

Factors associated with depressive episode among first year University students in Serbia

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Background:

Some findings indicate that university students are at higher risk of depression despite being a socially advantaged population, showing that 15 to 25% of them develop some type of mental disorder during graduation, and depression is one of the most prevalent. The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of depressive symptoms and its association with gender, material status, social health, and behavioral factors among university students.

Methods:

The research represents a cross-sectional study conducted at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. The research involved 455 first-year students. The average age of participants was 19.3 years (72.1% girls and 27.9% boys). Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) was used to measure depressive symptoms (cut point for depressive episode ≥ 10). Additional questions were focused on self-assessed material status, social health, and behavioral factors (smoking and alcohol use). The binary logistic regression model was used to estimate the association between depression and observed independent variables.

Results:

The prevalence of moderate to severe depressive episode among students was 18.0%, with no gender differences. Out of the total, 11.0% of students had suicidal thoughts or thoughts of hurting themselves. Multivariable logistic regression showed that self-assessed poor material status (OR=2.04; 95%CI: 1.06-3.89), self-assessed poor social health (OR=8.9; 95%CI:4.87-16.42) and smoking (OR=2.18; 95%CI: 1.09-4.39) were significant predictors of depression among first-year university students.

Conclusions:

High prevalence of depressive episode among university students call for the action for the promotion of mental health, particularly among those of lower socioeconomic status, and points out the importance of social health and social network in the prevention of mental disorders.

Key messages:

- Students on the first year of University should be screened for depressive symptoms.
- It is important to educate students on how to create a strong support network and to implement intervention programs for improving mental health through fostering healthy lifestyles change.