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DEPRESSION AND ATTITUDES TO DEPRESSION AMONG STUDENTS OF A RUSSIAN MEDICAL UNIVERSITY DURING THE PANDEMIC CORONAVIRUS

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ABSTRACT — The paper analyzes the attitude towards depression and the level of depression among medical students. Astrakhan State Medical University (Astrakhan, Russia) conducted a survey of students on their attitude towards depression, whether they consider depression a dangerous disease and whether they believe that it is necessary to consult a specialist in the presence of depression. The data of the depression level research and coping strategies among medical students are presented. In the course of study, it was found out that students know the symptoms of depression and the majority of them assess the effect of depression on their health correctly, however, they are not sufficiently informed about the treatment of depression and are biased against antidepressants. More symptoms of depression were diagnosed among junior students than that among senior ones. We identified that the students cannot adequately assess their mental condition and determine whether they have depression or not. It should be noted that students are practically not informed about such a disease as depression and it is necessary to carry out psychoeducational work with student youth.

KEYWORDS — attitude towards depression; medical students; coping strategies; depression; questioning; seeking social support; psychological help.

RELEVANCE

Depression is a serious emotional disorder that affects people of all ages, including children and adolescents [5]. It is characterized by a steady state of sad and irritable mood and loss of interest and pleasure in life [4]. These feelings are accompanied by a number of additional symptoms that affect appetite and sleep, the level of activity and concentration, as well as well-being [6, 7]. Depression is one of the most common mental disorders. WHO estimates that it affects more than 300 million people of all age groups. In adolescence, the overall prevalence of depression is 15 to 40%. In extreme cases, depression can lead to suicide,

one of the leading causes of death among young people aged 15-29. According to WHO forecasts, depression may come out on top in the world, overtaking today's leaders - infectious and cardiovascular diseases. Endogenous and exogenous depression are distinguished, endogenous depression is considered the most severe, in which it is necessary to consult a specialist. The effective treatment for depression is medication and psychotherapy [1]. Student youth falls into the risk group for developing depression and is considered to be the target group which is necessary to carry out preventive work for the early active detection of this disease with [8]. In general, it can be argued that depressive states significantly reduce a person's quality of life, vitality and interest in life. In the study of L.V. Kochorova, V.S. Skripova, A.S. Slivka. [2] it was found out that the majority of the surveyed students had symptoms of anxiety and depression, and a third of the surveyed students were ready to receive psychotherapeutic assistance. In the work of A.A. Yezhov, A.A. Parsadanyan. [3] the symptoms of severe depression and depression of moderate severity among students are characterized by the phenomenon that most of the time they are occupied only with themselves and their own thoughts and problems. During this difficult period, the personality is undergoing a restructuring of the psycho-emotional sphere, adaptation to new conditions, and the development of new coping strategies. Coping strategies are behavioral strategies that are characterized by flexibility and purposefulness. The study of the level of depression and attitudes towards depression in a sample of medical university students seems to be especially important in connection with the high academic load, longer training in comparison with students of other specialties. An additional risk factor is the epidemiological situation associated with coronavirus infection. Thus, the problem of studying the emergence and spread of depressive disorders at a young age is relevant today. Hence, there is an urgent need to study attitude towards depression in students and to determine the level of depression in the student environment. This topic is also relevant in connection with the spread of depressive disorders, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the creation of preventive

measures in the early stages to normalize the psychoemotional state of students, and increase awareness of depressive disorders. The results of the study will help to contribute to the field of differential diagnosis of depression among students, as well as to the prevention of depression and the reduction of negative consequences.

The aim of the study

is to study the attitude towards depression, identify the level of depressive symptoms and coping strategies in the student environment.

MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHODS

A survey on the attitude towards depression and psychodiagnostic examination of students was conducted in the Astrakhan State Medical University, at the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy. The research was done in December 2020. The comprehensive study involved 80 students of a medical university in the number of 1–5 courses, studying in the specialties "General Medicine", "Pediatrics". The average age is 20.2 years. The following methods were used in the study: 1) the author's questionnaire "Attitude of medical university students to depression", which allows to determine the attitude towards depression, whether they consider depression a dangerous disease, whether depression affects human health and whether they believe that it is necessary to turn to specialists when the presence of depression; 2) the level of depression was diagnosed using the scale (test questionnaire) A.T. Beck (Beck Depression Inventory), adapted by N.V. Tarabrina, which includes 21 categories of symptoms and complaints [9]. Beck's test questionnaire includes 21 statement questions that concern the behavior, thoughts and feelings of the test-taker in the past 2 weeks; 3) the methodology "indicator coping strategies" by J. Amirkhan (adapted by N. A. Sirota and V. M. Yaltonsky), designed to diagnose the dominant coping strategies of the individual [10]. Further processing of the data was carried out using the Student's t-test to identify the significance of differences, the K. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the correlation analysis of the data obtained. The SPSS-22.0 software package was used. During the study, a positive attitude to the situation and interest in the expected results were noted; there were no refusals during the survey. The research results are presented in the figures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire survey "Attitude of medical university students to depression" showed that 67.5% (54 people) experienced symptoms of

depression in themselves or their loved ones at different periods of time. For example, 40.0% of them (32 interviewed students) noted that they themselves experienced a state of mild depression, significant stable and low mood and loss of appetite, 17.5% (14 people) observed a depressive state in their parents for various factors, such as stress or psychosomatic illnesses, and about 10.0% (8 interviewed respondents) experienced depressive symptoms in their friends and close social environment. 32.5% (26 students) did not experience a state of depression. In the course of the survey, students of the medical university were asked to assess the severity and danger of depression as a disease. As a result, it turned out that 37.5% (30 people) do not consider depression a dangerous disease that needs to be taken seriously. The average score for assessing the severity of depression in comparison with other diseases is 6 points on a ten-point scale among the studied students. This result is an alarm.

The questionnaire "Attitude of medical university students to depression" included questions that reveal the awareness of medical university students how depression affects the quality of life and health of people. It was found that 55.0% (44 interviewed respondents) noted that in a state of depression, a person experiences apathy, loses motivation for various types of activities (training, work, hobbies, etc.); 40.0% (32 people) indicated that in a state of depression suicidal thoughts can occur in a person. About 5.0% (4 interviewed respondents) associate the presence of a depressive state with increased conflict, irritability, emotional stress, as well as the manifestation of aggressive behavior in people. In the studied sample of medical students, opinions were divided regarding the effect of depression on a person's somatic health. The influence of a depressive state on health and on the quality of human life is noted by 75.0% (60 people). Depression only in some cases can affect the psychosomatic state of a person is noted by 10.0% (8 surveyed students). The absence of a connection between a depressive state and a healthy state was indicated by 15.0% (12 surveyed students).

The next block of questions in our questionnaire concerned what helps to cope with the state of depression and its symptoms. 47.5% (38 respondents) answered that a person in a state of depression should "pull himself together" and direct his activity to improve his mood. 30% (24 respondents) noted that in a depressive state and in depression, it is necessary to seek help from a specialist (psychologist, psychiatrist or psychotherapist). As an effective remedy for depression and anxiety, 15% (12 students) offer good rest. And 7.5% (6 people) noted that doing important things helps to cope with depression and neuroses. For help in a state of depression, 42.5% (34 respond-

ents) consider it necessary to consult a psychologist, 42.5% (34 respondents) — to a psychotherapist, 5.0% (4 respondents) — to a psychiatrist and 10.0% (8 respondents) do not consider it necessary to consult a specialist. This result is cause for concern. Treatment of depression without medication is preferred by 85.0% (68 students), students are afraid of the consequences of using antidepressants and believe that addiction to them is possible. The second stage of the study was to determine, using psychodiagnostic testing on a scale (test questionnaire) A.T. Beck (Beck Depression Inventory), adapted by N.V. Tarabrina, the presence of the level of depression and the severity of depressive disorder in medical students (Fig. 1).

As a result of psychological testing, it was found that 60.0% (48 people) of the surveyed students of medical and pediatric faculties had no depressive symptoms and signs of depression. A mild level of depression (subdepressive state) was diagnosed in 22.5% (18 people) of the respondents, including 11 first-year students and 7 fifth-year students. A mild level of depression does not require serious psychological assistance, however, informing and creating preventive measures in the early stages will help prevent the development of a depressive state and emotional disorders in students. The average level of depression (moderate depression) was found in 8.75% of medical students (7 people). It can be assumed that this result reflects the stressful state of students in the process of educational activities, the ongoing pandemic of coronavirus infection and the state of exit after self-isolation. Such a result may be a reflection of the neurotic state of the students. Severe depression (moderate) was observed in 8.75% of the respondents (7 people). This result may also be a reflection of stress and personality influences. Based on psychodiagnostic testing on a scale (test questionnaire) A.T. Beck, the students were distributed as follows: Group 1 - students who have no signs of depression in the amount of 48 people (60.0%); Group 2 - students with a mild level of depression in the amount of 18 people (22.5%); Group 3 — students with moderate and severe depression in the amount of 14 people (17.5%).

As a result of test diagnostics using the “indicator of coping strategies” technique by J. Amirkhan (adaptation by N. A. Sirota and V. M. Yaltonsky) showed (Figure 2) that for students of the first group without signs of depression, the dominant coping strategy is “problem solving” (24.8%). Medical students of the first group demonstrate a constructive approach to solving life problems and situations, which is a positive indicator of adaptation to social life (Fig. 2).

Students of the second group with a mild level of depression also prefer the productive coping strategy

of “problem solving” (23.1%), indicating that they are ready to solve emerging difficulties through dialogue with others, that is, they are focused on a productive and constructive way of overcoming difficult situations.

Among the students of the third group with moderate and severe depression, it was found out that most often they use the strategy of “avoiding problems” (23.3%). This coping strategy is the least effective attempt to get out of stressful situations. The identified coping strategy can negatively affect the psychological health of students and may be a prerequisite for the development of depressive disorder. Thus, students with moderate to severe depression use the non-constructive coping strategy of “avoidance”. This coping strategy in the third group was significantly higher in comparison with the 1st and 2nd groups of respondents ($p < 0.05$). In the questionnaire, students gave a subjective assessment of their condition, noted the absence or presence of depression. The level of depression among students was diagnosed using a scale (test questionnaire) by A.T. Beck (Beck Depression Inventory), adapted by N.V. Tarabrina. We carried out a correlation analysis of the data obtained. K. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used. The relationship between the subjective assessment of the state and the level of depression according to the A.T. Beck was found ($r = 0.177$; $p > 0.05$). The obtained result of the correlation analysis indicates that students cannot adequately assess their condition and determine whether they have depression. The results obtained during the study are preliminary, and work in this area is promising and will continue.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the results of the study, it should be noted that the students are familiar with the symptoms of depression and assess the impact of depression on health correctly. However, they are less informed about the treatment of depression and are biased against antidepressants. The opinion of whether depression is a disease was divided equally among the student community. It was found out that the students with moderate and severe depression most often use the non-constructive strategy of “avoiding problems” while facing stressful situations. In connection with the results obtained, it is necessary to note the importance of psychoeducation work on the treatment and prevention of depression. It is necessary to work with student youth to inform them about the risk factors, methods of preventing depression and promoting a healthy lifestyle. The results of this study will help to contribute to the differential diagnosis and prevention of reducing the negative consequences of depression.

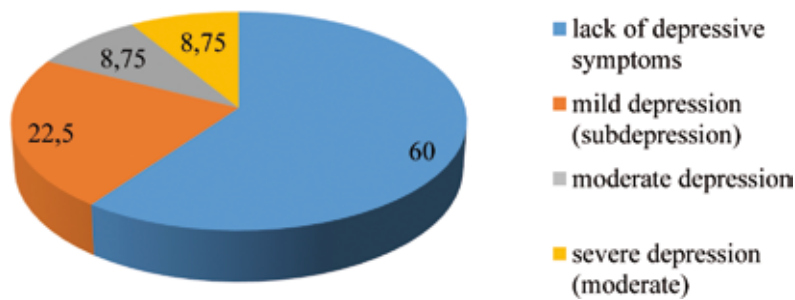


Fig. 1. Average indicators of the level of depression in medical students according to the A.T. scale. Beck (compiled by the authors based on research materials)

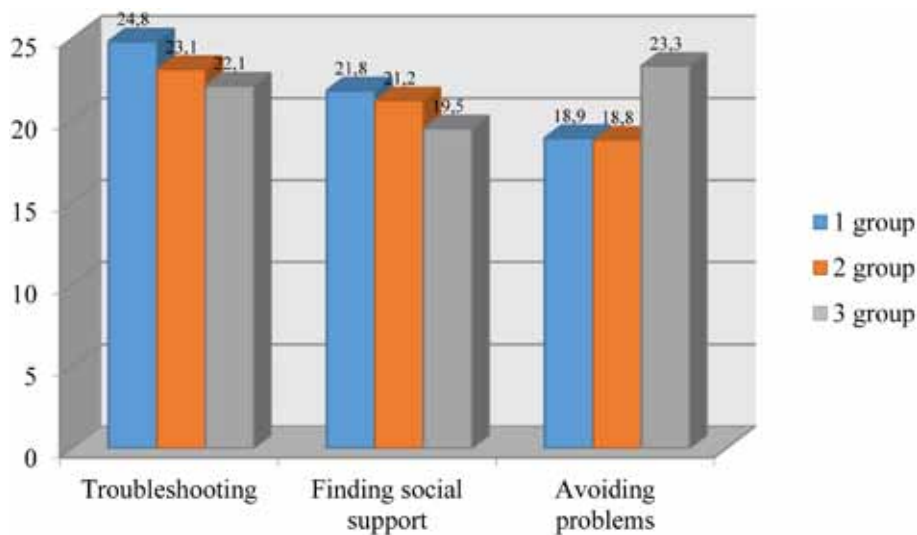


Fig. 2. Average indicators of the level of depression among students of a medical university. Methodology "indicator of coping strategies" by J. Amirkhan (compiled by the authors based on research materials)

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