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PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS PREDISPOSING DEPRESSION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN UNIVERSITIES IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:
This study empirically investigated psychosocial factors predisposing depression among undergraduates in universities in Edo State, Nigeria. The study employed a correlational survey design. The sample size for the study consisted of eight hundred and ninety-six (896) undergraduate students selected from three sampled universities. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire, titled: Psycho-Social Factors Predisposing Depression Among Undergraduates (PSFPDAU). It has eight (8) sections; Section A covers the biodata of the students like sex and university of study, while sections B to H cover items on depression, and psychosocial factors. The result of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship between negative thought patterns, social isolation, sense of hopelessness, stigmatization, financial/economic hardship, academic stress and psychosocial factors with depression. The study recommends that universities should establish robust mental health support systems to help vulnerable students. Institutions should implement anti-stigma campaigns to foster

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a culture of acceptance and encourage students to seek help without fear of discrimination, among others.

Keywords: depression, negative thought pattern, social isolation, sense of hopelessness, stigmatization, financial/economic hardship, academic stress, psychosocial factors

1. Introduction

Depression has been found to rank among the leading causes of emotional problems in individuals (Yamani *et al.,* 2026; Dembo *et al.*, 2026). University students are faced with many problems that could culminate in varying degrees of stress, anxiety and depression (SAD). Challenges that could trigger depression among university students include: negative thoughts, social isolation, sense of hopelessness, stigmatization, financial and economic hardship, academic stress and psychosocial factors. These interrelated constructs have increased the global burden of depression cases among the university student population.

Negative thinking, such as self-destructive or nihilistic thinking, could lead people to hold harmful beliefs about themselves (Remes *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, social isolation, a state of disconnect from social interactions, is another possible predictor of depression among university students. Studies have linked it with mental illness (McIntyre *et al.*, 2018); loneliness and high risk of suicide (Taliaferro *et al.*, 2019); misunderstandings and hostility (Suh *et al.*, 2022); and substance abuse (Chae *et al.*, 2022). In addition, hopelessness as a predictor of depression may manifest as negative emotions (Marsiglia *et al.*, 2011; Beck *et al.*, 2020); a sense of emptiness (Lew *et al.*, 2019); negative expectations and mood swings (Lima *et al.*, 2021; Assari & Lankarani, 2016).

Stigmatization could also be a predictor of depression. It may hinder some students from seeking professional help (Ibrahim *et al.,* 2019). Furthermore, financial and economic hardship may predispose depression, especially in a country like Nigeria where the standard of living is high. Low-income families experiencing poverty have been linked to stress, anxiety and depression (SAD) among university students (Thomas *et al.*, 2020), while high-income families have been found to cope better with negative psychological experiences (Li *et al.*, 2019). Academic stress could also predispose university students to depression (Jayanthi *et al.*, 2015). Academic stress could come from academic work or excessive worry about academic performance (Olum *et al.*, 2020).

2. Studies on Negative Thoughts and Depression

Previous studies associated negative thoughts with depression. Gongxing *et al.* (2023) found that rumination mediated the relationship between negative life events and depressive symptoms among Chinese students. Ahadi *et al.* (2018) equally noted that rumination partially mediated depression in a study. In addition, Chan and Sun (2020) observed among university students in Hong Kong that irrational beliefs were associated

with depression. Zhang *et al.* (2025) and Zhang *et al.* (2023) also revealed that negative life events (which include negative thinking) had a significant effect on depression and significantly predicted depression respectively. These studies provide empirical evidence of a possible correlation between negative thoughts and depression.

2.1 Studies on Social Isolation and Depression

On social isolation and depressive moods, Alsadoun *et al.* (2023) posited that social isolation among adolescents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia significantly associated with depression. Similarly, Karaağaç and Yilmaz (2023) confirmed frequency of depression was significantly higher in participants with insufficient physical activity levels due to social isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Alshammari *et al.* (2023) observed that social isolation had negative effects on international college students' mental health and well-being. Furthermore, Geng-feng *et al.* (2022) confirmed that social exclusion was positively associated with undergraduate students' depression. It could be observed from these studies that social isolation could relate to depression.

2.2 Studies on Sense of Hopelessness and Depression

Regarding sense of hopelessness and depression, Zainal *et al.* (2026) found that low self-acceptance correlated with depression. Similarly, Mares and Fuller (2026) observed a medium-strong association between intolerance of uncertainty and depression symptoms in children and adolescents. In addition, Mustafa *et al.* (2018) reported a significant positive correlation between hopelessness and depression. Nalipay and Ku (2018) also revealed a significant indirect effect of hopelessness on depression. Corroborating previous reports, Zhang *et al.* (2022) posited that hopelessness moderated and related to depressive symptoms. Again, these studies provide sufficient evidence of the possibility of a sense of hopelessness correlating with depression.

2.3 Studies on Stigmatization and Depression

On stigmatization and depression, Prizeman *et al.* (2023 revealed that stigma was related to depressive symptoms. Similarly, Habib *et al.* (2022) found that depressive symptoms and stigma were associated with depression among university students in Sarawak. Meisel *et al.* (2022) also noticed that higher levels of education-related stigma were associated with greater levels of depressive symptoms. Based on the findings of these studies, stigmatization could be linked with depression.

2.4 Studies on Financial/Economic Hardship and Depression

Concerning financial/economic hardship and depression, Isara *et al.* (2022) observed that financial challenges significantly predicted depression among undergraduate students in Nigeria. In addition, Bakesia *et al.* (2023) noted that socio- economic status of parents and being orphaned significantly related to depression among students in Kakamega County, Kenya. Similarly, Mac-Ginty *et al.* (2023) noted that family socioeconomic status/class and financial stress were positively associated with depressive symptoms. Choi *et al.* (2022)

also indicated that changes in financial hardship were associated with depression. Collaborating with previous studies, Ahmed *et al.* (2020) noted that depression was related to pocket money; Islam *et al.* (2018) linked depression to poor financial backgrounds; and Ismail and Shujaat (2018) concluded that socioeconomic status had a significant relationship with participants' mental health.

2.5 Studies on Academic Stress and Depression

Regarding academic stress and depression, previous studies reported that academic stress predicted depressive disorder among Vietnamese adolescents (Ho *et al.*, 2023); had a significant impact on depression in college students in China (Chen *et al.*, 2024); significantly associated with depression among students in Uganda (Olum *et al.*, 2020); had a positive and significant relationship with depression among students in Malaysia (Sawai *et al.*, 2022); and associated with higher levels of depression among students in Nigeria (Aluh *et al.*, 2020). Previous studies also reported that academic stress impacted depressive symptoms (Zhang *et al.*, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2021; Preethi *et al.*, 2023; Deng *et al.*, 2022); was a significant predictor of depression (Zhang *et al.*, 2022); and significantly correlated with psychological well-being (Barbayannis *et al.*, 2022). The plethora of literature reviewed here shows the tendency of academic stress predisposing depression.

2.6 Studies on Psychosocial Factors and Depression

Studies on psychosocial factors and depression reveal statistical relationship between these variables. For instance, Ravichandhiran *et al.* (2026) observed that depression was significantly associated with parental education and occupation, living arrangements, and sleep patterns. Deng *et al.* (2022) found that family stress impacted students' depression levels. Corroborating, Ogunsanwo and Akintola (2023) found a significant relationship between family support and depression among Nigerian undergraduate students. In addition, Preethi *et al.* (2023) noted that social factors like peer pressure and family discord are associated with depression among students in India. Similarly, Fahad *et al.* (2022) reported that psychosocial factors like loss of dear ones and exposure to bullying are associated with depression in students in Majmaah, Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Tebu *et al.* (2022) observed that social factors like family type and birth order were associated with depression among tertiary students in Rivers State, Nigeria. In collaboration with these reports, Muhammad *et al.* (2022) found a significant association between psychosocial demographic factors and depression among students in Nigeria. In harmony with previous reports, AlAzzam *et al.* (2021) noted that parental level of education was a significant predictor of depression among students in Jordan. Worku *et al.* (2020) noticed that concern about career prospects was significantly associated with depressive outcomes among undergraduates in Ethiopia.

Studies reviewed so far proved that negative thinking, social isolation, sense of hopelessness, stigma, financial and economic hardship and psychosocial contexts could be associated with depressive moods and may predispose depression.

2.7 Theoretical Framework: Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (1986)

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a framework for understanding human behaviour by emphasizing the dynamic interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioural patterns. Central to this theory is the concept of reciprocal determinism, which posits that individuals are both products and producers of their environments (Bandura, 1986). In the context of mental health, particularly depression, SCT offers valuable insights into how cognitive, behavioural, and environmental variables interact to influence depressive symptoms.

One of the most critical constructs of social cognitive theory in explaining depression is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief in their capacity to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997). Individuals who perceive themselves as incapable of coping with stressors or solving life problems are more likely to experience feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and persistent sadness. Within SCT, low self-efficacy reduces motivation, increases maladaptive behaviour, and reinforces negative cognitive appraisals, thereby increasing vulnerability to depression.

Another relevant construct is observational learning (or modelling). According to Bandura, individuals learn behaviours, emotional reactions, and coping strategies by observing others, especially significant role models such as parents, peers, or authority figures (Bandura, 1986). Exposure to maladaptive coping behaviours, pessimistic thinking, or depressive expressions in one's social environment can shape an individual's own responses to stress. For instance, adolescents who observe caregivers responding to challenges with withdrawal or despair may internalize such patterns, increasing their risk of developing depressive symptoms. Thus, environmental modeling may trigger depression through learned emotional and behavioural responses.

Yet an important element of SCT is outcome expectancies, which refer to beliefs about the likely consequences of one's actions. Individuals who consistently expect negative outcomes, such as rejection, failure, or punishment, are more prone to depressive thinking. SCT explains that when individuals believe their actions will not lead to positive outcomes, they are less likely to engage in adaptive behaviours, resulting in reduced reinforcement and increased depressive affect. The environmental context, as emphasized by SCT, is equally important in predicting depression. Stressful life events, lack of social support, academic pressure, and socioeconomic challenges function as environmental risk factors.

The relevance of Bandura's Social cognitive theory to this study lies in its ability to integrate cognitive, behavioural, and environmental predictors of depression within a single explanatory model. The theory provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for examining how personal beliefs and social contexts can predict depressive symptoms.

3. Rationale of the Study

Students in tertiary institutions may experience various challenges resulting from living independently, accompanied by rigorous academic activities. Tertiary education in Nigeria is characterized by persistent interruptions due to disputes between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union (ASUU). These actions do not just prolong the duration of acquiring tertiary education, it could also have impacts on the mental health of students. Studies have consistently shown an alarming prevalence rate of depression symptoms among the undergraduate population in Nigeria, underscoring the urgent need to understand the factors that predispose students to depression. For instance, a recent study among medical students at the University of Benin, Nigeria revealed that 32% of the students experienced significant depression symptoms often linked to emotional challenges, financial stress and lifestyle factors such as substance use (Omole *et al.,* 2023). Pathetically, awareness of mental health issues remains low, and many affected students do not seek professional help due to stigma, cultural misconceptions or limited access to mental health services (Afolayan & Akimyemi, 2022).

In Edo, a state in Nigeria where there are many universities which attract students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, these psychosocial dynamics may present unique patterns that are yet to be adequately explored or investigated. Without empirical data specific to this environment, intervention will remain poorly targeted, leaving many students vulnerable to worsening mental health, which could culminate in poor academic performance, poor quality of life and self-harm, including suicide. There is therefore a compelling need to investigate the psychosocial factors predisposing depression among undergraduates in Edo State universities to inform culturally relevant interventions, promote mental wellbeing and enhance academic success. Counselling services are needed in university institutions to address students' interpersonal conflicts, career concerns, and psychological needs like depression (Kanikwu *et al.*, 2026).

Out of the plethora of literature examining the associations between various risk factors and depression among undergraduates, most of the studies were generally conducted outside Nigeria and Edo State in particular. There seems to be a paucity of literature on personal and social factors that can predispose depression among undergraduates in universities in Edo State; hence the need to fill this gap by empirically investigating the relationship of negative thoughts, social isolation, sense of hopelessness, stigmatization, financial/economic hardship, academic stress and psychosocial variables with depression among undergraduate students in Edo State, Nigeria.

3.1 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested at a 0.05 significance level.

- There is no significant relationship between negative thoughts and depression,
- There is no significant relationship between social isolation and depression,
- There is no significant relationship between sense of hopelessness and depression,

- There is no significant relationship between stigmatization and depression,
- There is no significant relationship between financial and economic hardship and depression,
- There is no significant relationship between academic stress and depression,
- There is no significant relationship between psycho-social factors and depression.

4. Method

This study employed a correlational survey design. The choice of a correlational survey design was made to help the researchers examine the relationship between two or more variables as they naturally occurred, without manipulating them. This non-experimental approach used surveys to collect data to determine the relationship, strength and direction of the interacting variables.

4.1 Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population of the study consisted of one hundred and six thousand, six hundred and ninety-one (106691) undergraduate students in the nine public and private universities in Edo State, Nigeria namely; Ambrose Alli University, (36570); Benson Idahosa University (3500); Edo State University Iyamho (4317); Glorious University (1752), Igbinedion University (5999); Light House University (1614); Mudiame University (1503), Wellspring University (1936); and University of Benin, Benin City (49500).

The sample size for the study was eight hundred and ninety-six (896) undergraduate students. The purposive and proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. First, the purposive sampling technique was used to select three universities in Edo State, namely: Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma (state), Benson Idahosa University (private), Edo and University of Benin, Benin City (federal). A discretionary proportion of 1% of the sample was selected from each stratum. Thus, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma (366), Benson Idahosa University (35), Edo and University of Benin, Benin City (495), making a total of eight hundred and ninety-six undergraduate students randomly selected for the study.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents in the Different Institutions by Gender

University	Sample	Male	Female
University of Benin, Benin City	493	247	246
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	364	182	182
Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	33	16	17
Total	**890**	**445**	**445**

4.2 Measures

A scale titled Psycho-Social Factors Predisposing Depression Among Undergraduates (PSFPDAU) was used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire was adapted from the Depression Patient Health Questionnaire- 9 (DPHQ-9) developed by Kroenke *et al.* (2002). It was originally developed to determine the measure of depression severity. The

DPHQ-9 consisted of 12 items. In the course of adapting the instrument, some items were expanded. Section A covered the biodata of students. Section B has 8 subsections with ten items for each- depression, e.g., "*Of recent I have thoughts of suicide*;" negative thought, e.g., "*I have thoughts or images that I may not graduate*;" social isolation, e.g., "*I miss the pleasure of the company of others*;" sense of hopelessness e.g., stigmatization, e.g., "*I worry about telling people I receive psychological treatment*;" financial/economic hardship, e.g., "*I am often absent from lectures because I have no means of paying for transportation and academic stress*;" e.g., "*I spend many hours on my studies*." The instrument was structured using four likert scale format of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by two experts in Guidance and Counselling and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation. The observations and corrections made by them were incorporated in the final copy of the questionnaire to ensure that items contained in the questionnaire were precise, unambiguous and relevant to the topic of the study. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha statistical method. The instrument was administered to thirty (30) undergraduate students who were not part of the sample. The subsections of the instrument yielded reliability coefficients as follows: depression (0.81); negative thought (0.72); social isolation (0.76); sense of hopelessness (0.85); stigmatization (0.79); financial/economic hardship (0.82); academic stress (0.80); and psycho-socio factors (0.77), which were considered reliable and suitable for this study.

4.3 Procedure of Data Collection

The researchers obtained informed consent from participants after obtaining permission to carry out this research from the Deans of Students' Affairs of the various universities chosen for the study. A consent letter from the Dean of Students Affairs was shown to students in order to get their attention. The questionnaires were explained to the students in order for them to understand the essence of the study. Data were collected anonymously; participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without any consequence attached. The questionnaires were administered to the undergraduate students with the assistance of nine research assistants. After retrieving the questionnaires, they were sorted and coded for analysis.

4.4 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using frequency and percentage for biodata (section A). Hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics and regression analysis. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of 0.05.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria. All personal data were kept confidential. Approval was secured from participating universities, and informed consent was obtained from all participants following due process. Participation was voluntary, giving the participants the right to withdraw at any stage of the survey. Questionnaires were completed anonymously to mask the identity of the participants.

5. Results

5.1 There Is No Significant Relationship between Negative Thought Pattern and Depression

Table 2: Pearson's Correlations between Negative Thought Pattern and Depression

Variables	N	R	Sig 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Negative Thought Depression	890	0.62	0.001	Significant

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

Table 2 shows the relationship between negative thought and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State, Nigeria. From the table, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.62. This is an indication of a positive relationship between both variables, meaning increased negative thought would lead to an increased level of depression and vice versa. Looking at the p-value (.001), the correlation coefficient is significant at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between negative thoughts and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State, Nigeria.

5.2 There Is No Significant Relationship between Social Isolation and Depression

Table 3: Pearson's Correlations between Social Isolation and Depression

Variables	N	R	Sig 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Social Isolation Depression	890	0.53	0.003	Significant

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

Table 3 shows the relationship between social isolation and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State, Nigeria. From the table, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.53, and this is an indication of a moderate positive relationship between both variables. This means an increased social isolation level would lead to increase level of depression and vice versa. Looking at the p-value (0.003), the correlation coefficient is

significant at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between social isolation and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State.

5.3 There Is No Significant Relationship between Sense of Hopelessness and Depression

Table 4: Pearson's Correlations between Sense of Hopelessness and Depression

Variables	N	R	Sig 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Sense of Hopelessness Depression	890	0.71	0.000	Significant

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

Table 4 shows the relationship between sense of hopelessness and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State, Nigeria. From the table, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.71, indicating a moderate positive relationship between both variables; that is, an increased sense of hopelessness would lead to increase level of depression and vice versa. Looking at the p-value (0.000), the correlation coefficient is significant at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between sense of hopelessness and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State.

5.4 There Is No Significant Relationship between Stigmatization and Depression

Table 5: Pearson's Correlations between Stigmatization and Depression

Variables	N	R	Sig 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Stigmatization Depression	890	0.48	0.006	Significant

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

Table 5 shows the relationship between stigmatization and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State. From the table, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.48, an indication of a weak but positive relationship between both variables- that is, an increase in stigmatization would lead to increase level of depression and vice versa. Considering the p- value (0.006), the correlation coefficient is significant at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between stigmatization and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State.

5.5 There Is No Significant Relationship between Financial/economic Hardship and Depression

Table 6: Pearson's Correlations between Financial/Economic Hardship and Depression

Variables	N	R	Sig 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Financial/Economic Hardship Depression	890	0.55	0.002	Significant

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

Table 6 shows the relationship between financial/economic hardship and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State. From the table, the correlation coefficient (r) is 0.55, an indication of a moderate, positive relationship between both variables; that is, an increase in financial/economic hardship would lead to an increase in the level of depression and vice versa. Looking at the p-value (0.002), the correlation coefficient is significant at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between financial/economic hardship and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State.

5.6 There Is No Significant Relationship between Academic Stress and Depression

Table 7: Pearson's Correlations between Academic Stress and Depression

Variables	N	R	Sig 2-tailed (p-value)	Remarks
Academic Stress Depression	890	0.64	0.000	Significant

$\alpha = .05$, $p < .05$

Table 7 shows the relationship between academic stress and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State. From the table, the correlation coefficient (r) = 0.64; this is an indication of a moderate, positive relationship between both variables, that is, an increase in academic stress would lead to increase level of depression and vice versa. Looking at the p-value (0.000), the correlation coefficient is significant testing at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between academic stress and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State.

5.7 There Is No Significant Relationship between Psycho-social Factors and Depression

Table 8: Regression Result of Psycho-Social Factors and Depression among University Undergraduate Students in Edo State

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P-Value)
1	Regression	118.43	6	19.74	84.58	.000
	Residual	82.21	883	0.09		
	Total	**200.64**	**3889**			

R =.768, R-Square =.590, (.000 < .05)

Table 8 shows the regression of psycho-social factors and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State, Nigeria. From the table, F= 84.58, P-Value = .000. The factors jointly explain 58.9% of changes in depression among University Undergraduate Students in Edo State. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the p-value is significant (.000 < .05). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, Psycho-social factors significantly relate to depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State.

5.8 Summary Result of Research Hypotheses

Table 9: Multiple Regression Coefficient Values of Psycho-Social Factors and Depression among University Undergraduate Students in Edo State

		Co-eff	std. error	t stat	p-value
1	(Constant)	0.241	0.092	2.62	.000
	Negative Thought	0.183	0.038	4.82	.000
	Social Isolation	0.096	0.039	2.46	.014
	Hopelessness	0.031	0.041	7.34	.000
	Stigmatization	0.072	0.036	2.00	.046
	Financial Hardship	0.092	0.039	2.36	.019
	Academic Stress	0.204	0.040	5.10	.000
	Psycho-social	0.124	0.024	5.17	.000

R-squ: 0.779; Adjusted R-squ: 0.636; Prob(F-stat): 0.000020

The result of Table 9 reveals that the independent variables (Negative Thought, Social Isolation, Hopelessness, Stigmatization, Financial Hardship, Academic Stress, Psycho-social factors) explained 77.9% systemic variation in the dependent variable (depression) and were endorsed by the adjusted R-square of 63.6%. Also, the result revealed that at least one of the independent variables has a significant influence on the dependent variable(depression). The coefficient results revealed that the independent variables have a positive relationship with depression among university undergraduate students, which validated the results of the Pearson's Correlations discussed above. Furthermore, the results revealed that the independent variables have a significant relationship with depression among university undergraduate students.

6. Discussion

6.1 Negative Thought Patterns and Depression

The findings of this study reveal a strong positive correlation between negative thought patterns and depression, which underscores the critical role of cognitive distortions in exacerbating depressive symptoms. This finding strongly aligns with Bandura's (1986) SCT theory, as outcome expectancies, which could manifest in the form of negative thoughts, could have grave consequences for students' emotional wellness. Some of these students who participated in the study could have expressed negative thoughts as avoidance coping because of the overwhelming challenges that have continued to besiege Nigerian universities. A correlation coefficient of indicates a substantial relationship, suggesting that as negative thought patterns increase, so do levels of depressive symptoms. The statistical significance further confirms that this relationship is not due to chance, highlighting the psychological impact of persistent cognitive distortions on students' mental well-being.

Furthermore, this finding is in consonance with previous studies which confirmed the association of rumination or cognitive distortion with depression (Gongxing *et al.*, 2023; Chan *et al.*, 2020; Ahadi *et al.*, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2025; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the finding of this present study harmonizes with Bandura's SCT Theory, which is the theoretical foundation of this study and previous empirical studies related to negative thoughts and depression. The result of this study shows clearly that negative thinking patterns could be a warning sign of impending depression among university students in Edo State, Nigeria, just as it is globally, as supported by previous studies from different regions of the world.

6.2 Social Isolation and Depression

The study finds that social isolation has a significant positive correlation with depression. The observed correlation coefficient reflects a moderate to strong relationship, suggesting that as experiences of social isolation increase, depressive symptoms also rise correspondingly. The statistical significance further confirms that this relationship is not due to random variation. This outcome is consistent with psychological and sociological literature emphasizing that humans are inherently social beings, and that the absence of supportive interpersonal relationships can lead to emotional distress and poor psychological outcomes. This finding supports previous studies (Alsadoun *et al.*, 2023; Karaağaç & Yilmaz, 2023; Alshammari *et al.*, 2023; Geng-feng *et al.*, 2022). Among undergraduates in Edo State, social isolation may be exacerbated by several factors, including relocation from home, academic pressure, poor communication skills, and digital overuse that reduces face-to-face interaction. Students who lack meaningful social ties may experience feelings of loneliness, alienation, and low self-worth, which are key psychological precursors to depressive episodes. Furthermore, the significant positive correlation between social isolation and depression underlines the crucial role of social integration in mental well-being. Tackling social isolation through intentional,

supportive community building strategies could be an effective avenue for reducing depression among university students in Edo State, Nigeria and in some other parts of the world whose students share similar experiences with the participants of this study.

6.3 Sense of Hopelessness and Depression

This finding exhibits the strongest correlation with depression. The observed strong positive correlation between hopelessness and depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State underscores the critical importance of investigating this relationship. The outcome of this finding could be a product of low self-efficacy, as students who may perceive themselves as incapable of coping with stressors or solving life problems are more likely to experience feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and persistent sadness. This view harmonizes with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations.

The finding of the study is in consonance with Zainal *et al.* (2026), who posited that low self-acceptance is related to depression and Mares and Fuller (2026), who noticed an association between intolerance of uncertainty and depression. It also aligns with Nalipay *et al.* (2018) and Mustafa *et al.* (2018), who all confirmed a link between hopelessness and depression. The result proves that experiencing a sense of hopelessness could predict depression among undergraduate students in Edo State, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, as evidenced by studies from different regions of the world.

6.4 Stigmatization and Depression

The finding shows that there is a substantial correlation between stigmatization and depression. Some Nigerian students who experience depressive mood may be stigmatized by those who are more psychologically healthy. Thus, peer rejection could have heightened the tendencies toward depression of some of the students who participated in the study. Stigmatization can exacerbate feelings of worthlessness and social withdrawal, as demonstrated with responses like: "*I am scared of how other people will react if they find out about my mental health problems*" from a good number of respondents. The findings of this present study resonate the findings of previous studies by researchers like Prizeman *et al.* (2023), Habib *et al.* (2022), and Meisel *et al.* (2022), who associated stigma with depression.

In Nigeria and Edo State in particular, cultural and religious beliefs often influence perceptions of mental illness, leading to stigmatization. Such beliefs may attribute mental health issues to spiritual causes or moral failings, discouraging individuals from seeking professional help. This societal stigma can result in internalized shame and reluctance to access mental health services, thereby increasing the prevalence and severity of depression among university students. Addressing the correlation between stigmatization and depression necessitates targeted interventions aimed at reducing mental health stigma within university settings.

6.5 Financial and Economic Hardship and Depression

The findings of this study also reveal that financial and economic hardship exhibited a significant positive relationship with depression. Items such as "*I am often absent from lectures because I have no means of paying for transportation*" and "*I could not afford to do my projects*" scored high, highlighting the financial strain faced by many students. Secondly, financial constraints play a major role in their association with students' depression. In Nigeria, where financial and economic hardship prevail, many undergraduates rely on limited financial support from their families or struggle to balance academic responsibilities with part-time jobs. Thus, in a region such as Edo State where economic hardship is common, the inability of students to meet basic needs such as food, accommodation, and educational resources can lead to chronic stress and depression, emphasizing the pervasive impact of financial hardship on students' psychological well-being. The finding that financial and economic hardship exhibit a significant positive correlation with depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State is consistent with empirical research. Financial stress can lead to psychological distress, thereby increasing the risk of depression. This position aligns with previous studies by researchers like Isara *et al.* (2022) and Bakesia *et al.* (2023), who found financial challenges to be significant predictors of depression. Studies by other researchers like Choi *et al.* (2022), Ahmed *et al.* (2020), Islam *et al.* (2018), Mac-Ginty *et al.* (2023), and Ismail and Shujaat (2018) also resonate with the finding of this present study. The significant correlation between financial hardship and depression highlights the need for targeted interventions within university settings and the offering of financial assistance to students in need to mitigate the adverse effects of economic stress on the mental health of students. The result further proves that the correlation of financial and economic hardship with depression among the participants of this study resonates with the general picture of what happens in diverse regions of the world where poverty and financial distress thrive among students.

6.6 Academic Stress and Depression

The finding shows a positive correlation between academic stress and depression. The finding emphasizes the detrimental impact of academic pressure on mental health among university undergraduate students in Edo State. In the context of university students, excessive academic workload, fear of failure, and high expectations can serve as potent stressors that trigger depressive symptoms. The competitive academic environment and the pressure to excel that is typical of the university environment can further exacerbate stress levels among students. This finding is consistent with recent studies, which reported that academic stress had a significant impact on depression (Chen *et al.*, 2024); predicted depressive disorder (Ho *et al.*, 2023); exacerbated depressive symptoms (Zhang *et al.*, 2022); and had a positive and significant relationship with depression (Sawai *et al.*, 2022). Studies by other researchers like Deng *et al.* (2022), Preethi *et al.* (2023), Barbayannis *et al.* (2022), Zhang *et al.* (2021), Olum *et al.* (2020), and Aluh *et al.* (2020) confirmed that academic stress is related to depression in their various studies. This finding makes

institutional intervention imperative to reduce academic stress on students. This result strengthens the empirical evidence that academic stress could be a red flag for depressive symptoms among students globally, as evidenced in this study and other studies from diverse places and backgrounds.

6.7 Psychosocial Factors and Depression

Finally, the result of this study reveals that psycho-social factors are significantly related to depression among university undergraduate students in Edo State, with risk factors including academic stress, financial burdens, social isolation, lack of social support, and past trauma. The finding of this study is in consonance with Ravichandhiran *et al.* (2026), who found that parental education and occupation, living arrangement and sleep patterns were significantly related to depression. It also aligns with Ogunsanwo *et al.* (2023) who found a significant relationship between depression and family support; Deng *et al.* (2022) who posited that family stress impacted on students' depression levels; Preethi *et al.* (2023) who revealed that social factors like peer pressure associated with depression; and Fahad *et al.* (2022) who found psychosocial factors like loss of dear one and exposure to bullying correlated with depression. Other authors like Tebu *et al.* (2022), Muhammad *et al.* (2022), Al Azzam *et al.* (2021), and Worku *et al.* (2020) reported similar findings. In view of the significant correlation between psychosocial factors and depression among the students, protective measures that can mitigate these risks could be social support, strong campus connectedness, and supportive social networks. Understanding this relationship is crucial for designing effective university interventions to improve students' mental well-being. Mitigating psychosocial factors that can trigger depression among undergraduates is a global burden based on evidence from this study and others from diverse cultures and places.

7. Conclusions

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of depression among undergraduates in Edo State, Nigeria. The findings reveal significant correlations between depression and negative thought patterns, social isolation, hopelessness, stigmatization, financial and economic hardships, academic stress and psychosocial factors. This study could be appreciated through the theoretical lens of Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT). It provides an understanding of how cognitive, behavioural, and psychosocial factors can predict depressive symptoms. Students who perceive themselves as incapable of coping with stressors may be at risk of helplessness, hopelessness, and persistent sadness as a result of low self-efficacy, which can reduce motivation and increase vulnerability to depression. Similarly, Students, through observational learning (or modelling), could learn behaviours, emotional reactions, and coping strategies by observing others, especially significant role models such as parents, peers, or authority figures (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, maladaptive outcome expectancies could make students to consistently expect negative outcomes, provoking depressive thinking. Thus, self-

efficacy, observational learning, and outcome expectancies components of Bandura's SCT theory provide a profound framework for this study.

7.1 Further Research Suggestions

The predictors of depression examined in this paper are related psychosocial constructs which may trigger other mental health challenges like anxiety and stress disorder among students. These disorders share symptoms with depression. Thus, it may be a good research project to investigate these predictors to see how they relate to anxiety and stress disorder with depression in a multifactorial study. Furthermore, further research involving these predictors of depression in this study should be carried out in other regions of the world to enhance comparison of results since geographical spread is likely to provide diversified findings which could aid global interventions. Further research may also adopt longitudinal and qualitative designs for deeper penetration of findings.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations could help in improving students' mental health and eradicating depression.

- Counsellors are to assist students in identifying early indicators of depression and help them with the adaptive skills they need to deal with stress, anxiety, and academic pressure.
- Universities should develop social support platforms and put structures in place to foster campus connectedness. Positive social interactions and feelings of connection to the university environment can act as a safeguard against stress and depression among students.
- Students should discuss their negative thoughts with a trusted friend, family member, or therapist to get a new perspective and release pent-up feelings.
- Nigerian culture is strongly built around communal living; thus, students should reconnect with their family and community by leaning on existing sociocultural structures in the family and community.
- Nigerian government at all levels should solve socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and insecurity in the country.
- Educational campaigns against stigmatization can make interventions more culturally sensitive and effective. Also, institutions should implement anti-stigma campaigns to foster a culture of acceptance and encourage students to seek help without fear of discrimination.
- Government should strengthen social protection programmes by initiating and sustaining students' loan schemes to alleviate the financial challenges faced by some students who are from poor socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Universities should reduce heavy academic workload by complementing academic work with extra curriculum activities in order to reduce academic stress and burnout.

- Lastly, students should engage in self-care practices such as exercise and healthy habits and seek social support from community, family and friends

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate
Ethical approved was obtained for the study, and consent was sought from all students who participated.

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