as a lack of interest in activities, social withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, changes in appetite and sleep patterns, feelings of isolation, and self-harm ideation. Additionally, participants were asked about their access to mental health resources on campus, their perception of the sufficiency of support provided by their institution, and their knowledge of where to seek help for depression. The moral issues for this study include obtaining informed consent from participants and maintaining participant confidentiality and anonymity. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics method and inferential statistics to test hypotheses and estimate correlations.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis was conducted on the primary data collected via an online survey. Due to missing data, 11 cases were eliminated. Thus, for the final analysis 83 cases were selected. The survey found that 55.4% of the 83 students surveyed identified as female, while 44.6% identified as male. According to Table 1, 71.1% of students believe their mental health has a negative effect on their academic

performance. Furthermore, 63.9% of students may not have access to experts like psychiatrists and psychologists at university. 43.4% of students exhibit uncertainty regarding the university's mental health services and assistance. However, 42.2% of students understand whom to reach out to or where to go for help when suffering from depression.

Variables	Percentage (%)
<b>Students who felt their academic performance was negatively impacted by their mental health</b>	
Yes	71.1
No	9.6
Maybe	19.3
<b>The different types of professionals that students can get help from in their university</b>	
Counselor	37.3
Psychiatrist	4.8
Psychologist	16.9
None of the above	63.9
<b>Students who believe their university provides sufficient resources and support for their mental health and well-being</b>	
Yes	25.3
No	43.4
Maybe	31.3
<b>students who know whom to approach and where to go when they feel depressed</b>	
Yes	42.2
No	31.3
Maybe	26.5

**Table 1: Students' perspectives on their mental health on four attributes.**

**Figure 1: Students who have been facing negativity due to academic stress**

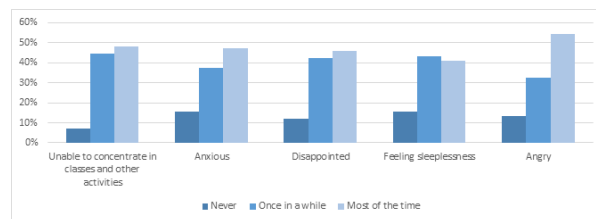
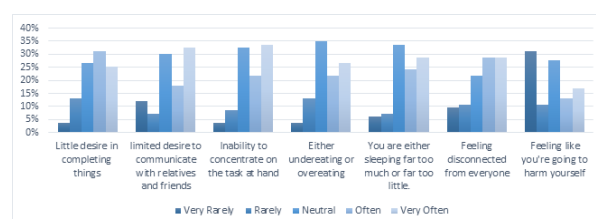


Figure 1 illustrates insight into the probability of various symptoms associated with depression among students. It is useful in understanding how common the above symptoms are and their possible influence on students' mental health. 25% of students or above experience these symptoms frequently, except for feeling suicidal. 15% of students report frequent suicidal thoughts. 30% of students or above often feel disconnected from society isolate themselves and feel lethargic and unable to concentrate.

**Figure 2: Students who have been feeling the below feelings due to academic stress**



The figure 2 illustrates the frequency of students experiencing certain emotions, ranging from "Never" to "Most of the time". According to these data, More than 40% of respondents report experiencing difficulties concentrating, anxiety, disappointment, sleepiness, and anger on a regular basis. (In order to investigate the relationship between gender and depression, the following hypotheses were examined.

**H0:** Gender and negative impact on academic performance due to mental health are not related.

**H1:** Gender and negative impact on academic performance due to mental health are related. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship

between gender and depression. The relation between these variables was significant. This shows an association between mental health and negative impact on academic performance in relation to gender.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, academic stress is an effective indicator of depression among university students. This finding is consistent with past research on the association between stress and depression, emphasizing the necessity of managing academic stress as a major risk factor for depression in students. Finally, this study provides evidence for the impact of academic stress on depression among students, the significant relationship between gender and depression, and emphasises the need to address academic stress as a critical risk factor for mental health disorders in the student population. It is important to help strengthen students' mental health and well-being by implementing particular strategies to lower academic stress and build efficient methods of coping with stress leading to depression among students.

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