

The Prevalence of Depression and Anxiety Among the University Graduates in Bangladesh: How Far Does it Affect the Society?

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Doi:10.19044/esj.2019.v15n10p75

[URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n10p75](http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n10p75)

Abstract

The symptoms of anxiety and depression amongst university students are more common throughout the globe as it affects one's social, economic, and academic life negatively. Although the students in developing and low-income countries have more tendencies to experience depression and anxiety, the extent and pattern of the problem of depression are largely unknown. This paper focuses on exploring the various models of depression amongst recent graduates of Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet-Bangladesh, who experienced depression and anxiety throughout their academic life. This is an exploratory study where in-depth interview methods have been used for the collection of data. This study involved field research, and it is based on the primary data and secondary data received from books, articles, newspapers, archival documents review, and other online sources to define concepts and relevant terms. Thematic analysis method has been employed through coding processes to analyze the collected data. The findings from this study revealed that most students, especially the female students, suffered from depression and anxiety in their academic life. This is most likely due to educational, social, personal, and family-related issues. This study also reveals a high tendency of suicide, involvement in illegal activities, and failure to attain academic goals amongst depressed students. Hopefully, from this research, these findings will provide some guidelines and policy strategies based on the nature of these problems. Also, it will serve as a guide for future researchers and academic and policymakers to base their reports on in order to reduce this social disease.

Keywords: Depression, Graduate students, University, Society, Prevalence, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Health is one of the fundamental human rights, irrespective of gender, caste, religion or ethnicity (Chill & Kilbourne, 2002). This is because health is a part of the capability approach of human beings, which provides a person with the freedom to determine the value of their life (Seddiky, 2019). Health constitutes of physical, mental, and social well-being; so mental health is an integral part of human health and wellbeing (Islam & Biswas, 2015). Depression is one of the most prevalent mental disorders worldwide, and it is responsible for 13% of the global burden of diseases (WHO, 2008). It not only causes personal distress and social dysfunction but also increases the likelihood of suicide (Westefeld & Furr, 1987). University students face a remarkable level of distress for a variety of reasons that affect their mental health and increase depression, anxiety, and suicide rates among them throughout the globe (Liu et al., 2018). Depression is a major mental health issue among adolescents and young adults (Tanaka et al., 2006) and it also negatively impacts their learning abilities. Hence, by living in a competitive environment, they are likely to further recede into bipolar illness later in their lives. Environmental and institutional factors that predispose undergraduate students to depression include academic pressure, trying to meet up with parents' and teachers' expectations, hindrances to goal achievement, favoritism, vastness of the curriculum, workload, student abuse, change in role from students to professionals, recent breakup, and childhood adversities (Fatimah et al., 2016). This incidence of depression is highly prevalent in university students in many countries (Field et al., 2009). In Bangladesh, the number of disordered or depressed students are elevated. As an individual gets older, the possibility of falling into depression gradually increases. More so, the impact of depression has a significant impact on an individual's ability to perform activities. Whereas the ability to participate in the lives of friends and family has been widely explored in the context of quality of life, not much research has been done that investigates the impact of depression on the ability to perform life activities related to work performance. Also, little research has been published on the impact of depression on the ability of students to perform the work required for academic achievement (Hysenbegasi, 2005).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There are various causes of depression. At present, more than 450 million people are suffering from neuro-psychiatric disorders throughout the globe and, in Bangladesh, more than 15 million people are suffering from mental disorders of different forms (Islam & Biswas, 2015). The country's percentage of depression disorder cases in proportion to the population of 4.1 percent is now close to the global average of 4.4 percent of such cases as estimated in 2015 (Prothom-alo, 2017). The prevalence of mental disorder is

higher amongst women (19%) compared to men (12.9%) in Bangladesh (Islam & Biswas, 2015). The depression amongst students in Bangladesh is high. Around half a million students graduate every year in Bangladesh, and about half of that population do not get jobs that match their qualifications (Bangla Tribune, 2016). This often leads to depression amongst these university graduates as it impacts their personal, educational, and family life and they can become stressed. Stress are related to independent living, developing new relationships and peer groups, issues with roommates, increased academic demands, or concerns about finances (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). Although there are mental illnesses of different types which are a threat to national development, this issue does not get receive significant attention from the policymakers in Bangladesh. The service facilities for the mentally ill are in a deplorable state in Bangladesh. Only 8% of the total hospital beds account for people with a mental health condition. In forensic units, this percentage is 0% across the country.

Furthermore, inpatient and outpatient service facilities for mentally ill constitute a lower portion (Islam & Biswas, 2015). Also, in Bangladesh, there are significant gaps in the rate of mental health diagnostics, and the most severe group is the university graduates with increased suicidal tendencies. Although some NGOs and government organizations are working on the development of a better health system, they mostly ignore the mental health of individuals.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

Every research work starts with a set of research questions. These questions accordingly guide the entire research process. The research questions were derived from a variety of sources, starting from the interest and inquisitiveness of the researcher, challenges generated from a profound issue, and the overall orientation of a research substance. The broad aim of the study is to explore the causes and consequence of depression amongst university graduates in Bangladesh.

The objectives set out for the attainment of the aim are:

- Determine the nature and patterns of depression among university graduates in Bangladesh.
- Identify the existing underlying causes of depression among university graduates.
- Explore the major consequences and effects of depression on both male and female graduates and to compare the range of depression they faced.
- Provide some suggestions based on the problems for overcoming this social affliction.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Every year, many students gain admission to universities in Bangladesh. With Bangladesh being a poor developing country, most of these students are from low earning families due to socioeconomic conditions. With the cost of graduating from the public universities being on the high side and out of reach for most low- income earning families, the public universities have been left to the more bourgeoisie families with most of these classes of earners living in the countryside. The few who manage to attend these universities from the lower income earners are tasked with having to put in twice as much effort as their counterparts from various parts of the country. As these students are from different parts of the country, some find it difficult to interact with other students, classmates or make new friends who may occur due to various reasons such as economic crisis, confrontations with colleagues, personal dissatisfaction, or not achieving their desired goals and so on. Any of these scenarios may lead to depression amongst these students which may result in their involvement in various unethical and illegal activities such as drug, smoking, attempting to revenge and attempt to suicide or committing suicide. Some students do not get the required financial support from their parents especially after graduation. With so little employment opportunities in Bangladesh, a lot of these graduates end up unemployed. In Bangladesh, around 2.5 million individuals are unemployed, as there are 1.2 million unemployed men and also another 1.2 million unemployed women (Prothomalo, 2017). Once these students become graduates, they become more of a burden to their families with no job. Hence, there is the need to develop a theoretical proposition and practical state of knowledge to inform the policymakers and practitioners regarding the underlying causes and consequences of their distress.

2. Relevant Literature Review

Fatimah et al. (2016) conducted a study about depression among students of undergraduate medical and engineering faculties and found symptoms associated with depression. The reason is attributed to the fact that most of these students irrespective of gender or institute attended are faced with challenges such as arguments between parents, loved ones involved in drugs, college discontentment, having heavy daily workloads, unsatisfied academic performance, sometimes feeling someone else is being favored academically, difficulty meeting parents expectations, always feeling bullied, always feeling socially isolated, etc. Stress was strongly associated with a higher likelihood of suicide attempts and mental health diagnoses, even among students reporting 1–2 stressful events (Liu et al., 2018).

Furthermore, treatment for a mental disorder was associated with suicidal treatment behavior. This is seen as the severity of students' lifetime

and a 12 months treatment rate was very low, which is estimated at 25.3% to 36.3% for mental disorder and 29.5% to 36.1% for suicidal treatment behavior (Bruffaerts et al., 2019). Among the Japanese university student in Kumamoto City, the female gender was correlated with the lower score. Depression was predicted by automatic thought and dysfunctional attitude, while gender often predicted these dysfunctional attitudes (Tanaka et al., 2006).

The study aimed to estimate the prevalence and examine the socio-demographic correlation of depression among university students living in the halls of residence of a federal university in Western Nigeria. The following was taken into consideration: socio-demographic details, problems encountered in the university, alcohol use, and smoking. A total of 8.3% of students met the criteria for a depressive disorder with 5.6% having a minor depressive disorder and 2.7% having a major depressive disorder. The factors that were significantly associated with depressive disorders in the students include problems with accommodation 95%, huge family size 95%, female gender 95%, heavy cigarette smoking 95%, and high level of alcohol consumption 95%. Depression is common among Nigerian university students and is significantly associated with socio-demographic factors (Adewuya et al., 2006). In addition, the top 10 sources of concern for students based on the percentage of participants' source of stress are as follows: academic performance, pressure to succeed, post-graduation plans, financial concerns, quality of sleep, relationship with friends, relationship with family, overall health, body image, and self-esteem (Beiter et al., 2015).

The highest prevalence of depression was reported in Asia 43.0%, Europe 38.0%, the Arab states 28.0%, North America 26.0%, and the lowest in Latin America 21.0% (Tunga et al., 2018). Internalized distress consisted of anxiety, depression, emotional stress, physical symptoms, personal maladjustment, eating problems, and eating traits. Alcohol abuse consisted of the amount and consequences of alcohol consumption. Female gender predicted higher scores on internalized distress, while male gender predicted higher scores on alcohol abuse (Oliver et al., 1998). Regarding depression, married students were less prone to stress. The presence of anxiety, age, and body weight has been identified, and the prevalence of anxiety was significantly higher among older students, while overweight was higher among obese students (Wahed & Hassan, 2017). According to a sociologist, due to frustrations, the youths get involved in various deviations like suicide. Due to the decrease in industrial employment, unemployment is on the rise. In a report by IPN, it was found that around 2.7 million people apply for jobs, but only 0.2 million people get employed.

Also, the youths in Bangladesh cannot get a job according to their qualifications. From the British Economist journal, a report published states that around 47% are unemployed in Bangladesh (Bangla Tribune, 2016). The

prevalence of mental disorders varied from 6.5 percent to 31.0 percent among the adults and from 13.4 percent to 22.9 percent among the children in Bangladesh (Hossain et al., 2014). The World Health Organization (WHO) through a report “Depression and other common mental disorders” estimated that around 6.9 million Bangladesh people are suffering from anxiety disorders. The report shows that Bangladesh has almost half of the total global cases of depression disorders at 322 million. Depression is caused by increased poverty, unemployment, life events such as the death of a loved one or a relationship break-up, physical illness, and problems caused by alcohol and drug use.

Furthermore, depressive disorders are characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness, and poor concentration (Prothom-alo, 2017). An institution-based cross-sectional study in India found that 13% of individuals are suffering from depression, 63% from anxiety and stress is at 13%. In private schools, students’ depression rate was nearly 6%, anxiety 60%, and stress 27% as none of them share their emotions with friends (Zare et al., 2018). Young undergraduate students with disordered eating patterns found that 9%-13% of female students manifested significant sub-clinical disordered eating prevalence. Also, 5.3% of females and 4% of male university students acknowledged disordered eating attitudes.

Up to 10% of the student population in upper Normandy, especially university students, are faced with the stress of coping with disordered eating (Power, 2016).

3. Conceptual Framework

In this paper, a conceptual framework was built up by the study of relevant literature and according to research title, research objectives, and research questions. From the cause-effect relationship, this conceptual framework shows the interrelationship between the dependent variable, independent variables, and the intervening variable. An independent variable is that whose values are not problematical in analysis but are taken as simply given. Independent variables are those that do not depend on other variables and whose effect upon the dependent variables should be understood and defined (Aminuzzaman, 1991). In this study, the ‘causes & pattern of depression among graduate students’ is considered an independent variable. The variable that the researcher wishes to explain is the dependent variable (Nackmias & Nackmias, 1996). In this study, ‘depression of graduate students’ is considered as the dependent variable because ‘depression of graduate students’ is mostly dependent on ‘causes & pattern of depression among graduate students.’

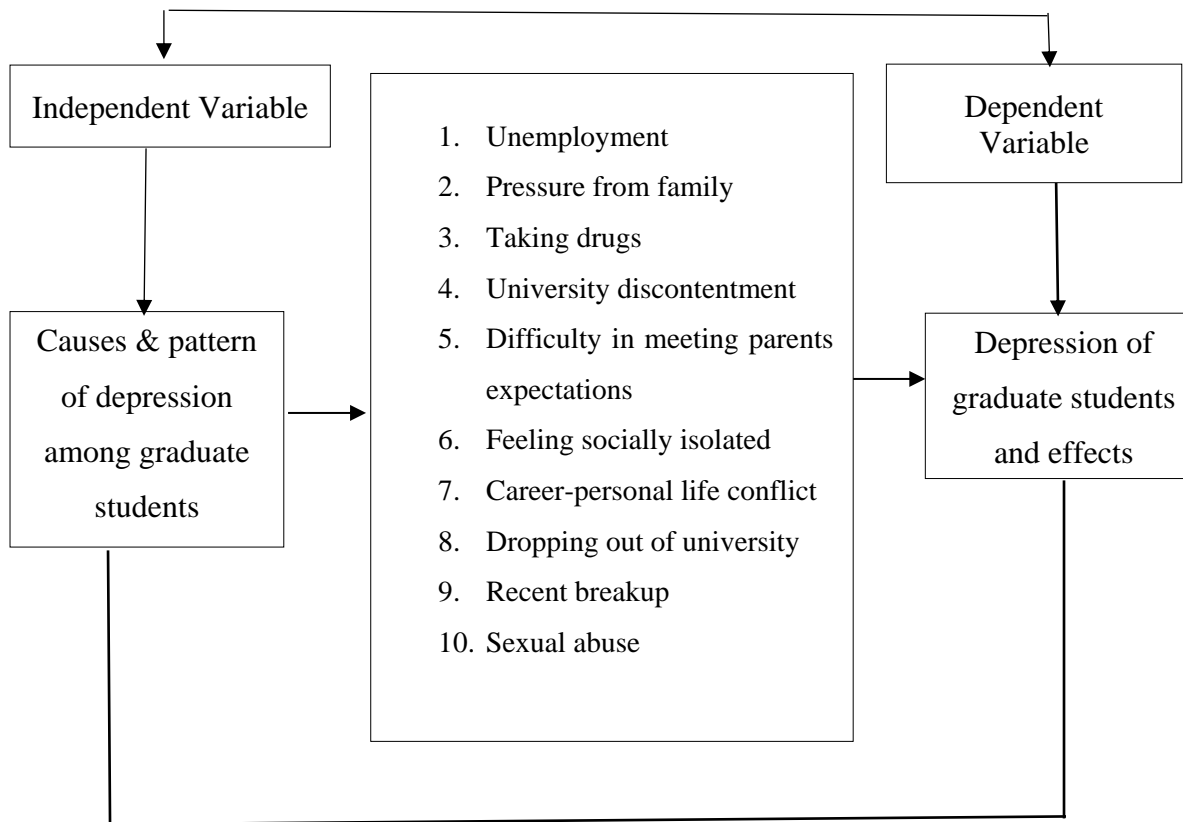


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

3.1 Operationalization of Relevant Terms

Depression is a mental illness that is associated with stress, sadness, and anxiety. Depression is also seen as a state of aversion to activity that may affect a person's thoughts, behavior, feelings, and sense of well-being. They may also feel notably hopeless, helpless, dejected, or worthless. Depression can cause many symptoms in the body as well as mood problems. Making decisions or experiencing relationship difficulties may also be notable factors in these individuals' depression and may also lead to their attempting or committing suicide. The depression pattern refers to what types of depression or frustrations people face in their life. There are various patterns of depressions such as physical, social, mental, educational, and domestic and so on. University master's students are the students studying in a program that is higher than the bachelor's degree which is gotten after four years of studying at a college or university. They can complete their master's degree from any discipline in any university around the world. In this research, the university graduate students refer to the students studying for masters in different schools

of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST). Unemployment is a situation where someone remains out of a job but would like to be in full-time employment.

Discontentment refers to lack of contentment or satisfaction with one's possessions, status, or situation. This means a restless desire or craving for something one does not have. University discontentment means students that are dissatisfied with the university in various aspects. Social isolation is a state of complete or near-complete lack of contact between an individual and the society. It differs from loneliness which reflects a temporary lack of contact with other humans. Social isolation can be an issue for individuals of any age, though symptoms may differ by age group (Bhruv, 2017). A career is an individual's journey through learning, work, and other aspects of life. There are many ways to define a career, and the term is used in a variety of ways. Personal life is the course of an individual's life, especially when viewed as the sum of personal choices contributing to one's identity (Baker, 2010). Dropping out of school means leaving high school, college, university or other institutions for different reasons without having any degree. Sexual abuse referred to as molestation is usually an undesired sexual behavior by one person upon another. When force is immediate, of short duration, or infrequent, it is called sexual assault. The offender is referred to as a sexual abuser or (often pejoratively) molester (Berlin, 2002).

4. Research Methods and Materials

An exploratory research and case study design have been employed to conduct this study with a view of fulfilling the research objectives. The research design is a blueprint for empirical research which is aimed at answering specific research questions or testing particular hypotheses. It also specifies the data collection and instrument development sampling process (Bhattacharjee, 2012). A case study refers to a detailed analysis of an individual's case, supposing that one can adequately acquire knowledge of the phenomenon from the extensive exploration of a single case (Becker, 1970). A qualitative case study is a unique way of observing any natural phenomenon which exists in a set of data (Yin, 1984). This study tries to explore the causes and pattern of depression and its way of adaptations by university graduate students. Qualitative research approach has been applied in this study because qualitative research is the systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings. These phenomena can include but are not limited to, how people experience different aspects of their lives, how individuals and groups behave, how organizations function, and how interactions shape relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Data and information for this study have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. In the study, the primary data was collected

through in-depth interview of case study schedule. An interview is a verbal technique for obtaining data directly from the primary source (Aminuzzaman, 1991). Face to face in-depth interview was used as a technique to realize the mode of a respondent and collect data. Interviewers collected multiple case studies for comprehensive data following a case study schedule from the respondents. Secondary sources of data were collected from different books, e-books, journals, articles, research works, and daily newspapers. Also, the internet has been used to update the concept because secondary data enriches the study through a better understanding of the concept and in finding out the research gap. The selected area of this study is the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST). The Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) campus is located in Komargaon under the Jalalabad Thana at Sylhet Sadar Upazilla. It is one of the well-known public universities in Bangladesh.

In this research, samples have been purposively selected from graduate students of the various department of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. They have also received consultancy services from university consultancy center for depression and anxiety. Out of the entire population, 15 students were purposively selected as sample size.

A purposive sample is a non-probability sampling that has been chosen based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. This means the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2007). Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. After collecting data using the case study, thematic analysis method has been applied for analyzing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is the method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data. It minimally organizes and describes data set in rich details. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to the study of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns (Lapadat, 2010). It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and coding pattern within data.

5. Mental Health Services in Bangladesh

Healthcare facilities are not satisfactory in Bangladesh, and the situation of mental healthcare services are very delicate. Decentralized healthcare facilities do not represent facilities for mental illness at the local or community level (Seddiky, 2019). Therefore, the overall picture of the psychological health-related treatment in Bangladesh can be shown in the following table:

Table 1. General mental healthcare facilities in Bangladesh

Existing facilities and services	Number
Mental hospital	1
Treatment and research facility on mental health institution	1
National training institute on mental health	1
Expenditure on mental health out of total health cost	0.05
Skilled workforce on mental health provider (Per 100,000)	0.49
Number of psychiatrists (Per 100,000) People	0.073

Source: Islam and Biswas, 2015.

6. Study Findings and Discussion

In this study, the data has been collected from the selected respondent purposively, and the in-depth interview has been taken to fulfill the objectives of the study. After completion of the data collection phase, the data was analyzed thematically by picking out the themes from the transcripts through the coding process.

The findings of the data are interpreted by transcribing the in-depth interview of respondents. Direct quotes and conversations with the respondents have also been presented here to support the variables.

Pattern and Causes of Depression and Anxiety among the University Students in Bangladesh

Unemployment

Most respondents have been suffering from depression and anxiety throughout their academic life. Lack of job opportunity and unemployment are the two leading causes of depression for this category of individuals. Among the respondents, the female graduates were found to be more depressed due to having a lesser employment opportunity in Bangladesh. This is because most jobs available almost always prefer to employ men rather than women. However, women and girls play essential roles in rural development but are mostly unpaid, and they face continuous social barriers and discrimination in social development programs (Khanal, 2015). They face systematic violence in the hands of men and the society; and they have little decision-making power in social, economic, political as well as other development arenas (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Generally, women are considered inferior to men (Bhasin, 2003). One female student said:

“I gained admission into this university with a great hope to become a government officer, but this dream is turning as puffy in the context of the present job situation. Although it is said that both male and female individuals are given equal opportunities in every sphere of life, but the reality is different.”

Furthermore, job opportunities for graduates are minimal due to the country’s development context. Due to the minimal job opportunities available

for graduates, most of them become stressed as the probability of getting a good job which fits their educational qualifications are slim to none. This, in turn, makes it difficult to achieve one's dream of supporting his or her family as well as building a bright future. Many of the respondents are faced with the unavailability of opportunities to practice their profession upon graduation, and they no longer get the financial support they used to get from their families upon graduation.

One of the male respondents stated:

“When I was admitted into this University, my family gave me a condition that they will bear the tuition fees of the university along with another cost before my graduation. I made a strong commitment to my family that I will not take a single dollar from them upon graduation. Am now a graduate and still dependent on my parents as I am still unemployed and could not provide any support in their time of difficulties. I am feeling a high mental pressure which increases every passing day.”

Depressed graduates cannot take their job preparation perfectly or smoothly. Consequently, they cannot overcome their financial crisis due to their depression on unemployment. To overcome this problem, they took some initiative such as managing the little they can afford at any given time, and they share their problems with their friends, seniors, and teachers. They also believe that being an employee can make them free from this depression.

Pressure from Family

Almost three-fourths of the total respondents claimed that pressure from their families is the leading cause of their depression. There are various types of pressure from the family which has been found in this research, such as a need to get a high paying job, the high expectation from family to develop the socioeconomic status and to take responsibility of their family members alongside the managing their own educational cost. One of the respondents speaking:

My family expects a lot from me just after graduation, but I know the difficulties of getting an excellent job in my country. My father is a patient of asthma, and being a small farmer, he could not afford the family cost. My mother always requests me to do something for my family. In this situation, I cannot be attentive to my studies. I couldn't fulfill my parents' expectation. It is a big pressure for me to meet my parents' expectation.”

Many graduates seek jobs in both private and public organizations upon graduation and are so focused that they become negligent in putting the required effort to achieve a master's degree.

As a result, they perform poorly in their academics, which also affect the possibility of getting a good job. They cannot manage the statistics of life

and think deeply about their future and family which leads to increased anxiety among them.

One of the respondents noted:

“From the beginning of my university life, I have to give a huge time for private tuitions to maintain my educational cost along with financial support for my family. For this reason, I cannot achieve my expected result in graduate level. Many students are taking job preparation with group study, but I cannot manage time. Huh, I will not get any government job.”

With thoughts like this, many students become hopeless and think negatively about their life. They became pessimists entirely and frustrated as well. To get rid of these types of depression mainly, they become self-inspired, motivated by teachers, friends, guardians, and family.

University Discontentment

Some respondents claimed that difficulties faced in the university sometimes leads to them becoming depressed. Due to lack of proper student accommodation, most students live in private houses far away from the university which usually takes a lot of their time and resources going back and forth. There are days where they have to do one class in the morning and another in the afternoon according to the academic class routine. When it occurs regularly, they feel depressed. They also expressed their opinion about their university discontentment such as when teachers are independent in university. They can shift their classes or stop anytime without any cause.

In most cases, the teachers evaluate manuscripts hurriedly without considering the quality. Teacher-students relationship, nepotism, injustice, and partial attitudes towards some students provoked anxiety among them. Sometimes, they create deviation among classes. One of the respondents said:

“In my class, when I checked my class test and exam manuscripts and compared them to my classmates, I found discrepancy regarding justice. The exam manuscripts of mine are more developed, and information based compared to others, but the grade or marks are inferior for me. I think about it deeply; I cannot sleep at night thinking that the university teachers are with best quality and symbol of judgment. However, they can intentionally destroy the life of a student. Sometimes, some students are always getting privilege from some teachers. It made me shocked.”

Many respondents identified various types of university discontentment that leads to depression such as insufficient residential problem, ragging, session jam, lengthy process in publishing result, and time-oriented curriculum.

One respondent stated:

“I was admitted into Shahjalal University of Science & Technology so that I can complete my graduation within a specified period. But gradually the

session jam of this university has been increased. At last, I have completed my graduate degree in 5.5 years instead of 4 years. The age limit of getting employed as a civil servant is 30, and now I am 25 years old. More than two years will take to complete my master's degree. Two years of my academic period have been lost and can never be regained making it a tightly fitted competition and challenging to achieve my employment goals.”

The case mentioned above leads to depression among the university students which puts them behind in the job competition. Consequently, when they become frustrated about their life and career, they become depressed and anxious, thereby provoking them to commit suicide. To overcome these types of university discontentment, most of the respondents opined that university authorities should take proper policies and actions like training for teachers, implementing code of conduct, regular consultancy for the students, recruitment of psychiatrists for every educational institution, arrange sufficient accommodation for students, develop time oriented curriculum, develop session jam free policy, and regular class monitoring by the university authority. This can make a productive environment to reduce depression among students.

Difficulty in Meeting Parents Expectations

In most cases, parents of university graduates are very ambitious about their boys and girls. They think that after graduation their children will get a good job and provide much support to their families. This is because in Bangladesh there is a general belief that getting a chance in a public university means getting a good job in the civil service. Some parents dream that their children will gain admission abroad for higher studies with scholarship, and then all their demands will be met up with their strong support. These expectations from parents make them pressurized both physically and mentally.

One respondent stated:

“We are very poor, and we had some land property before. However, my parents sold it to bear the cost of my academics. They thought that after graduation, I would get a good job and provide support to recover the necessity. My father is suffering from a malignant abscess that requires urgent surgery according to the doctors' advice. They are still waiting for my establishment, but I have been a graduate for at least one year, and yet am unemployed. How could I meet the demands of my family? I do not know whether I will get any government job or not. At times I think that my life is valueless in this earth.”

Consequently, the economic crisis is the primary indicator of depression among university graduates. Both male and female students think about their own life and family and that can make them depressed. They

believe that if they are not established, then they have to depend on their parents and husbands. One respondent said:

“I am the eldest in my family. I am a little bit dark in color, and it would be difficult for my parents to arrange a marriage for me. My father is a day laborer and my mother is a housewife. So all family members look at me for providing support. My brothers and sisters are attending various schools, and my parents cannot afford their cost properly. My parents are very anxious about my marriage also. As a girl, I am thinking about my personal life and my family. It is my bad luck to be born as a human being who cannot do anything good for myself.”

Some respondents stated that sharing and caring are the two primary tools to overcome this pressure. Self-motivation, inspiration from friend, family, and relatives can be a good source of removing depression among university graduates. Some of them are very affectionate to their parents. One respondent noted: *“When I feel that, parents are the soul of mine, it gives me more pleasure than feeling depressed.”*

The Feeling of Social Isolation

Many university graduates feel socially isolated in some criterion as they think they have no value to others or they are not illegible for this society. They feel socially isolated because of their egos which leave them thinking otherwise. Furthermore, social isolation is caused due to ignoring one’s opinion, obsolescence of their birthday party, separation from peers and groups, unwillingness to participate in any cultural activities and programs. As Rab, Mamdou, and Nasir (2008) found in their study, students living in university dormitories were significantly more depressed and anxious than those living at home. Those having a history of adverse life events in the past were more likely to be depressed. One of the respondents noted:

“I am a student from a middle-class family, and my dress is not very well and brand new. Many of my friends are from rich families with a high status; that’s why they kept me outside of their groups. Only financial identity is the tool for making friends. I think it is my sin to be born in a low-income family. I cannot tolerate this negligence from my friends that made me anxious and depressed.”

Some graduates are suffering from inferiority complex, losing inspiration of doing something, becoming hopeless, thinking of themselves as valueless, and feeling of self-destruction tendencies such as suicidal attempt. To overcome these types of depression, the respondent tried to maintain good communication with friends, avoided conflicting matters, and tried to participate in every occasion. The most common way of removing depression is by getting constructive suggestions from good friends and self-willingness.

Career-personal Life Conflict

Every student has a desire for their personal life and career. Sometimes, personal matters hamper the dream of achieving one's career due to being detached from their own goal. From the very beginning of their student life, they start weaving dreams to be good civil service officers. However, when they get a job offer from private companies or NGOs with lower salaries, they become depressed. The service provision is also lengthy in the process, and at times it takes more than one year to be recruited into the selected job. Although as a member of a middle or low-income family, they cannot stay a long time for a good position to open up before meeting the demands of their family. This is why many students are sacrificing their career objectives due to the unavailability of jobs, procedural matters, and family pressure that lead to anxiety and mental illness among them.

One of the respondents stated:

“When I got admitted into the university, I decided to be a public servant of the peoples’ republic of Bangladesh upon completion of my graduation. The process of Bangladesh civil service is very complex and lengthy, so I am currently working in a private company with a low salary only to meet the daily demands of my family and me as I am from a low-income family. Many students are taking coaching in the capital after their graduation, and somewhere high amount of bribe is needed to be selected in the civil service, but my parents cannot provide a single coin. For my current job, I have to work more than 10 hours which hampers my study to get to my desired goal. I do not know. Hu.....”

Many students claimed that their families are also creating pressure for them to be involved in any job at once to support the family. Hence, the students should get an opportunity from the government and family to select their personal goals, and enjoy the freedom of selecting the job accordingly.

Sexual Abuse

There were a few cases of sexual abuse related to depression among the respondents. Some of the respondents have fallen into depression due to sexual abuse. Mainly, the female students have been sexually abused which leads to depression. Women are the victims of sexual assault—defined as being pressured or forced into unwanted sexual contact—at least twice as often as men, and people with a history of sexual assault have increased rate of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). Some forms of sexual abuse they face include Eve teasing, whistling at public places, obscene commenting, stalking, and gesturing. Due to the harassments faced from these types of sexual abuse, they cannot go out freely, cannot give the necessary attention during studies, and are afraid of the unexpected situation. To overcome these types of depression, they should avoid social-cultural events; they should return home

as early as possible mostly before nightfall, avoid studying at evening hours, and should file complaints to the respected authority.

One female respondent claimed:

Everywhere we go unsafe. In the markets, transports, and other public places we are almost always sexually abused. We have no guardian here, so we have to go outside for different purposes, and some Norfolk teased us with whistling, unnecessary touching, and scolding.”

Some male friends are sexually abusing many of the female students in the university. In the name of friendship, some male friends unnecessarily come closer to the female students and touch them in sensitive areas. Sometimes they sit together in the classroom side by side and draw some dirty picture so that their female friend can see it easily.

Gender Violence

Women are dominated and discriminated in every sphere of life (Mahtab, 2011). They face systematic abuse in the hands of men and the society; and they have little decision-making power in the social, economic and political as well as other development arenas (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015).

In Bangladesh, they are often subject to systematic discrimination in different aspects including education, employment, participation in development activities, and social relations which leads to more depression among them (Jayachadran, 2014).

Sexual assault is another important cause of depression among female students (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). These types of violence create depression and trauma among females.

One female respondent claimed:

“In an occasion of electing a class representative and society member from the students in my department, I was competing for the post monitor. However, I did not get even a single vote in favor of me from my male friends. They claimed that I am not fit to hold such a responsible post as a female student. We have no decision making power, and we always respond to our male friends without any understanding. If in the university the mentality is such, how can we imagine equality in our family.”

Furthermore, gender discrimination starts in Bangladesh from the family. The male child as the future head of the family will get all types of preferences such as good food with more amount, freedom of movement and education, choice of life partners, and more property rights (Carter, Mwaura, & Ran, 2015).

One female respondent noted:

“Women are more depressed with reasonable cause, as I am comparatively getting fewer facilities in my family. My father has documented

some land property for my younger brother telling that (Shoshana) me, will get married in a few years, so she does not need any property. This discrimination is everywhere in our country. Some employers prefer male employees than female in their companies. What is the position of women in society? Is it a sin to be a girl? Oh... disgusting.....”

Recent Dissolution

Affairs and love among university students are common in Bangladesh. However, sometimes it creates problems for both male and female students. One of the respondents has expressed his experience regarding the causes and consequence of depression relating to breaking up.

Case Study-1: Rakib Hasan (Pseudo name)

He is an MSS 2nd semester student of the Shahjalal University of Science and technology. He expressed his story of how he became depressed because of his breakup with his girlfriend in the university saying that “when I was a 2nd-year student, I started a relationship with my classmate. Most of the students and teachers knew about our relationship. The relationship continued smoothly without any problem. After graduation, she went on to be admitted into Dhaka University far away from my university with a view of completing her master’s degree. Her family members were living in Dhaka, so she left for Dhaka, and told me to manage a good job before completing her post-graduation. She was also committed to getting married to me after getting a job. But after some days, she gradually relieved contact with me, and after three months she completely stopped every type of communication with me without explaining any causes. A few days later, I received words of her marriage. I could not accept it anyway. It made me totally depressed. From that time, my memorizing capacity is decreasing. I always feel indifference and illusion. Now I am seeing a psychologist.

Consequences of Depression and Anxiety Dropping Out of University

Many students drop out of the university due to depression and cannot continue a normal life. Due to anxiety, they cannot study well in the right place and sometimes they fail in the final exam or get expelled in the examination for a year or longer time due to involvement in illegal activities during examinations. Students become speared from academic activities, feeling shy of friends, teachers, and their peer groups. One of the respondents opined: “Stopping study for one year is better than dropping out of university for one year.”

Taking Drugs

Many of the respondents have become addicted to drugs or smoking because of various types of depression such as failing examinations, breakups,

the thrill of companionship, unemployment, frustration, socio-political unrest, and removing others pressure. They get addicted to smoking or drugs subconsciously. Many of them are trying to isolate themselves; in most cases, they stay in their rooms. They also get involved in illegal activities such as drugs trafficking, distributing, hijacking, kidnapping, and murder to collect money for their drugs. They cannot think about anything normally. At times, they behave roughly and fight with other students and staff for silly reasons. Their depression makes them suffer from social and personal matters such as loss of personality, loss of inspiration, stigmatization, carelessness in academic activities, loss of morality, and criminality behavior. Most of the respondents till now are addicted to various types of drugs in a bid to get away from any form of mental pressure. A few of them are trying to recover from such attitudes and behavior in different ways such as avoiding drug-addicted friends, increasing their daily activities to keep themselves busy, and trying to be employed.

Case Study-2: Imran (Pseudo name)

He is an MSS 1st semester student of the Shahjalal University of Science and technology. He explained the causes and consequences of his becoming depression in the university. He gave his reasons as "I had never smoked or taken any kind of drugs, when my lover broke up with me. I didn't take it easy. It created too much stress, I tried to overcome such stress, but I failed. Then a few of my friends suggested smoking cigarettes with them, but they mixed ganja with cigarettes. After taking it, I felt relieved of stress. Then gradually I became dependent on those drugs to release my pressure which made me drug addicted. " He also explained the consequences by saying, "When I became fully addicted to drugs I could not run my study, everybody seems to be an enemy. After all, addiction to drugs makes one a thug from the street rather than a student. I wish to get rid of drugs by proper suggestions of my bosom friend and respected teachers."

Committing Suicide

It has been theoretically proven that depression and anxiety can lead to suicide. In too many Bangladeshi universities, students commit suicide, and their previous records referred to depression without an explicit exception.

When depression attacks them on the surface, they commit suicide making a death note claiming it is their fate. Recently, a student of Shahjalal University committed suicide and made a note on his Facebook wall indicating his teachers' conspiracy against him for holding his faculty post in the same department (The Daily Star, 2019). Lee and Atteraya (2018) stated that depression and abuse experience could lead to suicide ideation among potential people. There are other consequences of this social affliction on the

society including social degradation, breaking family dreams, the death of a prospective young student, and diminished organizational reputation.

Discussion

The university is the highest or tertiary level of education in Bangladesh. The students of the university are regarded as the wealth of the country. The admission examination is open to any public university. Thus, students from every part of the country and world come here to get higher degrees. The overall environment of different universities is almost the same with an explicit exception of area and accommodation system. Most of the students come to the university from different family background leaving their family members. However, in this open environment, there is no one to take care of them like their family. They have a lot of opportunities and freedom to pass their time such as studying in the library individually or as a group, involving in different organizations to organize drama, rally, and procession, open photo gallery, and other constructive activities. However, while some students can cope with the environment and do better in their academic and professional life, other students become trackless from their determined objectives for different reasons which lead to depression among them. This has created a long-term negative impact on society.

This study was conducted with the students of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology who have been suffering from anxiety and depression in different forms and patterns and taking psychotherapy from the doctors and university consultants. In previous studies, many researchers tried to explore the lack of mental healthcare facilities in Bangladesh. This also included their origin, forms of depression, and difficulties of diagnosis process of depression. A quantitative method was applied where in most cases they fragmented their study by male and female. Considering this research gap, this study has tried to find out the depression pattern among students, causes of depression they faced, the consequence of depression, and ways to overcome these social afflictions.

This can be done by employing a qualitative method for getting in-depth information from the respondents. However, very little research has been conducted on the depression of university-level graduates.

Study findings revealed that the leading causes and pattern of depression that the respondents face are configured in some themes such as unemployment, pressure from family, university discontentment, difficulty in meeting parents' expectations, feeling of social isolation, career-personal life conflict, **gender violence**, dropping out of university, recent breakup, **and** sexual abuse. This study also found the various patterns of depressions such as the mental stress to get a good job, the depression that comes with being unemployed, high expectation from family to develop the socioeconomic

status, maintaining own educational cost, failing examination, breakups, thrill of companion, unemployment, frustration, socio-political unrest, removing others pressure, deviation among classes, insufficient residential problem, ragging, session jam, ignoring of their opinion by other friends circle, non-celebration of their birthday party by their friends, unwillingness to participate in cultural activities, being detached from the personal goal, worried about their personal life and career, eve-teasing, whistling at public place, obscene commenting, stalking, and gesturing.

In this study, the consequences are found in different forms such as in many depressed students who are mentally weak and are seen as pessimists. They hardly give concentration to their academics and rarely take care of their health. Most of the depressed students prefer to be isolated from friends, family, and other groups and suffer from inferiority complex. Although participating in any cultural and public programs reduces anxiety and mental illness, but the depressed students feel discouraged to participate in any constructive activities. This is because they become hopeless and think of themselves as valueless. After that, they took drugs that made them trackless from normal life, and they most often engaged in all types of illegal activities including rape, murder, hijacking, drugs trafficking, and kidnapping. The society and family look with great expectations at the future of the university students, but the mechanisms mentioned above makes them burdensome in society. Sometimes, some depressed students think about reality and attempt to commit suicide.

Most parents wait for the arrival of their children after graduating from the university with reasonable hope to get financial support from their established graduates. However, students get more pain and hardship from their families when they come back without any degree due to depression.

Depressed students not only hamper their matters but also influence the university, family or societal issues negatively. The depressed students get rid of their depression by sharing their internal anxiety with their teachers, classmates, parents, and their younger brothers and these are the well-wishers of the respondents. We should be aware of this social disease through collective efforts to remove this affliction from the university graduates for the greater benefit of the family, society, and nation as well.

7. Challenges of the Study

Depression is a complex issue and is also a sensitive case. Hence, at the time of conducting this study, the researchers faced some problems such as:

- (d) The selection of depressed students from the consultancy list was very difficult. This was because the researchers intended to serve the purpose of this study by selecting both male and female students.

- (e) In our first attempt, the respondents were unwilling to provide any information related to their personal life and experience. However, when they saw our ethical issues regarding this study, then they gave their consent to participate as respondents.
- (f) After giving our informed consent with the purpose of the survey, they gave us so much time and location to participate in the in-depth interview, but they missed 2/3's of our attempts. We continued to follow up with interviews.
- (g) The nature of these study findings may vary from country to country, but countries of similar characteristics to Bangladesh may adopt the recommendations and guidelines.

8. Concluding Remarks with Policy Implications

As humans are deeply related to mental or psychological matters and have to struggle in every aspect of life, they can experience various forms of mental depression. However, in most developing countries including Bangladesh, they do not have proper treatment and diagnostic facilities for mental disease. Throughout the world, a significant portion of the population is suffering from depression.

In Bangladesh, this amount is high among females as they are more depressed compared to males. This is as a result of their adverse situations in all aspects of life from family to university. It is found that these students have a significant amount of depression which can have far-reaching consequences. Furthermore, students have been suffering from depression due to personal, academic, and family matters that have a profound impact on their academic and socio-personal life.

To reduce the proportion and probable adverse outcomes of depression, proper preventive and obstructing initiatives should be taken and preserved. It is significantly important to provide counseling and suggest stress management courses to the students for every department of the university, especially those that are depressed. In short, there is a need for psychologists, mental health professionals, teachers, and peers of the individual to extend a helping hand to minimize the high risk of depression. Further studies are needed to explore the effects of various types of depression students face in their academic life, and how to minimize or remove the catalyst of depression. Depression hampers the personal, family, educational, and future career of most graduates. It also provokes decadence and suicidal tendency. Hence, it is very urgent to reduce depression among university students. To minimize depressions among university students, the following recommendations should be made:

- There should be more mental hospitals with expert human resources and modern technology to meet the demands of the general public. At

the local and educational level, some psychiatrists and psychologists should be appointed for regular consultancy and checkup on the mental conditions of the local people and students.

- The peers, friends, and loved ones of the individual need to extend a hand of love to reduce normal depression of these students.
- The family should be the main mechanism to minimize stress from their girls and boys by sharing, inspiring, and talking with them to make them feel accepted.
- Ensuring good jobs upon completion of one's studies can reduce depression among graduate students. Thus, the government should guarantee or dramatically increase the employment of university students.
- Proactive policy regarding mental health should be implemented, and the government should allocate more budgets for implementing these programs.

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