

# The Effects of Social Support on Depression

Dr. Priyanga Anuradha Senadheera & Prof. Romesh Jayasinghe\*

Institute of Mental Health, Sri Lanka

\*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7011138>

Received: 09 November 2023; Revised: 20 November 2023; Accepted: 22 November 2023; Published: 20 December 2023

## ABSTRACT

This review paper aims to provide a comprehensive review of the effects of social factors on depression. It explores the various social determinants that contribute to the development, maintenance, and exacerbation of depression in individuals. The paper examines the influence of social support, socioeconomic status and social isolation on depression. Additionally, it investigates the role of social media and online interactions in relation to depression. The findings of this review highlight the significant impact of social factors on depression and emphasize the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address these factors.

**Keywords:** Depression, Social support, Socio-economic, social media

## INTRODUCTION

### Definition and prevalence of depression

Depression is defined as a mood disorder characterized by a sense of inadequacy, despondency, decreased activity, pessimism, anhedonia, and sadness. These symptoms severely disrupt and adversely affect a person's life, sometimes leading to suicide attempts or results. According to WHO estimates, depression will become the second most common disease in terms of incidence within a decade worldwide, with 1 in 5 women suffering from depression and 12 men. Not only adults, but 2% of school children and 5% of adolescents also suffer from depression, and these symptoms are hardly identified. Depression is the most common reason people see a psychiatrist, despite the general perception that all psychological problems are depressive<sup>1-2</sup>. What we see in most patients are myths related to depression. People still believe that it is due to a weak personality, or because the illness can be cured on its own, or because the medicine will last a lifetime and is just a sedative (Iyer & Khan, 2012).

All these myths are mostly created by faith healers, unqualified counselors and non-medical professionals for their own benefit, and mostly by society lack of understanding. Increased awareness and an increased approach by psychiatrists is the main cause of the increase in patient numbers and not necessarily an increase in prevalence. With newer medications and better facilities, treating depression has become easier and most people respond very well to treatment and return to optimal functioning very quickly (Iyer & Khan, 2012).

There are mainly three different types of depression (Iyer & Khan (2012):

1. Major depression: This type of depression is characterized by a combination of symptoms that interfere with a person's ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities. These episodes of depression can occur once, twice, or several times in a lifetime.
2. Dysthymia: Dysthymia is a less severe type of depression that involves chronic symptoms that do not

disable but keep a person from functioning at their full potential or feeling good. People with dysthymia may also experience major depressive episodes.

3. Manic-depressive or bipolar disorder: This form of depression is less prevalent than other types. It involves cycles of depression and elation or mania. The mood switches can be dramatic and rapid or gradual. During the depressed cycle, a person may experience symptoms of a depressive illness, while during the manic cycle, they may experience symptoms of mania.

## Methodology

In the context of a review paper, the conventional requirement for a distinct methodology section is alleviated. Unlike empirical research papers, wherein the delineation of methodological procedures is imperative for the validation of original findings, the essence of a review paper lies in the comprehensive analysis and synthesis of existing literature. Therefore, the omission of a dedicated methodology section is considered judicious, as the primary aim is to offer a thorough overview of established knowledge rather than to present novel research methods.”

## IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL FACTORS IN DEPRESSION

### The impact of social support on mental health

Social factors play a crucial role in shaping health outcomes, influencing disease incidence, prevalence, and persistence. Among these factors, social support, or the perceived level of assistance individuals receive, holds particular significance for mental health. It encompasses the interactions between people, impacting an individual’s well-being. The belief in the existence of social support is key, offering both physical and psychological advantages, especially during stressful events. While various studies have explored the relationship between social support and health, these studies differ in populations, methodologies, and instruments, leading to varied and sometimes contradictory results (Harandi, 2017).

To address this diversity, systematic extraction and integration of research findings become vital. Meta-analysis, a method used to amalgamate diverse studies, aims not only to summarize findings but also to identify specific factors influencing the results. In the context of social support’s impact on physical health, a meta-analysis of 41 studies revealed a correlation range between social support and health outcomes. Additionally, studies examining the relationship between social capital and mental health indicated a significant predictive role of social support in various health outcomes. Notably, a meta-analysis on patient adherence to medical regimens underscored the influence of content and methodology variables on the effectiveness of social support interventions. Despite these insights, previous meta-analyses in Iran lacked comprehensive representation and failed to consider moderator variables such as gender, measurement instruments, and sampling methods. Consequently, this study was conducted to provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of the correlation between social support and mental health in the Iranian population (Harandi, 2017).

### Types and sources of social support

The two types of social support in depression are:

1. Emotional support – This type of support involves providing empathy, love, and care to the person experiencing depression. It helps in reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.
2. Instrumental support – This type of support involves providing practical help and assistance to the person experiencing depression. It helps in reducing stress and improving coping skills.

## The sources of social support in depression

1. Family and friends – They can provide emotional and instrumental support to the person experiencing depression.
2. Mental health professionals – They can provide emotional support and help in improving coping skills through therapy and counseling.
3. Support groups – They can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging to the person experiencing depression

The participants in a study reported receiving support from various sources. They had high levels of support from family members, good friends, and other adults. In terms of types of support, most participants had access to informational support, such as receiving good advice during a crisis. However, less than half of the participants felt they had enough people to count on for material support, such as someone to loan them money in an emergency (Vans, 2022).

The main findings of the study include Young adults with a history of out-of-home care reported high levels of support from family members, good friends, and other adults. Having support from an adult family member was associated with fewer mental health symptoms and higher life satisfaction.

Having good friends for support was associated with fewer mental health symptoms. It is important to have enough people to provide informational support (e.g., giving good advice) was associated with fewer mental health symptoms and higher life satisfaction. In addition, enough people to provide material support (e.g., loaning money in an emergency) was associated with fewer mental health symptoms and higher life satisfaction. Having a mental health diagnosis was associated with more mental health symptoms and lower life satisfaction. Gender was also a significant factor, with males reporting higher life satisfaction than females (Vans, 2022).

These findings highlight the importance of social support, particularly from family members and friends, in promoting better mental health and life satisfaction among young adults with a history of out-of-home care. Additionally, the availability of both informational and material support was crucial for their well-being (Vans, 2022).

## NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF LACK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON DEPRESSION

The negative effects of lack of social support on depression have been widely studied and documented. Some key points are Increased risk of depression. Lack of social support has been consistently linked to higher rates of depression. Social support provides individuals with a sense of belonging, emotional support, and resources to cope with stressors. Without these, individuals are more vulnerable to developing depression (McDaniel & Amos, 1983).

Lack of social support can hinder the effectiveness of treatment for depression. Social support plays a crucial role in encouraging individuals to seek help, adhere to treatment plans, and provide a supportive environment during the recovery process. Without adequate support, treatment outcomes may be compromised. Increased risk of recurrence: Individuals lacking social support are more likely to experience recurrent episodes of depression. Having a strong support network can act as a protective factor against relapse, as it provides ongoing emotional support and assistance in managing stressors (McDaniel & Amos, 1983).

Greater severity and longer duration of depressive symptoms: Lack of social support is associated with more severe depressive symptoms and longer durations of depressive episodes. Social isolation and loneliness can exacerbate feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and despair. Impact on overall well-being: Lack of social

support not only affects depression but also has a negative impact on overall well-being. It can lead to increased stress levels, reduced self-esteem, and impaired social functioning (McDaniel & Amos, 1983).

## **SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND DEPRESSION**

### **The relationship between socioeconomic status and depression**

The relationship between socioeconomic status and depression is a well-established topic in psychology and sociology. Research has consistently shown that individuals with lower socioeconomic status are at a higher risk for developing depression and other mental health issues. This may be due to a variety of factors, such as increased stress, limited access to healthcare, and social isolation.

### **Income inequality and its influence on depression**

Socioeconomic status influences individual health behaviors and contributes to the complex relationship between health and development due to the complexity, the relationship between Socio economic status (SES) and health behaviors is not yet fully understood. Therefore, this review aims to evaluate the association between socioeconomic status and health-related behaviors during childhood and adolescence. Preferred Reporting protocol guideline for systematic review and meta-analysis was used to conduct a systematic review of the literature(Gautam et al.,2023)

This review found that children and adolescents of low socioeconomic status face an increased risk of unhealthy behaviors (e.g., early initiation of smoking, diets rich in energy, low physical activity and substance abuse), unlike their counterparts so there is a great chance of getting depression for them. In contrast, children and adolescents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have higher odds of engaging in health-promoting behaviors, such as increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, dairy products, regular small breakfasts, adherence to a nutritious diet and commitment to a healthy diet. active lifestyle. . The results of this study highlight the need to implement specific interventions to support families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to reduce significant disparities in behavioral outcomes (Gautam et al.,2023)

## **SOCIAL ISOLATION AND DEPRESSION**

Social isolation and loneliness are growing problems among the ageing society. The comparability of the distribution of social isolation in our sample with another study among community-dwelling elderly in Singapore using the same measure indicates that although social isolation is most common in elder population, their prevalence among the young and middle aged group are also of concern. The importance of high frequencies of social connectedness with relatives on low level of loneliness has been recognized in prior literature, data shows that the social connectedness with friends also has a statistically significant association with loneliness (Ge,2017).

This look at indicates that depressive symptom score is better amongst more socially remoted contributors. although various studies have stated that social isolation (with definition and measurement varied) is related to depressive symptoms, the associations of social connectedness with family and friends with depressive signs and symptoms are hardly ever distinguished. This observe disentangles these factors of social isolation and examines their associations (together with other social isolation signs) with depressive signs respectively. The consequences show that poorer social connectedness with friends and with family are related to increased depressive signs and symptoms, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors, modern-day smoking repute, alcohol intake, preceding diagnosis of despair and number of persistent conditions. furthermore, our records suggest that the effect of social connectedness with friends on depressive symptoms is greater principal than that of social connectedness with relatives the various examine populace. This locating confirms the importance of friendship in stopping or assuaging depressive

signs and symptoms. preceding take a look at indicates that dwelling alone contributes to poorer despair amongst aged persons however, this shows that dwelling alone does no longer appear to have a full-size affiliation with depressive symptoms in adult populace. this means that social isolation isn't in reality a characteristic of the amount or format of social connectedness (i.e. dwelling on my own), different aspects of social isolation (i.e. social aid and social integration) can also have better impact on depressive symptoms in person population(Ge,2017).

This study indicates that depressive symptom score is better amongst more socially remoted contributors. although various studies have stated that social isolation (with definition and measurement varied) is related to depressive symptoms, the associations of social connectedness with family and friends with depressive signs and symptoms are hardly ever distinguished. This observe disentangles these factors of social isolation and examines their associations with depressive signs respectively. The consequences show that poorer social connectedness with friends and with family are related to increased depressive signs and symptoms, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors, modern-day smoking repute, alcohol intake, preceding diagnosis of despair and number of persistent conditions (Ge,2017).

furthermore, this records suggests that the effect of social connectedness with friends on depressive symptoms is greater principal than that of social connectedness with relatives the various examine populace. This locating confirms the importance of friendship in stopping or assuaging depressive signs and symptoms. preceding take a look at indicates that dwelling alone contributes to poorer despair amongst aged persons however, our observe shows that dwelling alone does no longer appear to have a full-size affiliation with depressive symptoms in adult populace. this means that social isolation isn't in reality a characteristic of the amount or format of social connectedness (i.e. dwelling on my own), different aspects of social isolation (i.e. social aid and social integration) can also have better impact on depressive symptoms in person population (Ge,2017).

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEPRESSION**

Studies at the affiliation among social media use and despair have yielded blended results. some studies propose that social media customers might also revel in decreased despair, probably from an boom in social capital, perceived social assist, and lifestyles pleasure. different studies, however, indicate that common use of social media can be associated with declines in subjective well-being, life pride, and actual-life community. All of these previous research, however, had been restrained by means of small and/or localized samples. moreover, they've tended to attention on one precise platform, face book, at the same time as actual-life utilization, in particular amongst teenagers, tends to comprise a various array of social media web sites along with Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Tumblr, and Snapchat (Lin et al. (2016).

This indicates that depressive symptom score is better amongst more socially remoted contributors. although various studies have stated that social isolation is related to depressive symptoms, the associations of social connectedness with family and friends with depressive signs and symptoms are hardly ever distinguished. This observes disentangles these factors of social isolation and examines their associations (together with other social isolation signs) with depressive signs respectively. The consequences show that poorer social connectedness with friends and with family are related to increased depressive signs and symptoms, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors, modern-day smoking repute, alcohol intake, preceding diagnosis of despair and number of persistent conditions. furthermore, our records suggest that the effect of social connectedness with friends on depressive symptoms is greater principal than that of social connectedness with relatives the various examine populace. This locating confirms the importance of friendship in stopping or assuaging depressive signs and symptoms. preceding take a look at indicates that dwelling alone contributes to poorer despair amongst aged persons however, our observe shows that dwelling alone does no longer appear to have a full-size affiliation with depressive symptoms in adult

populace. this means that social isolation isn't in reality a characteristic of the amount or format of social connectedness (i.e. dwelling on my own), different aspects of social isolation (i.e. social aid and social integration) can also have better impact on depressive symptoms in person population (Lin et al. (2016).

Social media use is growing among U.S. teenagers, and its affiliation with intellectual well-being stays doubtful (Lin et al., 2016). Records show that social media usage amongst young adults (aged 18–29) has multiplied from 90 minutes in step with day in 2012 to 144 minutes per day in 2019 (Pew studies Centre, 2019). melancholy is an intellectual health disorder which can begin around younger adulthood, and even as there are multiple elements that make a contribution to depression, the ability impact of social media use on psychological well-being is of developing hobby (Shensa et al., 2017). despair and depressive symptoms convey the heaviest burden of disability among mental and behavioral disorders, and for teens in particular, despair is related to an increased danger of substance abuse, terrible educational performance, and suicide (Shensa et al., 2017). studies indicate that accelerated social media use should lead to negative online stories, fewer in-character social interactions, and a decreased ability to sustain interest, which could motive signs of despair (Shensa et al., 2017). Zhang et al. (2014) located that although social media appears harmless, many university college students who have interaction in big quantities of social media use are extra disillusioned with their lives and are extra depressed than folks who are concerned in interactive activities (Rainer, 2021).

## KEY FINDINGS

1. Social support, including emotional and instrumental support, plays a crucial role in influencing mental health outcomes, particularly in the context of depression.
2. Types of social support include emotional support (empathy, love, and care) and instrumental support (practical help and assistance).
3. Sources of social support for individuals experiencing depression include family and friends, mental health professionals, and support groups.
4. Lack of social support is associated with an increased risk of depression. Social support provides individuals with a sense of belonging, emotional support, and resources to cope with stressors, and without these, individuals are more vulnerable to developing depression.
5. Lack of social support can hinder the effectiveness of treatment for depression. It plays a crucial role in encouraging individuals to seek help, adhere to treatment plans, and provide a supportive environment during the recovery process. Without adequate support, treatment outcomes may be compromised.
6. Individuals with lower socioeconomic status are at a higher risk for developing depression and other mental health issues, likely due to factors such as increased stress, limited access to healthcare, and social isolation.
7. There is a strong association between socioeconomic status and health-related behaviors during childhood and adolescence. Children and adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as early initiation of smoking, diets rich in energy, low physical activity, and substance abuse, which can increase their risk of developing depression.
8. Social isolation and loneliness are significant concerns among the aging population, but their prevalence among the young and middle-aged groups is also notable.
9. The study highlights the importance of social connectedness with both relatives and friends in relation to feelings of loneliness and depressive symptoms.
10. Studies on the association between social media use and depression have yielded mixed results, with some suggesting that social media use may lead to decreased depression due to increased social capital, perceived social support, and life satisfaction, while others indicate that frequent social media use could be associated with declines in subjective well-being and life satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

Summary of key findings on the effects of social factors on depression Implications for interventions and support systems targeting social factors Recommendations for future research in this area by conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature, this research paper aims to contribute to the understanding of how social factors impact depression. It emphasizes the importance of considering social determinants when developing interventions and support systems for individuals with depression.

## REFERENCES

1. Gautam, N., Dessie, G., Rahman, M.M., & Khanam. (2023). Socioeconomic status and health behavior in children and adolescents. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11:1228632. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2023.1228632
2. Ge, L., Yap, C., Ong R., & Heng, B (2017). Social isolation, loneliness and their relationships with depressive symptoms: A population-based study. *PLOS ONE* 12(8) <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182145>
3. Harandi, T. F. (2017). The correlation of social support with mental health. *Electronic Physician*, 9(9), 5212-5222. <http://dx.doi.org/10.19082/5212>
4. Iyer, K., & Khan, Z.A. (2012). depression-A review. *Research journal of recent sciences*, 1(4), 79-87.
5. Lin, L.Y., Sidani, J.E, Shensa, A., Radovic A., Miller E., Colditz, J.B., & Primack, B.A. (2016). Association between social media use and depression among U.S. young adults. *Depression and Anxiety*, 33(4), 323-331. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22466>
6. McDaniel, S. H., & Amos, S. (1983). The risk of change: Teaching the family as the unit of medical care. *Family Systems Medicine*, 1(3), 25-30. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0090088>
7. Rainer, C.S. (2021). Association between Social Media Use and Depression among U.S. Young Adults. *Research gate*
8. Shensa, A., Escobar-Viera, C. G., Sidani, J. E., Bowman, N. D., Marshal, M. P., & Primack, B. A. (2017). Problematic social media use and depressive symptoms among U.S. young adults: A nationally-representative study. *Social Science & Medicine*, 182, 150-157
9. vans, R., Katz, C. C., Fulginiti, A., & Taussig, H. (2022). Sources and Types of Social Supports and Their Association with Mental Health Symptoms and Life Satisfaction among Young Adults with a History of Out-of-Home Care. *Children*, 9(4), 520. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9040520>