

## Emotional Dependence and Major Depressive Disorder in University Students

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### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to establish the influence of emotional dependence on major depressive disorder in university students. It is a basic type, with a quantitative approach, non-experimental transectional, causal correlational design. The sample selected and processed was non-probabilistic for convenience, with a sample of 122 university students. The results obtained in this research have revealed a causal relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder; for each student with emotional dependence, an increase of 0.208 in major depressive disorder is observed.

### 1. Introduction

Emotional dependence and major depressive disorder are personality disorders that affect a large part of the population. University students are usually affected with these problems, which is amplified by the overload of academic activities appropriate to their level. Emotional dependence is described as the prevailing affective need that a person experiences towards their partner, even persisting over time and with other subsequent partners (Castelló, 2005). It can contribute to increasing major depressive disorder and disturb feelings and emotions in a negative way. Both emotional dependence and depression are disorders that can interact and enhance each other, worsening the symptoms and quality of life of the person who suffers from them.

In relation to emotional dependence, it is a disorder that has a significant impact on those individuals with unmet affective needs and low self-esteem, who follow a pattern of emotional requirements and that ends up having a negative and unfavorable impact on their lives (Gonzales-Castro, A. et al., 2022), even leading to the development of an aggressor profile (Jaimes, 2020); and that it is present constantly and in various stages of their lives.

People with this disorder tend to look to their partner for the satisfaction of the emotional deficiencies they experienced in their childhood, often in an excessive way. It is troubling to note that such a high percentage of students, especially women, are on the spectrum of moderate or severe emotional dependence, underscoring the importance of addressing this issue from an emotional health and healthy relationships perspective in today's society. Understanding that it plays an important role in relationships in society, and that it is the basis for the formation of personality (Alaric, 2017).

An important factor that greatly affects the emergence of emotional dependence is emotional attachment, which allows the individual to achieve and maintain a greater proximity with another person with characteristics different from their own and who generally considers them to have greater strength or intelligence; it is a feeling typical of the human being, which motivates the search for closeness between the infant and his parents or caregivers (Garrido-Rojas, 2006). Emotional attachment is an affective, deep and permanent bond between two individuals, especially between a child and his or her caregiver; In the case of these, emotional attachment is decisive for constant emotional and social development. When attachment is secure, it gives the child confidence in feeling that their caregivers will provide what they need to cover their basic and emotional needs in a solid and sensitive way. This will contribute to the development of their self-esteem, being able to

regulate their emotions, as well as the possibility of instituting healthy relationships in the future.

In the context of adult relationships, the type of emotional attachment that the individual experienced during their childhood will influence the intimate and emotional bond with their partners, friends or family. If the attachment was secure, these relationships will be marked by certainty, trust and permanent communication, as well as the feeling of emotional security. Therefore, depending on their upbringing and the situations they experienced previously, emotional attachment can vary in its quality, influencing the way people interact in their interpersonal relationships over the course of their lives.

Of the parental attachment styles and emotional dependence, factors of emotional dependence, such as fear of abandonment and low self-esteem, are closely related to anxiety. Constant worry about losing emotional connection can generate anxiety, contributing to a vicious cycle of dependency and emotional distress (Rocha et al., 2019).

Thus, emotional dependence disorder is usually defined as excessive attachment that develops as an incipient obsession that begins in a person and becomes an addiction, likewise, a fear of rejection and abandonment develops in the person, which often leads to depression. If we understand emotional dependence, as a situation of suffering experienced by those individuals, who believe that it is impossible for them to socialize amicably or form emotionally healthy couples, since it will always mean discomfort, manifesting itself in what is described above (Echajaya, 2021).

More current studies in their resulting statistics contribute to a more reliable picture in terms of numbers and the mental condition of adolescents or young university students, as shown by Rudy, M. (2023) when commenting that, according to multiple surveys carried out, where young people reported on their mental health, there was a small and high risk of depression and anxiety in university students unlike those who were not. There was an approximate difference of 6% in risk between the two groups. This has led authorities and officials of these public institutions to establish and promote support programs for students who suffer from this disorder.

Among the consequences that severely harm people who are abused or emotionally dependent are psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, suicidal ideation, among others, which in the case of students directly and notoriously affects their academic performance, being that the factors of submission, subordination, and fear of breakup are characteristics of emotional dependence (Ponce-Diaz, C. et al., 2019)

Liu et al. point out that university students are the key group with a significantly higher risk of poor mental health. A number of factors, including family, college, studies, and social interactions, are likely to induce depression in college students. However, few publications have reviewed the literature on risk factors for depression in this group. Since most studies examined individual risk factors based on samples from a certain country or region, this article reviewed the existing literature related to college student depression and aimed to systematically present the non-pathological factors, predictions, and non-pharmaceutical interventions for college student depression (2022).

Likewise, Marzilli et al. (2020) point out that, when studying the new practices and habits that are associated with university life today, there is internet addiction, considering the role played by interpersonal factors (i.e., family functioning), comorbid psychopathological symptoms (i.e., depression and anxiety), and self-regulation variables (i.e., impulsivity). As a result, there is still a greater addiction to the internet among men compared to women; as well as a potential relationship of addiction to social networks with their closest circle (family, partner, friends), becoming impulsive, presenting depressive and anxiety symptoms, finally affecting the quality of family functioning.

Chang et al. point out to question the relationship between childhood traumas in the lives of adolescents and young university students, and whether they can influence the development of

major depression if resilience is not used as a means or alternative, in the same way, they point out that:

Not all young people who have experienced child abuse and neglect will become depressed or have the same degree of depression. Resilience may probably be the cause of this difference according to previous studies. Observe the association between abuse, child neglect and depression; as well as to analyze whether psychological resilience has mediating and moderating effects of this association (2021).

Alsunni and Latif (2021) point out that most of the studies that have reported on the adverse effects of social media (SR) use on mental health have been conducted in adolescents and young people, and that by relating SR use (frequency, duration, and emotional investment) to anxiety, depression, and self-esteem in college students, A greater emotional investment of these was given to social networks, also related to anxiety and depression. The likelihood of being anxious and depressed increases significantly as emotional investment in SR increases.

Thus, depressive disorder is defined by the presence of a series of emotional manifestations or changes in mood that impact the development of the individual in various aspects of their life, covering work, personal, social and academic environments. Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) is positioned as a therapy that yields positive and safe results for patients affected by depression. Although there are few clinical trials carried out in Latin America, they have revealed encouraging results in the treatment of depression.

Ayala, J. (2022) points out that atypical depression, also known as depression with pathological features, is a form of depression with persistent mood swings. This variation is accompanied by a significant increase in sleep (hypersomnia) and a disproportionate increase in appetite, as well as a feeling of heaviness in the arms and legs and a feeling of repulsion. This form of depression is not uncommon in the general population, and people who suffer from it experience a progression of symptoms that affect both emotional and physical aspects. These symptoms make it difficult for a person to perform their normal daily activities, resulting in a loss of desire to participate in any activity. In contrast, typical depression has the opposite characteristics of atypical depression. It is characterized by a marked lack of appetite, which leads to weight loss, which leads to a physical imbalance. In addition, difficulty falling asleep can also cause general changes in the attitude of the affected person. Lack of sleep can lead to a permanently low mood and persistent reluctance to perform daily activities.

For Montalvo-Herdoiza et al (2021), who refer that major depressive disorder is a psychological problem that is determined by the presence of prolonged episodes of deep sadness, apathy and hopelessness and that more than 300 million people in the world suffer from it, possibly due to socio-economic problems and that will obviously have an impact on the work and productive activity of their context. In addition, it occurs more in men than in women and that among other causes, the most prominent was that of social isolation, in which young people are, which is the most prominent age in the sample. It was also found that there are diseases that act as decisive and that influence these results, such as diabetes, since the low or high amount of sugar in the blood is directly related to moods.

Thus, mental health problems, such as emotional dependence, contribute to the manifestation of major depressive disorder, these problems being increasingly common among university students. Therefore, it is essential to know this topic in depth in order to develop preventive and intervention strategies that allow you to overcome these mental processes that affect your mental health. Students who experience depressive disorders may have difficulty concentrating, studying, and actively participating in their academic activities.

## 2. Methodology

The present research work is of a basic type, quantitative approach located at the level of correlational causal research. The work conforms to a non-experimental, cross-sectional design, the sample was constituted by 122 university students from the Lima region. The first instrument was the Emotional Dependence Questionnaire (CDE). (Lemos & Londoño, 2006). Its dimensions are separation anxiety, affective expression of the partner, modification of plans, fear of loneliness, limit expression, attention seeking. The following instrument, Construction and validation of a scale to evaluate the subtypes of major depressive disorder, developed in 2016 by Javier Hernán Ramos Rosales and Cecilia Silva, having as dimensions atypical depression and melancholic depression.

## 3. Results and Discussion

From the application of the instruments in the present research, the following results were obtained, which determined the influence of emotional dependence on major depressive disorder in university students.

Table 1 *Level of emotional dependence in students at a Public University, Lima Region-2023*

Variables	High		Intermediate		Low		Total
Dimensions	n	%	n	%	n	%	N
Emotional dependence	2	1,6	32	26,2	88	72,1	122
D1: Separation anxiety	10	8,2	32	26,2	80	65,6	122
D2: Affective expression of the couple	18	14,8	42	34,4	62	50,8	122
D3: Modifying Plans	2	1,6	38	31,1	82	67,2	122
D4: Fear of loneliness	12	9,8	32	26,2	78	63,9	122
D5: Limit Expression	4	3,3	6	4,9	112	91,8	122
D6: Attention Seeking	8	6,6	42	34,4	72	59,0	122

Table 1 shows low emotional dependence in 72.1%, explained by low separation anxiety in 65.6%, affective expression of the partner in 50.8%, modification of plans in 67.2%, fear of loneliness in 63.9%, borderline expression in 91.8%, attention seeking in 59.0%, of students of a Public University. Lima-2023 Region.

Table 2 *Level of major depressive disorder in students of a Public University, Lima Region-2023*

Variables	High		Intermediate		Low		Total
Dimensions	n	%	n	%	n	%	N
Major depressive disorder	10	8,2	52	42,6	60	49,2	122
D1: Atypical depression	16	13,1	60	49,2	46	37,7	122
D2: Melancholic depression	8	6,6	28	23,0	86	70,5	122

Table 2 shows a low major depressive disorder in 49.2%, explained by atypical depression of intermediate level in 49.2% with a tendency to low level in 37.7%, melancholic depression of low level in 70.5%, of students of a Public University, Lima Region-2023.

Table 3. Correlation Between Emotional Dependence and Major Depressive Disorder

Emotional dependence	Major depressive disorder	
	Correlation coefficient	,409
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
	N	122

From Table 3, the p value is less than 5% (Sig = 0.000), so the Ho is rejected, so it deduces that there is a relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder, with a moderate positive correlation (0.409), which means that the greater the emotional dependence, the greater the moderate major depressive disorder.

Table 4 Model Overview

Model	R	R squared	R square adjusted	Standard Estimate Error
1	0.357a	0,128	0,120	10,026
Note, a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional dependence, R: Correlation coefficient.				

From Table 8, the R-value is 0.357, which refers to the relationship between the variables, which is low. Now we observe the adjusted R-squared, which indicates that the emotional dependence variable explains 12% of major depressive disorder, and 88% is explained by other variables that are not incorporated in the regression model.

Table 5 Coefficients

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Gis.	95.0% confidence interval for B	
		B	Desv. Error	Beta			Lower limit	Upper limit
1	(Constant)	24,328	4,691		5,186	0,000	15,040	33,616
	Emotional dependence	0,208	0,050	0,357	4,189	0,000	0,110	0,306
Note, a. Dependent variable: Major depressive disorder.								

From Table 5, we observe the p value, which is less than 5%, therefore, the Ho is rejected, accepting the Hi,  $\beta_1 \neq 0$ , therefore, the model is valid by constructing the following model:  $\neq$

$$y = 24.328 + 0.208x_1$$

Which can be interpreted, for each student with emotional dependence, major depressive disorder increases by 0.208.

## Discussion

The results obtained in the present research have revealed a causal relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder in students of a public university in the Lima-2023 Region. Specifically, for each student with emotional dependence, an increase of 0.208 in major depressive disorder is observed. However, no evidence has been found of a causal relationship between the perception of social exclusion and major depressive disorder, which led to the elimination of this variable from the final model. The methodology used, based on a quantitative approach and regression analysis, provides a rigorous evaluation of the causal relationships between the variables studied. However, the exclusion of some relevant variables may limit the model's ability to explain the totality of the variability in major depressive disorder. The application of a cross-sectional design may also limit the ability to establish definitive causal relationships.



When comparing these findings with the research of Zárate - Depraect et al. (2022) carried out in Mexico, a convergence in the importance of emotional dependence in the student context is observed. Both studies coincide in highlighting the presence of a marked emotional dependence among students, although populations and contexts may vary. This point of convergence strengthens the validity and relevance of the findings, supporting the idea that emotional dependence is a relevant factor in the mental health of university students.

In addition, studies by Vinaccia et al. (2020) in Colombia, Ducuara et al. (2021) in Mexico, and Rocha et al. (2019) in Colombia, provide additional perspectives on the mental health of university students. Vinaccia et al. (2020) highlights the correlation between the sociodemographic context and anxiety and depression problems, Ducuara et al. (2021) focuses attention on the influence of couple relationships on mental health, and Rocha et al. (2019) explores the correspondence between parental attachment modes and emotional dependence.

The results obtained in this study are aligned with theories that highlight the importance of emotional relationships in mental health, such as attachment theory. The emotional dependence identified in the participants suggests that affective dynamics may play a crucial role in the onset and development of major depressive disorder. On the other hand, the lack of a causal relationship with the perception of social exclusion coincides with previous research that suggests that other factors may be more determinant in the mental health of university students.

Research in Ecuador led by Quizhpi et al. (2023) highlights the need to address emotional dependence, pointing out its overexposure and normalization, which leads to detrimental consequences for quality of life and can contribute to the development of pathological problems such as depression. The relationship with the family and parenting styles is identified as determinant, but the importance of treating early signs and combating misinformation and stigmas associated with this phenomenon is also emphasized. The findings suggest the relevance of interventions that promote resilience and encourage healthy boundary-setting. Both studies recognize the importance of addressing emotional dependence. While your focus is on the causal relationship with major depressive disorder in students, Quizhpi et al. (2003) highlight the overexposure of the subject and its normalization, focusing on long-term consequences. Both studies agree on the relevance of treating emotional dependence to prevent pathological problems, although their findings are more specific to a particular demographic.

Both studies share a concern about violence and its emotional effects. While this paper addresses the relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder, Bogarín et al. (2021) focus on women who have experienced family violence. Both studies highlight the complexity of the decisions made by victims and the influence of economic and family factors on these decisions.

Research recognizes the formation of identity and lived experiences by young people. While your research focuses on the relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder in students, Téllez (2019) addresses inequality and social exclusion in young people. Both highlight the uniqueness of experiences and how social and family factors contribute to the construction of identity. They share the perspective of the evolution of the study of emotional dependence and its growing relevance in mental health. Both recognize the multiplicity of terms used to describe this phenomenon and advocate a comprehensive approach.

It is agreed in the conceptualization of emotional dependence as a relational disorder with roots in childhood. While my point focuses on the relationship with major depressive disorder in university students, Villa and Sirvent (2009) describe emotional dependence as a habitual and constant model with a frustrated search for love in infancy and childhood.

The complexity of factors contributing to emotional problems is recognized, especially in adolescents. The present identifies a specific causal relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder in university students, Basantes et al. (2020) highlight the variety of factors

that affect the mental health of adolescents. Both studies emphasize the need for early and preventive interventions.

Comparing the findings with the research of Ponce-Diaz et al. (2019), both studies conducted in Lima, Peru, agree on the relationship between emotional dependence and psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression. Both studies underline the prevalence of emotional dependence in students and its consequences on academic performance. However, while this study focuses on the specific relationship with major depressive disorder, Ponce-Diaz et al. (2019) explore the relationship with life satisfaction in psychology students.

The research by Castro et al. (2021) and the present one share the concern about emotional dependence in Peruvian students. Both studies find that a significant percentage of students manifest moderate or severe levels of emotional dependence. Although this study focuses on the relationship with major depressive disorder, both highlight the relevance of addressing this problem in the academic context.

The research by Obregón-Morales et al. (2020), and this thesis explore different aspects related to mental health in students. While this study focuses on the relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder, the research of Obregón-Morales et al. (2020) analyzes the connection between academic stress, sleep quality, and depression in human medical students. Both studies highlight the importance of addressing mental health in academic settings, highlighting the relevance of detection and protection strategies.

Together, these studies offer a comprehensive perspective of the mental health situation in Peruvian students. Emotional dependence appears to be a common concern, with notable impacts on life satisfaction, academic performance, and overall mental health. Adjustment to the university environment, academic stress, and career-specific challenges are recurrent factors that influence students' emotional health. The implementation of detection strategies and protection measures, as well as the promotion of resilience and interpersonal skills, emerges as an evident need in these contexts. Student mental health must be addressed holistically, recognizing the interconnectedness of emotional, social, and academic factors.

#### **4. Conclusion and future scope**

Of the fulfillment of the general objective, the existence of a causal relationship of emotional dependence in major depressive disorder in students of a public university, Lima Region-2023, has been evidenced in Table 5. This causal relationship indicates that, for each student with emotional dependence, major depressive disorder increases by 0.208 with respect to the regression equation proposed.

Of the fulfillment of specific objective 1, a low relationship between emotional dependence and major depressive disorder has been evidenced in Table 4. Of these, the variable emotional dependence explains 12% of major depressive disorder, and 88% is explained by other variables that have not been taken into account in the study. From this, we can deduce that there must be a search for new independent variables that can complete the proposed model, in order to then have proposals for improvement.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest for the publication of this scientific article.

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