

Study of prevalence of depressive disorder among law students of a private law college in Durgapur, West Bengal

Dr Pratanu Saha¹, Bibekananda Das², Dr Kajal Kumar Patra^{3*}, Dr Kishore P Madhwani⁴

1. Associate Professor, Dept of Psychiatry, Gouri Devi Institute of Medical Science, Durgapur, West Bengal, India,
2. Associate Professor, Dept of Gynae and Obstetrics, Barasat Government Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata, West Bengal, India
3. Ex-Professor and Head, Dept of Gynae and Obstetrics, Gouri Devi Institute of Medical Science, Durgapur, West Bengal, India
4. Senior Medical Consultant, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Corresponding Author :

Dr Kajal Kumar Patra

Ex-Professor and Head, Dept of Gynae and Obstetrics
Gouri Devi Institute of Medical Science
GT Road, National Highway 2, Rajbandh,
Durgapur, West Bengal 713212

Mobile : +91 9830212433

Email: drmch2000@gmail.com

Running Title: Prevalence of depressive disorder among law students

Abstract

Background: Depression is a major public health threat that can affect anyone including law students. Law professionals are an understudied population that is integral to society. Limited research indicates lawyers experience poor mental health, decreased wellbeing, and suicidality.

Aims and Objectives: We aimed to investigate prevalence of depression levels among law students of a private law college of Durgapur, West Bengal, India. **Materials and Methods:**

This analytical, cross-sectional study was conducted among 51 law students in the Durgapur Law College, Durgapur, West Bengal, India from August 2021 to September 2022 after getting approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee. Template was generated in MS excel sheet and analysis was done on SPSS. **Results:** The present study revealed that 45.10% of the law students had some degree of depression. In the study 18 (35.29) law students belong to 17-19 years of age, 16 (31.37%) belong to age group of 20-22 years and 17 (33.33%) belong to age group of

23-25 years and 21 (41.18%) law students were male and 30 (58.82%) were female. After applying Beck Depression Inventory method 28 (54.90%) law students were suffering from normal depression. Borderline depression was present in 10 (19.61%) of law students, 3 (5.88%) law students were suffering from mild depression. Moderate depression was present in 7 (13.73%) law students and 3 (5.88%) law students were suffering from severe depression.

Conclusion: Our study showed that the prevalence of depressive symptoms was very high among law students. If detected early, students with depressive symptoms may be managed successfully by behavioral therapy, emotional support and interpersonal psychotherapy

Keywords: Beck Depression Inventory, depression, law professional, lawyer

Introduction

Lawyers and other law professionals play a vital role in the functioning of our society. They are leaders in business, government, and community, guiding decision-making, and shaping policy at all levels. Yet despite this societal influence, law professionals are a relatively understudied population. Anecdotal reports and the limited studies that do exist indicate that these workers face many psychological challenges. Law students and legal professionals in the field have individually indicated that they face many mental stressors, including highly elevated incidents of poor mental health and other issues of well-being. While these stressors are also experienced in other demanding professional occupations (eg, medicine) and have been studied accordingly, limited efforts have been made to scientifically understand both the magnitude of the problem and factors within legal work that are associated with the development of reduced psychosocial wellbeing.

Research assessing lawyer well-being is in the early stages. In 2016, a study by Krill et al¹ showed that lawyers in the study had meaningful prevalence of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. This study generated increased interest in lawyer well-being. Even so, scant data exist on which to base decisions regarding actual risk factors for lawyers and potential interventions that might encourage increased wellbeing.

To date, we have identified nine peer-reviewed publications assessing lawyer well-being, all of which report some level of serious concern.¹⁻⁹ The suicide rate among lawyers is ranked fourth among working professionals, behind only dentists, pharmacists, and doctors.^{10,11}

Depression is a serious public health problem in the modern world. It can significantly contribute

to physical, financial, and interpersonal problems for people suffering from the condition, as well as for their families and the societies in which they live.¹² Depression is a mood disorder which includes negative signs and symptoms, such as sadness, despair, anxiety, sleep disturbance, psychomotor disturbance, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, or recurrent thoughts of death.¹³

Several researchers suggest factors which either cause or contribute to depression in students.^{14,15}

These include:

- Character traits, such as perfectionism
- Lack of perceived control and mastery
- Workload
- Study problems
- Isolation due to relocation
- Lack of peer support
- Financial worries
- Examination stress.

To combat the negative impact of these factors among law students, regular psychological support, in any form whether formal or informal, is very much needed in India. However, this support is not currently available throughout the country.

With all of this in mind, the present study was conducted to find out the prevalence, as well as the level of depression, among the law students in a private college located in Durgapur, West Bengal, India

Methods:

The study was conducted after receiving approval from the ethical committee.

Study Design : Analytical, cross-sectional study.

Study Population: The study comprised of 51 law students in the Durgapur Law College, Durgapur, West Bengal, India.

Place of study: Durgapur Law College, Durgapur, West Bengal, India.

Study Period: August 2021 to September 2022.

Sample Size: 51 law students after applying exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria : Students giving consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria : Students declined to participate in the study.

The purpose of the study was explained and written, informed consent was obtained. In addition to the basic purpose of the study, law students were also explained about the objective, methodology and of course the confidentiality of their responses in order to increase their confidence about participating in the study.

Data collection

The data were collected by means of a predesigned, pretested, self-administered, semi-structured and anonymous questionnaire. It included structured Beck depression inventory (BDI) for assessing depression (Beck et al, 1961).¹⁶

- Normal/no depression (1-10)
- Borderline (11-16)
- Mild (17-20)
- Moderate (21-30)
- Severe (30–39)
- Very severe (≥ 40).

Statistical Analysis: Ethical consent for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Board (ERB) of the institute. The collected data were compiled in a spreadsheet. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were computed in appropriate situations.

Results

This cross sectional study was conducted among 51 law students of Durgapur Law College, West Bengal, India from August 2021 to September 2022. Template was generated in MS excel sheet and analysis was done on SPSS software.

Table 1: Distribution of the participants according to their ag.

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage
17 - 19	18	35.29
20 - 22	16	31.37
23 - 25	17	33.33
Total	51	100

In the present study 18 (35.29) law students belong to 17-19 years of age, 16 (31.37%) belong to age group of 20-22 years and 17 (33.33%) belong to age group of 23-25 years. (Table 1)

Table 2: Distribution of the participants according to their gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	21	41.18
Female	30	58.82
Total	51	100

In our study, 21 (41.18%) law students were male and 30 (58.82%) were female. (Table 2)

Table 3: Distribution of the participants according to their habitat.

Habitat	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	26	50.98
Urban	13	25.49
City	12	23.53
Total	51	100

In present study, 26 (50.98%) law students reside at rural areas, 13 (25.49%) law students reside at urban areas and 12 (23.53%) reside at city areas. (Table 3)

Table 4 : Distribution of the participants according to BDI scores (Beck Depression Inventory).

BDI score	Male		Female		Total		Mean ±SD
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Normal (1 - 10)	14	27.45	14	27.45	28	54.90	9.32 ± 1.26
Borderline (11 – 16)	2	3.92	8	15.69	10	19.61	7.12 ± 0.82
Mild (17 – 20)	1	1.96	2	3.92	3	5.88	3.46 ± 0.52
Moderate (21 – 30)	3	5.88	4	7.84	7	13.73	5.28 ± 0.76
Severe (31 – 40)	2	3.92	1	1.96	3	5.88	3.46 ± 0.52
Total	22	43.14	29	56.86	51	100.00	

In our study after applying Beck Depression Inventory method 28 (54.90%) law students were suffering from normal depression. Borderline depression was present in 10 (19.61%) of law

students, 3 (5.88%) law students were suffering from mild depression. Moderate depression was present in 7 (13.73%) law students and 3 (5.88%) law students were suffering from severe depression. (Table 4)

Discussion

The present study revealed that 45.10% of the law students participating had some degree of depression, where it is relatively higher compared to undergraduate students in overseas institutions ranging from 27.9% to 38.2%.^{17,18,19} However lower compared to students in a private institution, Kedah which revealed that 56.60% of students were depressed.²⁰

In the present study 18 (35.29) law students belong to 17-19 years of age, 16 (31.37%) belong to age group of 20-22 years and 17 (33.33%) belong to age group of 23-25 years. In our study, 21 (41.18%) law students were male and 30 (58.82%) were female.

In present study, 26 (50.98%) law students reside at rural areas, 13 (25.49%) law students reside at urban areas and 12 (23.53%) reside at city areas

After applying Beck Depression Inventory method 28 (54.90%) law students were suffering from normal depression. Borderline depression was present in 10 (19.61%) of law students, 3 (5.88%) law students were suffering from mild depression. Moderate depression was present in 7 (13.73%) law students and 3 (5.88%) law students were suffering from severe depression.

The higher total BDI scores in law students are probably due to students thrust into an unfamiliar environment in which predominant Socratic teaching method undermine self-esteem,²¹ lack of feedback, lack of educational context in the learning process and the reliance of class rank as an evaluation and hiring tool.²²

The present study showed there was no significant difference in acquiring depression between males and females, which is contrary to the well-known notion that depression is more common in women in general. Other studies have suggested that females are more liable to depression because females are more likely to adapt with distress feeling through emotion-focused compared to problem-focused where most of emotion-focused coping measure do not help to reduce distress feeling.^{23,24}

Future research should include further epidemiological work, as well as intervention studies where science-based interventions are deployed to see if the levels of depressive symptoms can be reduced. Additionally, researchers may consider partnering with educational institutions to

train future law professionals and lawyers to help them avoid these outcomes. This may include both resilience training as well as training on the primary drivers of depression from a job-demands perspective.

Finally, increased student involvement in extracurricular law school and university activities is also likely to result in a greater sense of belongingness and, therefore, wellbeing in students. To be effective however, extracurricular programs need to cater to a diverse range of student interests. While competitions such as mootings, client interviews and negotiations may appeal to the competitive, outgoing law student, they may not appeal to more introverted and shy students.

Limitations of the study :

Due to time limitation, study was conducted in few number of law students. Further study may be conducted with large number of students with involvement of more law colleges.

Conclusion :

The findings of the present study indicate that depression is a serious problem among law students. In this Indian study, the determinants which seem responsible for this depression are mostly psychosocial factors. Sincere attention must be paid to these issues as these students are entering into a very stressful time of their lives. Proper pre-admission counselling might have been beneficial for those students being admitted to the law programme. Generating awareness among faculty members regarding the mental health status of the law students may also be a positive approach to this problem. The role of family and social support cannot be ignored in this respect.

Consent

Duly informed written consent was taken from the students.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

References :

1. Krill PR, Johnson R, Albert L. The prevalence of substance use and other mental health concerns among American attorneys. J Addict Med.2016;10:46–52.

2. Sheldon KM, Krieger LS. Service job lawyers are happier than money job lawyers, despite their lower income. *J Positive Psychol.* 2014;9:219–226
3. Krieger LS, Sheldon KM. What makes lawyers happy: a data-driven prescription to redefine professional success. *Geo Wash L Rev.* 2014;83:554
4. Langford CM. Depression, substance abuse, and intellectual property lawyers. *U Kan L Rev.* 2004;53:875
5. Austin DS. Drink like a lawyer: the neuroscience of substance use and its impact on cognitive wellness. *Nev LJ.* 2014;15:826
6. Rothstein L. Law students and lawyers with mental health and substance abuse problems: protecting the public and the individual. *U Pitt L Rev.* 2007;69:531
7. Bergin AJ, Jimmieson NL. Australian lawyer well-being: workplace demands, resources and the impact of time-billing targets. *Psychiatry Psychol Law.* 2014;21:427–441
8. Organ JM. What do we know about the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of lawyers-a meta-analysis of research on lawyer satisfaction and well-being. *U St Thomas LJ.* 2010;8:225
9. Maslach C, Jackson S. Lawyer burn out. *Barrister.* 1978;5:8.
10. These Jobs have the Highest Rate of Suicide; 2016.
11. Roberts S, Jaremin B, Lloyd K. High-risk occupations for suicide. *Psychol Med.* 2013;43:1231–1240
12. Zlotnick C, Kohn R, Keitner G, Della Grotta SA (2000) The relationship between quality of interpersonal relationships and major depressive disorder: findings from the National Comorbidity Survey. *J Affect Disord* 59(3): 205-15.
13. Radloff LS (1977) The CES-D Scale. A Self-Report Depression Scale for Research in the General Population *Applied Psychological Measurement* 1(3): 385-401
14. Arnett JJ (2000) Emerging adulthood. A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *Am Psychol* 55(5): 469–80.
15. Mastekaasa A (2006) Is marriage/cohabitation beneficial for young people? Some evidence on psychological distress among Norwegian college students. *J Community Appl Soc Psychol* 16(2): 149–65
16. Beck AT, Ward CH, Mendelson M, Mock J, Erbaugh J (1961) An inventory for measuring depression. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 4: 561-71.

17. Baldassin, Sergio, Tânia CTF Alves, Arthur G. de Andrade, Luiz A. Nogueira Martins. The characteristics of depressive symptoms in medical students during medical education and training: A cross- sectional study. *BMC medical education*. 2008;8(1):60
18. Peltzer, Karl, Supa Pengpid, Sola Olowu, Matthew Olasupo. Depression and Associated Factors among University Students in Western Nigeria. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. 2013;23(3):459-465.
19. Sokratous, Sokratis, Anastasios Merkouris, Nicos Middleton, Maria Karanikola. The prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of depressive symptoms among Cypriot university students: A cross- sectional descriptive co-relational study. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2014;14(1):235.
20. Shalini S, Geap OK, Harveen KOIS, Bakri SHSI, Baig MR, Dhanaraj SA. Prevalence of Depression and impact of psychosocial factors in undergraduate students at a private university in Kedah, Malaysia. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Nanotechnology*. 2011;4:1.
21. Temple, Hollee Schwartz. Speaking up: Helping Law Students Break through the silence of Depression. *ABA Journal*; 2012.
22. McKinney, Ruth Ann. Depression and anxiety in law students: Are we part of the problem and can we be part of the solution. *Legal writing: J. Legal Writing Inst*. 2002;8:229.
23. Yusoff, Muhamad SaifulBahri, Ahmad Fuad Abdul Rahim, and Mohd Jamil Yaacob. The prevalence of final year medical students with depressive symptoms and its contributing factors. *International Medical Journal*. 2011;18(4):305-309
24. Bostanci, Mehmet, Osman Ozdel, NalanKalkan Oguzhanoglu, Lale Ozdel, Ahmet Ergin, Nesrin Ergin, Figen Atesci, Filiz Karadag. Depressive symptomatology among university students in Denizli, Turkey: Prevalence and sociodemographic correlates. *Croat Med J*. 2005;46(1):96- 100