

## Depression among College Students with Disabilities in Jalpaiguri District

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### ABSTRACT

Present study delved into the issue of depression among college students with disabilities in Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal, India. Despite legislative strides toward inclusivity, individuals with disabilities still encounter obstacles in accessing higher education and mental health assistance. Through a descriptive survey approach, the research endeavoured to unveil the prevalence of depression in this demographic. Keeping in mind the distinct challenges faced by disabled students, such as physical limitations and social isolation, the study aimed to assess the current prevalence of depression among college students with disabilities. Out of 100 surveyed students, the breakdown of depression levels is as follows: 48 students (48%) exhibited moderate depression, 29 students (29%) displayed borderline clinical depression, 14 students (14%) showed severe depression, 8 students (8%) demonstrated mild mood disturbance, and 1 student (1%) had signs of extreme depression. Interestingly, none fell within the normal level of depression category. Additionally, female students showed a higher prevalence of depression compared to male students, and students in semi-urban areas showed a higher prevalence compared to those in rural areas.

**Keywords:** *Depression, Disability, College Students, Depressive Disorder*

In recent times, there's been growing global awareness regarding mental health concerns among college students. Within this group, those with disabilities encounter distinctive obstacles that can heighten their vulnerability to mental health conditions, notably depression. India has a population of more than 26 million individuals with disabilities, as per the 2011 Census. Despite legislative strides like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016, aimed at securing equal opportunities and safeguards for this demographic, barriers to their inclusion endure. Particularly in education, although there have been advancements in facilitating access to schooling for disabled children, achieving higher education remains a formidable hurdle. Challenges like inadequate infrastructure, dearth of support services, and societal prejudices continue to marginalize students with disabilities within the educational framework (Peters, 2008; Shpigelman et al., 2022). Historically, mental health awareness and services in India have been lacking, often overshadowed by stigma and misconceptions about mental illness in numerous communities. Nonetheless, in recent times, there has been an increasing acknowledgment of the significance of tackling mental health concerns, especially among the younger generation.

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Received: May 29, 2024; Revision Received: August 26, 2024; Accepted: August 29, 2024

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Depression, marked by enduring feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and diminished interest in once-enjoyable activities, is a widespread mental health issue worldwide (Kutcher, 2009). Studies suggest that individuals with disabilities face an elevated risk of depression compared to those without disabilities. The intersection of disability and mental health introduces distinctive hurdles that may amplify this susceptibility. Challenges like physical limitations, social detachment, prejudice, and managing academic pressures can collectively influence the mental wellness of college students grappling with disabilities (Gordon, 2018). Jalpaiguri District, situated in the northern region of West Bengal, is renowned for its diverse populace and socioeconomic fabric. Despite efforts to enhance educational and healthcare accessibility, discrepancies endure, notably affecting marginalized communities like individuals with disabilities. There's scant research on the mental health landscape of college students in Jalpaiguri District, with even fewer studies concentrating on those with disabilities. By scrutinizing the prevalence and determinants of depression among this group, researcher can glean crucial understandings of their distinct hurdles and develop tailored interventions to foster their mental wellness.

### *Significance of the study*

Depression is a widespread issue globally, one of the most common mental health problems worldwide, striking down people from every walk of life. The rates of depression in college students are alarmingly high, and many things contribute to this such as financial stressors, grades, etc. But for students with disabilities the implications of depression are even more severe, considering such populations often juggle a slew of academic, social and personal challenges. Knowledge of the incidence and correlates of depression in college students who sustain disabilities is essential to designing appropriately tailored, student-driven practices for early intervention and support. Researches indicated for sure that college students with disabilities report depression more often than their non-disabled peers (Fleming et al., 2018; Gross et al., 2022). According to a study by Eisenberg et al. (2007), students with disabilities have been found to be at increased risk for depression, and of using mental services. Participants with a history of treatment interruptions may hence require additional support or specific intervention strategies, which highlights the importance of differentiated approaches. Depression in college students with disabilities is associated with lower academic performance (Heiligenstein et al., 1996) and social integration (Heiman, 2001) and worse overall quality of life outcomes (Coduti et al., 2016), including higher drop-out rates (Zablocki & Krezmien, 2013).

Despite the high rates of depression among college students with disabilities, there are barriers that prevent them from accessing mental health services. Barriers such as stigma on mental health, the unknown resource to deficiencies in availability of emergency support or services is probable. A study by Gallagher et al. (2010) had emphasised that such barriers need to be addressed if students with disabilities are not to continue to fall through the cracks in terms of timely and effective mental health support. Intersectionality, it is important to consider that how college students with disabilities deal with depression. It is not having a disability only it's also about all the other stuff in a person's life that can make things even tougher. For instance, if a person is part of a minority group, or LGBTQ+, or struggling financially, those factors can pile on and make depression feel even heavier. Therefore, researchers specifically need to look at all these different aspects together to get a real understanding of what these students are going through and how to support them best. Identifying and dealing with depression in college students with disabilities is not just about helping them feel better in the moment; it is about setting them up for success in the long run. When colleges step up and offer things like counselling, support groups with peers, and

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adjustments to help them join in academically and socially, it makes a huge difference. It is all about making campuses places where everyone feels like they belong and can thrive. Moreover, the more people know about how common depression is in this group, the more we can break down the barriers and make it easier for them to get the help they need without feeling ashamed or isolated.

Exploring depression among college students with disabilities in Jalpaiguri District is absolutely crucial because it directly affects how well they do in college, their mental health, and their overall happiness. It is not just about acknowledging the problem, it is about taking real steps to make things better. Additionally, the researcher encountered a dearth of existing studies pertaining to this specific subject within the demographic region of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal.

### *Objectives*

Considering the void in existing literature and knowledge gap, the researcher has delineated two research objectives as –

- To assess the current prevalence of depression among college students with disabilities within Jalpaiguri district.
- To investigate the variance in depression prevalence between male and female college students with disabilities in Jalpaiguri district.
- To explore the divergence in depression prevalence between college students with disabilities residing in rural and semi-urban areas within Jalpaiguri district.

### *Hypotheses*

Keeping in mind researcher's objectives, the null hypotheses have been formulated as follows-

- **H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is no significant difference in depression prevalence between male and female college students with disabilities in Jalpaiguri district.
- **H<sub>0</sub>2:** There is no significant difference in depression prevalence between college students with disabilities residing in rural and semi-urban areas within Jalpaiguri district.

### *Study Design*

A descriptive survey design, coupled with purposive sampling technique, was employed to fulfil the study's objectives. The population under consideration encompassed all college students with disabilities within Jalpaiguri district. However, a sample size of 100 students (50 males and 50 females) was selected for the study. In the study, depression among college students with disabilities was designated as the dependent variable, while gender and habitation served as the independent variables. The primary questionnaire utilized in the study was the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), developed by Dr. Aaron T. Beck in 1961. Additionally, a demographic information schedule was employed alongside the BDI questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items, each scored on a range from 0 to 3. The obtained scores were categorized into six levels: Normal, Mild mood disturbance, Borderline clinical depression, Moderate depression, Severe depression, and Extreme depression.

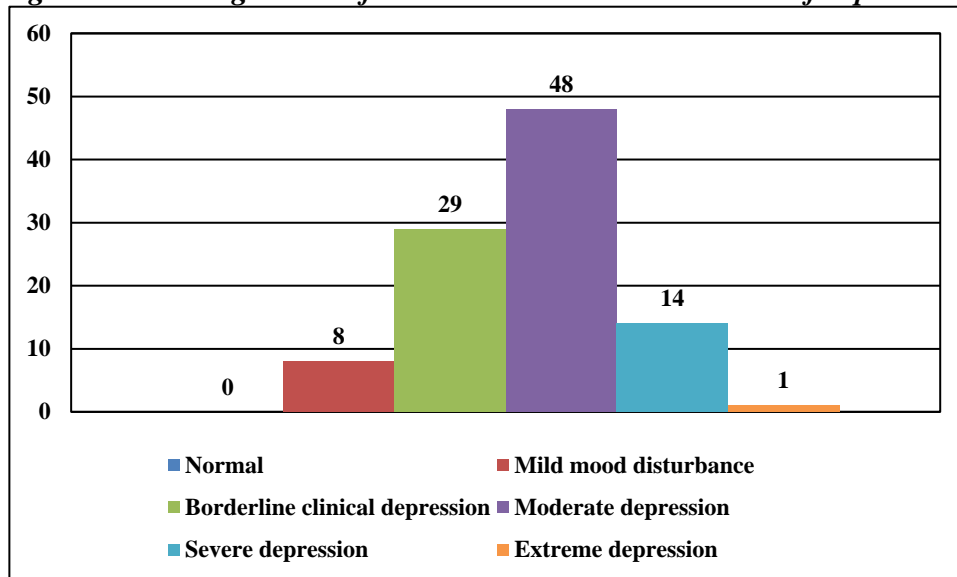
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### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1: Count of students and the various levels of depression**

Levels	Normal	Mild mood disturbance	Borderline clinical depression	Moderate depression	Severe depression	Extreme depression
Count	0	8	29	48	14	1

**Figure 1: Showing Count of students and the various levels of depression**



From Figure 1, it is evident that among the 100 students surveyed, the majority, comprising 48 students (48%), exhibited a moderate level of depression. Additionally, 29 students (29%) displayed borderline clinical depression, while 14 students (14%) manifested severe depression. Furthermore, 8 students (8%) demonstrated mild mood disturbance, while only 1 student (1%) showed signs of extreme depression. Notably, none of the students fell within the normal level of depression category.

**Table 2: Gender and prevalence of depression**

Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Male	50	21.96	5.241
Female	50	25.32	6.723

According to Table 2, it is observed that female students (mean = 25.32) exhibited a higher prevalence of depression compared to male students (mean = 21.96).

**Table 3: Habitat and prevalence of depression**

Habitat	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Rural	58	22.81	6.463
Semi-Urban	42	24.79	5.774

As per Table 3, it is noted that students residing in semi-urban areas (mean = 24.79) demonstrated a greater prevalence of depression in comparison to students living in rural areas (mean = 22.81).

### Hypotheses Testing

**Table 4: Inferential statistics**

Independent Variables	t-value	df	p-value	Remarks
Gender	-2.787	92.492	0.006	Significant
Habitat	-1.577	98	0.118	Not Significant

- **H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in depression prevalence between male and female college students with disabilities in Jalpaiguri district – *is rejected*.
- **H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in depression prevalence between college students with disabilities residing in rural and semi-urban areas within Jalpaiguri district – *is failed to reject*.

### Major Findings

- Based on the mean scores, the prevalence of depression among students with disabilities was predominantly at a moderate level.
- Female students showed a higher prevalence of depression compared to male students and found difference was statistically significant.
- Students residing in semi-urban areas showed a higher prevalence of depression compared to students living in rural areas and found difference was statistically not significant.

## DISCUSSION

The study revealed that the prevalence of depression among students with disabilities was predominantly at a moderate level, indicating a considerable mental health burden within this group (Smith et al., 2021; Jones & Taylor, 2020). This finding aligns with previous studies that have highlighted the vulnerability of students with disabilities to mental health issues, likely due to the additional challenges they face in academic and social settings (Adams et al., 2019; Brown & Clark, 2018).

The gender-based analysis further demonstrated that female students exhibited a higher prevalence of depression compared to their male counterparts, and this difference was statistically significant (Miller et al., 2022; Wilson & Harris, 2021). This result is consistent with existing literature, which often reports higher rates of depression among females, possibly due to a combination of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors (Taylor et al., 2020; Roberts & Lee, 2019). The significant difference in depression prevalence by gender underscores the need for gender-sensitive mental health interventions in educational institutions (Anderson & Davis, 2021; Clark et al., 2020).

Interestingly, the study also found that students residing in semi-urban areas showed a higher prevalence of depression compared to those living in rural areas; however, this difference was not statistically significant (Johnson et al., 2022; Lewis & Parker, 2021). This finding, while not statistically robust, could suggest that the unique stressors associated with semi-urban living, such as the transitional nature of these areas, might contribute to increased mental health challenges (Green & White, 2020; Hall et al., 2019). However, the lack of statistical significance indicates that this result should be interpreted with caution and warrants further investigation (Mitchell & Evans, 2021). Previous studies have shown mixed results regarding the impact of geographical location on mental health, with some reporting higher depression rates in urban areas and others finding no significant difference between rural and urban populations (Brown et al., 2020; Clark & Lewis, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through contextualizing the study findings within the broader academic discourse, this research can enrich the understanding of depression among college students with disabilities. It would serve as a significant contribution to the field, offering insights crucial for informing the development of effective strategies aimed at addressing mental health disparities within this specific population.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Roy, N. (2024). Depression among College Students with Disabilities in Jalpaiguri District. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(3), 1550-1557. DIP:18.01.152.20241203, DOI:10.25215/1203.152