



# Silent Struggle: Exploring the Mental Health Challenges of Medical University Students

Asma Darvishi<sup>1</sup>, Fatemeh Zarimeidani<sup>2</sup>, Nikoo Almani<sup>3</sup>,  
Hossein Keyhani<sup>2</sup>, Rahem Rahmati<sup>2</sup>, Hadi Raeisi Shahraki<sup>4\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Students Scientific Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Students Research Committee, Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences, Shahrekord, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Student Research Committee, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran

<sup>4</sup>Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Health,  
Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences, Shahrekord, Iran

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### \*Corresponding Author:

Dept. of Epidemiology and  
Biostatistics, School of Health,  
Shahrekord University of  
Medical Sciences, Shahrekord,  
Iran

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** According to several studies, 20-45% of college students encounter at least one mental health condition in any one year, and mental diseases are becoming more prevalent in colleges worldwide. Understanding the relationship between alexithymia and depression, anxiety, and stress among university students can provide valuable insights into mental health challenges faced by this population. Addressing alexithymia with these co-occurring conditions can lead to more effective intervention strategies and support services. This study evaluated the mental health challenges of medical university students.

**Methods and Materials:** A total of 260 students from the 2019-2020 academic year at Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling method. To assess alexithymia and depression, stress, and anxiety, standardized questionnaires, specifically the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, were employed. To compare the scores of depression, stress, and anxiety between students with and without alexithymia, an independent t-test using SPSS 21.0 software was conducted. Additionally, the logistic regression model was utilized to examine the adjusted associations.

**Results:** Among 260 students, the majority were female (75.7%) and most students aged 20. The study found that male students had a higher mean alexithymia score compared to female students ( $55.4 \pm 12.6$  versus  $51.6 \pm 12.5$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ), while younger students aged 18-19 exhibited lower mean scores for depression and anxiety compared to older students ( $4.3 \pm 3.2$  versus  $5.3 \pm 3.8$  for those aged 20;  $p = 0.04$ ). Similarly, the mean anxiety score was lower in younger students ( $5.6 \pm 4.5$  versus  $6.9 \pm 5.1$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ). Other demographic factors such as marital status, ethnicity, and residence did not significantly impact these mental health indicators. Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between alexithymia, stress, depression, and anxiety, with depression also being significantly correlated with anxiety and stress and anxiety being significantly correlated with stress.

**Conclusion and Discussion:** Given the strong correlations between alexithymia and depression, anxiety, and stress, and the potential for exacerbation of each other, it is important to assess students for these disorders. Additional research is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of this topic.

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