

# Depression in university students: the hidden face of mental health

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Dear Editor,

Depression in university students has become a silent reality profoundly affecting both their emotional and academic well-being. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in depressive symptoms in this population, associated with academic pressure, social isolation, and difficulties in balancing personal life with academic demands. This situation directly influences overall performance, university retention, and, above all, the emotional health of those students.

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), depression is defined as an illness characterized by persistent sadness and loss of interest in activities that were normally pleasurable, as well as difficulty performing daily tasks, lasting at least two weeks.<sup>1</sup>

A recent global study revealed that 35.41% of university students present mild depressive symptoms; 24.54% moderate symptoms; and 13.42% severe symptoms, highlighting the magnitude of this problem and the urgent need to

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address it comprehensively within the university setting.<sup>2</sup> Internationally, a recent meta-analysis that included 32 cross-sectional studies with a total sample of 93,679 students reported that the estimated prevalence of depression ranged from 12.1% to 77.1%, with a summary overall prevalence of 34.7%. These results demonstrate that depression is a widespread mental health problem in the university context, regardless of the global health setting.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, depression among university students represents an urgent challenge for public and educational mental health. Current evidence confirms its high prevalence and its direct impact on emotional well-being and academic performance. Therefore, it is essential that universities strengthen their mental health awareness promotion and prevention policies, incorporating accessible and sustainable psychological support programs. Addressing this problem promptly will improve students' quality of life and also contribute to developing more balanced, empathetic, and emotionally healthy professionals.

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