

Minds that Matter: Depression

How Common is Depression in Students? The Healthy Minds Study (U. Michigan--2017) surveyed 300 schools with 300,000 students. 18% meet criteria for Depression (14% for severe Depression) and the survey showed rising rates of suicidal ideation among students 6% (2007) to 14% (2019). Depression is twice as common in women as in men.

People with Depression are also at high risk for Anxiety and for Substance Use Disorders. According to Healthy Minds Surveys, approximately 1/3 of those with a diagnosable mental health problem received treatment. Asian students and Persons of Color were least likely to get treatment.

Outcomes for Students: Students with mental health issues tend to have lower GPAs and an increased tendency to drop out (doubled rate)

What Does Depression Look Like? (at least 5--most of the day, most every day for at least 2 weeks)

- Low energy, fatigue, loss of initiative
- Loss of interest in things (activities, social events, hobbies)/social withdrawal
- Feeling tearful, sad, "down" or "blue" (thinking is negative)
- Feeling excessively irritable or anxious
- Loss of appetite
- Problems with memory and concentration, attention, decision making, thinking
- Problems with sleep
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, self-blame, inadequacy
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Seasonal pattern occurs December-March: increased sleep, increased eating/weight

What Else Do We Know? Rates of Depression are quite low prior to puberty, but there is a dramatic increase in Depression during the teen years, and a continued steady rate of onset through middle age. Depression lasts an average of 4-9 months but 85% of people who have it once will have it again. Genetic risk factors can increase the likelihood of experiencing Depression. People are also more likely to become Depressed when they experience significant stress or a loss.

How does Depression Appear in the Classroom?

- Missing classes, showing up late (due to sleeping), problems with planning
- Problem with stamina (focus in a long class, staying awake)
- Lack of engagement, contribution, note taking (due to energy)
- Missing assignments, tests, etc.
- Inattention—cannot screen out irrelevant stimuli
- Easily overwhelmed and may be prone to give up easily
- Statements that indicate feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, hopelessness
- Problems with fatigue/low energy, dry mouth, slowed response time due to medication side effects.
- If the Depression begins during the semester, you may notice slower speech, slower walking, etc. for some students

Design Issues

- Organized syllabus and descriptions of assignments with key dates
- Allow some dropped and/or late assignments
- Provide a series of small assignments and feedback
- Avoid single, heavily weighted assignments
- Provide alternatives to presentations and discussions (journaling?)
- Do not heavily weight attendance
- Allow missed exams when necessary
- Include a well being statement in syllabus and try to appear welcoming and flexible