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## Factors Influencing Depression in Teenagers

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper explores depression among high school students and its impact on their mental well-being and academic experiences. It examines how adolescent depression is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including family environment, school pressure, peer relationships, psychological characteristics, biological vulnerability, and cultural and societal influences. The paper highlights the importance of understanding depression within school settings and emphasizes the need for supportive environments, early awareness, and combined efforts from schools, families, and communities to promote adolescent mental health.*

**Keywords:** Family Environment, Peer Relationships, Societal Influences, Adolescent Mental Health, Early Awareness.

### INTRODUCTION

Depression among high school students has increasingly been recognized as a major public health concern, with significant implications for both mental health and academic achievement. During adolescence, a period marked by rapid emotional, social, and cognitive development, students often encounter challenges such as academic pressure, peer influence, and family-related stress. These stressors can manifest as depressive symptoms, which not only affect their psychological well-being but also interfere with school performance and long-term outcomes. Research highlights that the prevalence of depression among adolescents is substantial. Bansal et al. (2009) found that 18.4% of school-going adolescents in their sample met criteria for depression, with stressors such as parental conflict, economic hardship, and difficulties in coping with studies serving as significant correlates of depressive symptoms (Bansal et al.43). Similarly, Frojd et al. (2008) demonstrated that depressive symptoms were strongly associated with poor school performance, including declining grade point averages, concentration difficulties, and strained social relationships within the school environment. These findings underscore the bidirectional nature of depression and academic struggles, where poor performance may contribute to depression, and depression in turn impairs learning and motivation. We should pay close attention to this issue because adolescent depression is not only prevalent but also frequently underdiagnosed and untreated. Studies show that usual primary care settings fail to identify up to half of depressed adolescents (Bansal et al., 2009), leaving many young people vulnerable to worsening symptoms, including self-harm, substance misuse, and long-term psychosocial difficulties. Within the school context, the effects are immediate and visible: reduced concentration, declining grades, and disengagement from peers and teachers (Frojd et al., 2008). If left unaddressed, these issues may jeopardize not only academic success but also future occupational and social functioning. Key stages of the research in adolescent depression reveal a growing recognition of the complexity of this condition. Earlier decades underestimated the prevalence of depression among adolescents, but more recent studies have provided evidence of its high occurrence and its strong association with school-related factors. Bansal et al. (2009) contributed to prevalence-focused research, demonstrating the role of socio-demographic factors and family environment in shaping adolescent mental health. Frojd et al. (2008), in contrast, advanced the understanding of how depression interacts with academic outcomes, showing that both subjective (perceived workload, difficulties with peers and teachers) and objective (GPA decline) measures of school performance are linked to depressive symptoms. Together, these studies highlight that effective intervention must not only address the psychological symptoms but also the educational and social contexts in which adolescents develop. In conclusion, depression in high school students is a multifaceted issue that intersects with academic performance, family dynamics, and social relationships. It deserves careful attention both in research and in practice, with schools serving as a critical arena for early identification, prevention, and support. The findings from Bansal et al. (2009) and Frojd et al. (2008) emphasize the urgent need for holistic approaches that integrate mental health support within educational systems to safeguard the well-being and future of adolescents.

### SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

The findings of various studies demonstrate how socio-demographic factors and family environments shape adolescents' emotional health and academic performance. "The material of the present study comprises the responses of the 7th–9th grade pupils (ages 13–17 years) attending secondary school in Pori, a Finnish city of approximately 80,000 inhabitants" (Fröjd et al.487). This information establishes a clear setting for the research, emphasizing that the participants were adolescents—a group particularly sensitive to emotional and developmental changes. "The 50.8% of the subjects were girls. The mean age of the respondents was 15 years (s.d. = 0.9), 71.5% were living with both parents and 62.2% reported stable employment of their parents (none unemployed during the past 12 months). Of the subjects' parents 16.5% of fathers and 16.7% of mothers had completed a university degree" (Fröjd et al.488).

Such details reflect how stable home environments and educated parents may offer emotional security, potentially reducing the likelihood of depressive symptoms among adolescents. “The sample is large and representative of all the secondary school students in an urban and sub-urban region. All shared the same language and ethnic background. The results may not, however, be generalizable directly to populations in rural regions and with different ethnic backgrounds” (Fröjd et al. 495). This acknowledgment of demographic limitations reminds us that depression and related behaviors can manifest differently across diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups. “Certain factors like parental fights, beating at home and inability to cope up with studies were found to be significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) associated with higher GHQ-12 scores, indicating evidence of distress” (Bansal et al. 44). It becomes clear here that negative family interactions and academic struggles play a substantial role in shaping adolescents’ emotional well-being. “Economic difficulty, physical punishment at school, teasing at school and parental fights were significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) associated with higher BDI scores, indicating depression” (Bansal et al. 45). This suggests that both home and school environments contribute to psychological strain, underlining the cumulative effect of stress on young minds. “According to the research, age and depression have an impact on academic performance, while gender and financial background do not” (Shaikh and Chandio 277). This implies that internal psychological factors may outweigh external demographic ones when it comes to academic achievement. “The prevalence of depression in females is higher than that of males in the all-inclusive population” (Shaikh and Chandio 279).

#### **FAMILY ENVIRONMENT**

“71.5% were living with both parents and 62.2% reported stable employment of their parents (none unemployed during the past 12 months)” (Fröjd et al. 488). This indicates that a stable family structure and financial security may contribute to a healthier emotional environment for adolescents, reducing their risk of developing depressive symptoms. Such evidence reinforces the idea that a supportive family atmosphere plays a vital role in protecting adolescents from psychological distress. “Certain factors like parental fights, beating at home and inability to cope up with studies were found to be significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) associated with higher GHQ-12 scores, indicating evidence of distress” (Bansal et al. 45). This suggests that family conflict and harsh disciplinary practices may heighten emotional stress among young individuals. “Economic difficulty, physical punishment at school, teasing at school and parental fights were significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) associated with higher BDI scores, indicating depression” (Bansal et al. 45). Together, these findings point to the combined influence of home and school stressors on the psychological well-being of adolescents. “Family and academic stress and their impact on students’ depression level and academic performance” (Shaikh and Chandio 283). This highlights that depression is often shaped by the intersection of personal, academic, and family-related stressors. “Factors will probably identify with environmental aspects, in particular family history, social help, financial situation and life events” (Shaikh and Chandio 279). This observation emphasizes how external circumstances—such as social support and financial stability—are key elements influencing the emotional resilience of students.

#### **ACADEMIC STRESSORS AND ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS**

“Adolescent depression has a significant negative impact on school performance and consequently produces maladaptive outcomes in terms of subsequent education and occupational functioning” (Fröjd et al. 486). This highlights that depressive symptoms extend beyond emotional distress and can hinder long-term development in both education and career pathways. “Depressed young people had impaired abilities to cope with academic responsibilities. This emerges both in external evaluation and in subjective experience” (Fröjd et al. 496). Such findings suggest that depression weakens both perceived and actual academic functioning, making it harder for students to keep up with academic expectations. “Also socio-demographic data (e.g. academic performance, marital harmony of parents, bullying in school, etc.) was collected in a separate semi-structured performance” (Bansal et al. 44). This indicates that multiple contextual variables were considered when assessing how depression interacts with school performance. “We found certain factors like parental fights, beating at home and inability to cope up with studies, to be significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) associated with higher GHQ-12 scores indicating evidence of distress” (Bansal et al. 45). These findings demonstrate that emotional strain from the home environment likely contributes to psychological distress, which in turn may further disrupt academic engagement. “Changes in depression explain 37.8 per cent of changes in the students’ performance, which is significant at a 1 per cent level of significance” (Shaikh and Chandio 275). This strong statistical association reinforces how closely linked depression is to academic achievement. “Depression has an adverse significant impact on the academic performance of the students” (Shaikh and Chandio 282). Overall, these findings collectively suggest that depression undermines students’ ability to perform academically, influenced by both psychological symptoms and broader social factors.

#### **SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS - BULLYING, PEER REJECTION, PERFORMANCE ANXIETY**

The school atmosphere and the way students treat each other have a huge impact on the mental health of adolescents.

Bullying, teasing, and physical punishment were linked to higher levels of depression in adolescents. Students who had trouble making friends, working in groups, or getting along with teachers were more likely to feel sad, stressed, or lose interest in schoolwork.

Performance pressure, parent expectations, and fear of getting low grades create performance anxiety, which can make students feel overwhelmed. When students are depressed, they often get lower grades, find it harder to concentrate, and feel tired or unmotivated—this makes school even more stressful (Bansal et al. 44). “The study found that teasing and physical punishment at school were significantly associated with higher levels of depression among adolescents” (Bansal et al. 44). In short, a negative school environment and peer problems can trigger depression, and depression can make school performance worse.

#### **PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS**

Several mental and emotional challenges make students more vulnerable to depression:

Depressed students often struggle with low self-esteem, sadness, hopelessness, and poor concentration. These feelings take up mental energy, making it hard to focus in class or complete assignments. Stress at home—such as parental fights, beating, or family financial problems—was also linked to higher levels of depression (Fröjd et al. 486). “Depressed adolescents showed impaired concentration, low motivation, and negative thinking patterns, which significantly affected their ability to cope with academic demands” (Fröjd et al. 486). Overall, emotional stress from both school and home can strongly affect students’ mental well-being.

#### **PERSONALITY TRAITS**

Some personality traits make it easier for depression to develop:

Students who are self-critical, perfectionistic, or easily discouraged feel more stressed when they fail or get low marks. Those with low confidence or low self-efficacy (“I’m not good enough” or “I can’t do this”) are more likely to become depressed when school life becomes difficult. Research showed that girls often internalize emotions more (worry, self-doubt) while in boys, depression is more linked to drops in academic performance. These traits influence how students respond to stress and challenges.

## **COPING MECHANISMS**

How students deal with stress affects their mental health:

Poor coping methods—like avoiding homework, giving up easily, or withdrawing from friends—make depressive feelings worse. Many depressed students struggle with emotional regulation, meaning they find it hard to manage frustration, fear, or sadness. This leads to a cycle: stress → negative thoughts → loss of motivation → lower grades → more stress. The studies recommend helping students develop better coping strategies and providing support through counselors, teachers, and peer groups (Bansal et al. 185). “The study found that adolescents who had difficulty coping with academic stress showed significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms” (Bansal et al. 185). Teaching healthy coping strategies such as time management, relaxation techniques and positive thinking can help students deal with academic and emotional stress more effectively. Strengthening emotional regulation skills helps adolescents manage anxiety, frustration, and sadness better during stressful situations. Accessible mental health support at school, along with supportive teacher involvement, encourages early identification of emotional difficulties and reduces academic pressure. Peer support, social connections, and active parental awareness together create a strong support system that reduces isolation and helps students cope better both at school and home.

## **EMOTIONAL REGULATION**

Emotional regulation is about how well students can manage their feelings during stressful situations. The studies show that difficulty controlling emotions is strongly connected to depression and school problems.

Students who struggle with emotional regulation often feel overwhelmed, get upset easily, or have trouble calming down when stressed. Depression makes emotional control harder because students experience constant sadness, negative thoughts, and low energy, which interfere with how they react to challenges. Poor emotional regulation affects schoolwork — students find it difficult to focus, stay motivated, or complete tasks, especially when emotions take over their thinking. It also affects social life. Students may withdraw from friends, get irritated quickly, or struggle to handle conflicts, which adds to their stress. Over time, this creates a cycle: strong emotions → poor performance → more stress → stronger emotions. Overall, emotional regulation is important because it helps students handle school pressure, communicate better, and stay stable during tough moments.

## **BIOLOGICAL AND GENETIC FACTORS**

Biological and genetic factors play an important role in why some adolescents develop depression.

### **Hormonal changes during puberty**

During puberty, the body’s hormones change rapidly, which can affect mood, emotions, and energy levels. These hormonal shifts can make teenagers more sensitive to stress, causing sadness, irritability, or sudden emotional ups and downs. During this period the brain is still developing, especially areas that control emotions and decision-making, which can cause teens to struggle more with mood swings and emotional stability. These natural changes can make some students more vulnerable to depression during early and mid-adolescence.

### **Genetic predisposition- hereditary influences**

Depression can run in families. Teens with a family history of depression or anxiety are at a higher risk of developing similar issues. This doesn’t mean they will definitely become depressed, but it means they have a greater biological sensitivity to stress and negative emotions. Genetics can influence how a person reacts to challenges, how they cope, and how sensitive they are to emotional triggers. When hereditary risk combines with school pressure or social problems, the chances of depression increase (Bansal et al. 46). “The study found that adolescents with a family history of mental illness were more likely to experience depressive symptoms, indicating a genetic or hereditary predisposition to depression (Bansal et al. 46)”.

### **Role of neurotransmitters - like serotonin and dopamine**

Neurotransmitters are chemicals in the brain that help control mood, motivation, and emotional balance. Serotonin helps with mood stability, sleep, and feelings of well-being. Low serotonin levels are linked to sadness, irritability, and depression. Dopamine affects motivation, pleasure, and focus. When dopamine levels are low, students may feel unmotivated, tired, or unable to enjoy activities. Imbalances in these neurotransmitters can make it harder for adolescents to handle stress, regulate emotions, and stay motivated in school.

## **CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL INFLUENCES**

Cultural and social factors shape how adolescents understand mental health, express emotion, and seek help. This influence can increase or reduce the risk of depression.

### **Stereotypes and Stigma surrounding mental illness**

In many cultures, mental illness is seen as something to be hidden or ignored, which stops students from seeking help. Stereotypes like “depression is just laziness” or “strong people don’t feel sad” make young people feel ashamed of their emotions. Due to this stigma, many adolescents avoid counseling, don’t talk about their feelings, and remain untreated even when they need support” (Fröjd et al. 488) (Shaikh and Chandio 4). “The studies indicate that adolescents experiencing depression often withdraw socially and do not receive adequate support, suggesting that social attitudes and lack of awareness may prevent early help-seeking” (Fröjd et al. 488) (Shaikh and Chandio 4). The absence of open conversation about mental health prevents early recognition of depressive symptoms among adolescents. Without supportive environments or accessible counseling services, many adolescents remain untreated, allowing their condition to worsen over time. This creates a cycle of silence, withdrawal, and lack of support, which discourages adolescents from seeking help even when they clearly need it. Addressing stigma and improving mental health awareness can therefore be crucial to encourage adolescents to seek timely support and reduce the long-term impact of depression.

### **Gender norms and expectations**

Boys are often expected to be “strong” and not show emotions, so they may hide sadness or stress, increasing internal pressure. Girls may face more emotional expectations, academic pressure, or family responsibilities, which can increase stress. These gender roles can influence how depression appears, how they cope, and whether they seek help or not (Fröjd et al. 487).

“The study identified gender differences in depressive symptoms and academic performance, indicating that gender-related expectations may influence how adolescents experience and express depression” (Fröjd et al. 487). Gender differences in depression exist because gender roles are socially learned rather than biologically fixed. Society treats boys and girls differently in how they are expected to think, feel, and behave, which affects how they express emotional distress. Boys may avoid seeking help due to fear of appearing weak, while girls may internalize pressure to meet social expectations, influencing how depression manifests and is recognized. As a result, depressive symptoms may be underdiagnosed in boys and more visible but often dismissed in girls, making it important to understand these differences to encourage timely help-seeking.

#### **Socio economic disparities**

Students from low-income families may face financial stress, unstable home environment, or limited access to resources, which increases their chances of depression. Lack of access to quality education, safe neighborhoods, or proper healthcare adds to their emotional strain. These factors can affect self-confidence, academic performance, and their overall well-being.

#### **Community resources**

Strong community support- such as youth groups, counseling centers, sports clubs, and even safe community spaces- can help reduce depression. When communities lack these resources students may feel isolated, have no trusted adult to talk to, and miss early chances of aid. Access to mental health services, especially affordable ones, play a key role in protecting young people.

#### **Prevention strategies**

Effective prevention strategies help students manage their stress early and avoid long term mental health problems. Encouraging open conversations about mental health reduces stigma. Teaching coping skills, emotional regulation, and problem solving helps students handle school pressure. Early screening programs in schools can help identify students who need support before the symptoms worsen (Shaikh and Chandio 4). “The study highlights the need for school-based mental health interventions, early identification, and supportive educational environments to reduce depressive symptoms among adolescents” (Shaikh and Chandio 4).

### **SCHOOL BASED MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS**

Schools can provide counseling services, awareness workshops, peer support groups, and stress-management programs. These programs help students understand mental health, build confidence, and handle academic pressure. Creating a supportive environment, where students feel safe to talk about emotions, plays a major role in preventing depression.

### **PARENTAL GUIDANCE AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS**

Parents who understand the signs of depression can support their child early. Awareness campaigns teach families to recognize emotional struggles, communicate openly, and reduce harmful stigma. When parents provide emotional support, healthy routines and positive communication adolescents cope better with school and social challenges (Bansal et al. 185). “Family-related factors such as parental conflict and lack of emotional support were significantly associated with adolescent depression, highlighting the importance of parental guidance and awareness” (Bansal et al. 185).

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper explored depression among high students and showed that it is a serious and widespread issue that strongly affects both mental health and academic performance. By examining studies by Bansal et al. (2009), Fröjd et al. (2008), and Shaikh and Chandio, the paper highlighted how adolescent depression is influenced by many connected factors, including family environment, school pressure, peer relationships, psychological traits, biological vulnerability, and cultural and social conditions.

The research clearly shows that depression and academic performance are closely linked. Depressed students often struggle with concentration, motivation, and coping with academic demands, which leads to lower grades and disengagement from school. At the same time, academic stress, fear of failure, bullying, and performance anxiety can increase emotional distress and contribute to depression. This creates a cycle where poor mental health and poor academic performance reinforce each other.

Family and socio-economic factors also play a major role. Supportive family environments, financial stability, and positive parental involvement help protect adolescents from depression, while parental conflict, harsh discipline, and economic difficulties increase emotional stress. Similarly, negative school environments—such as bullying, teasing, peer rejection, and lack of support—were strongly linked to higher levels of depression. Psychological factors like low self-esteem, negative thinking, and poor coping skills further worsen emotional well-being, especially when students struggle to regulate their emotions.

The findings also suggest that biological and genetic vulnerability, especially family history of mental illness and the developmental sensitivity of adolescence, increases the risk of depression. Cultural stigma, gender expectations, and limited access to mental health resources often prevent students from seeking help early, allowing symptoms to worsen. This highlights the importance of schools, families, and communities working together to create supportive environments.

Overall, this research emphasizes that adolescent depression must be addressed through a holistic approach that includes school-based mental health programs, parental awareness, peer support, and early identification of emotional difficulties. While the reviewed studies provide strong evidence, further research is needed to better understand biological factors, cultural differences, and the long-term effectiveness of school and community interventions. Addressing these areas can help improve prevention strategies and ensure better mental health and academic outcomes for adolescents.

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