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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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USE OF ANTIDEPRESSANTS BY STUDENTS OF A NUTRITION COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Depression is a constant mood disorder and becoming worrisome. It occurs in all age groups, and its incidence is higher among young and elderly people. Exposure to the university environment, which is often exhausting, and changes in daily life can make young students more likely to use antidepressants. **Objective:** To identify and characterize the use of antidepressants by students enrolled in the Nutrition course of a higher education institution of a private university in the interior of the state of São Paulo, in the midwest of São Paulo. **Methods:** This is a primary, cross-sectional, observational, analytical, and single-center study. To obtain participant identification data, as well as on the use of antidepressants and their characterization, a quantitative approach was used, with the application of a questionnaire. **Results:** There are significant differences regarding the use of antidepressants in the items of family income ($p=0.0290 \times^2$), work ($p=0.0005 \times^2$), and children ($p<0.0001 \times^2$). The academics who most use antidepressants are those with an income of up to 5 minimum wages, who work and have children, in relation to the other items, no significant changes were evidenced. **Conclusion:** With the data obtained, it was found that the students who most use antidepressants are those with an income of up to 5 minimum wages, who work and have children, in relation to the other items, no significant changes were evidenced. As a benefit, the survey showed greater knowledge about the use of antidepressants among university students in a Nutrition course.

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INTRODUCTION

Depression is a constant mood disorder, making it worrying. It occurs in all age groups, and its incidence is higher among young and elderly people (Marques, 2012). There are some signs such as lack of motivation, sadness, anguish, irregular sleep and eating, lack of energy, and lack of interest that must be observed (Marques, 2012; Nardi, 2000). These concerns require the use of antidepressants, which are drugs in which the action takes place in the central nervous system, regulating the mood of depressed patients (Associação de Apoio aos Doentes Depressivos e Bipolares). The most popular types of these drugs are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (Abreu, 2017). These substances act in the brain, rectifying and altering neurochemical transmission in specific places that control mood variations when these manifest themselves negatively at a significant level. However, there are side effects such as drug dependence, certain mental confusion, drug withdrawal, amenorrhea, anxiety, and

tremors (Pitliuk, 2017). It is noteworthy that antidepressants do not respond when the mood is normal (Associação de Apoio aos Doentes Depressivos e Bipolares). The frequency of depression predominates in the group of young students. Therefore, several studies are based on the peculiarities of academics, concomitantly with the depressive condition, they present. These often have in common a high charge due to the fear of making mistakes, great study overload due to the heavy workloads, disappointments in professional achievement, which add up to greater use of alcoholic beverages, life without rules, in addition to the fact that many are far from family. In this way, a rupture is made in the room, exposing it to waves of crises, which, in most cases, can lead to depression (Nardi, 2000; Pereira, 2010). In this context, research indicates that, throughout academic life, 15 to 25% of students at Brazilian universities have some psychic disorder (Sakae, 2010), leading to the use of antidepressants, as psychotherapy and psychotropic drugs are therapeutic strategies used to treat people with depressive disorders (Ribeiro, 2014).

This scenario signals a high frequency of antidepressant use among university students, which is proven by a survey conducted among medical students at a public institution, which found that 11.4% of the 289 academics interviewed use or have already used antidepressants, with fluoxetine being the most used (Ribeiro, 2014). Additionally, research among students of a nursing course found that 19% of the 273 students evaluated had sporadic or continuous use of antidepressants (Istilli, 2010). In short, the frequency of use of antidepressants is higher in the young student population, in contrast to other age groups and social groups (Nardi, 2000; Pereira, 2010). Cases that demonstrate the pathology must be treated with caution so as not to bring bad consequences to the health of university students. Depressive disorder spreads the person's pain to the family and also to society (Usala, 2008). This research aimed to identify and characterize the use of antidepressants by students of a Nutrition Course at a private Higher Education Institution in the interior of Sao Paulo.

METHODS

A primary, cross-sectional, observational, analytical, and the unicentric study was carried out. The study was carried out among students enrolled in the Nutrition course of a private university in the interior of the state of Sao Paulo, in the Midwest of Sao Paulo. Participants' identification data and data regarding the use of antidepressants and their characterization were collected. For this, the questionnaire developed by Istilli et al. (2010) was used as a basis, with adaptations to meet the objectives of this research. The questionnaire with a quantitative approach for data analysis on antidepressants was applied in the form of self-report.

Statistical Analysis: The statistical treatment of quantitative data was carried out with the support of Excel® and BioEstat5.0 software, presented in frequency tables and/or central tendency and dispersion measures. To assess the association of the studied variables, appropriate statistical tests were used, depending on the variance of the analyzed data. The significance probability considered is 5% ($p \leq 0.05$) for the operations performed.

Ethical Aspects: The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Marilia. The invited students were duly informed about the research, and the participants signed an Informed Consent Form, guaranteeing the confidentiality of their identity. By participating in the research, the student was not subjected to any risk, whether emotional or physical. Authorization was requested from the course coordinator for further data collection.

RESULTS

Among the participants, 90% were single and only 10% had children. Regarding professional activity, 38% reported working. A total of 171 students enrolled in the Nutrition course participated in this study, distributed over four years of graduation. Of these, 80.1% were women and the age of the participants was 22.8 ± 5.7 years. There was a predominance of students who reported family income ranging from 1 to 5 minimum wages (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of family income among participants

Family income		
Less than 1 salary	5	3%
From 1 to 5 salaries	115	68%
From 6 to 10 salaries	43	25%
of 11 or more salaries	7	4%
Total	170	100%

Regarding the period of the last medical appointment, there was a predominance of students who reported that it took place less than 6 months ago (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the period to the participants' last medical appointment

Last medical appointment		
Less than 6 months	66	38%
4 to 6 months	44	26%
7 to 12 months	28	16%
More than a year	34	20%
Total	172	100%

Regarding the level of knowledge about antidepressants, there was a predominance of students who reported average knowledge, knowing the pros and cons effects (Table 3).

Table 3. Relation of the level of knowledge about the effects of antidepressants

Level of knowledge about antidepressants		
Low, I just know they are antidepressant drugs	59	35%
Medium, I know pros and cons effects	92	54%
Alto, I know its mechanism of action in the body.	19	11%
Total	170	100%

Regarding the use of antidepressants, there was a predominance of students who reported never using such drugs (Table 4).

Table 4. Relationship of use of antidepressants

Use of antidepressants		
I use	10	6%
I've taken it in the past	16	9%
I never took	145	85%
Total	171	100%

Regarding the last specialist consulted, there was a predominance of students who reported different specialties (others). Regarding the guidance received regarding the use of antidepressants, 81% of the students reported having received guidance. Among students who used antidepressants, 81% reported having received medical advice, and all considered this advice important, and 32% reported that it increases safety in therapy (Figure 1).

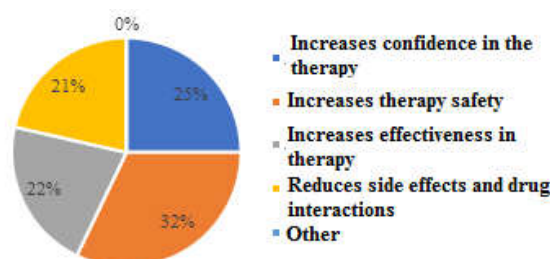


Figure 1. Participants' report on the importance of guidance in the use of medication

As for therapy, 80% had no doubts about the treatment, and 67% never changed the dose without medical advice, however, 12% reported this practice frequently. Regarding the interruption of treatment on their own, 77% reported this practice. Of the participants, 50% denied the occurrence of side effects, while 28.5% reported the presence of such effects. Of the Nutrition students who reported the use of antidepressants, all said they believed it could cause dependence, and 67% believed that it could generate tolerance. The main reasons reported by students for using antidepressants were relationships and family issues (Figure 2). When performing the inferential analysis, it was verified the presence of a significant difference in the use of antidepressants among students who work, have children, and family income. The other variables had no significant difference regarding the use of antidepressants.

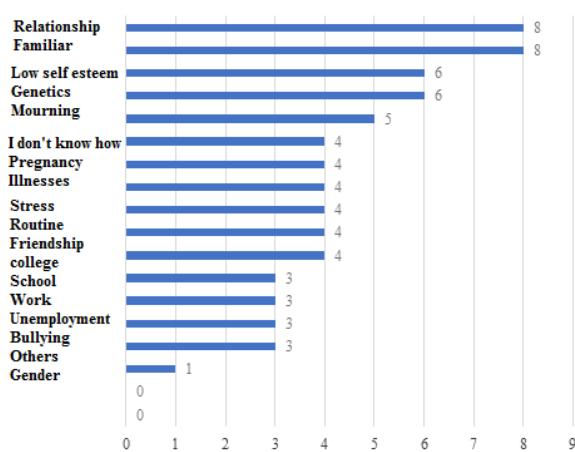


Figure 2. Report of participants as to the reason that led to the use of medication

DISCUSSION

The present study, which aimed to identify the use of antidepressants by students in the nutrition course, considered characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, children, occupation, family income, last medical appointment, level of knowledge about antidepressants, use of antidepressants, last consultation performed and what was the specialty. According to the tests performed, significant differences were evidenced regarding the use of antidepressants in the items such as family income ($p=0.0290$ χ^2), work ($p=0.0005$ χ^2), and children ($p<0.0001$ χ^2). In this context, with the increasing prevalence of psychiatric symptoms among university students, a recent study identified temporal trends in the use of psychiatric medications. Thus, in the last decade, from 2007 to 2018-2019, there has been an increase in the use of almost all classes of psychiatric medications, with reports of antidepressant medication (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, etc.) increased use from 8.0% to 15.3%, anxiolytic drugs (benzodiazepines, buspirone, etc.) from 3.0% to 7.6%, psychostimulants from 2.1% to 6.3%, antipsychotics from 0.38% to 0.92% and mood stabilizers from 0.8% to 2.0% (all $p<0.0001$), respectively. In addition, the use of more than one drug category at a time increased, from 28.2% in 2007 to 40.8% in 2018-2019 ($p<0.0001$). The proportion of students who received their most recent prescription for psychiatric medications from primary care providers increased from 49.1% in 2007 to 58.8% in 2018-2019 ($p<0.0001$), while the proportion who received these prescriptions of psychiatric care providers did not increase significantly and is at 36.1% in 2018-2019. The percentage of students using the psychiatric medication without a prescription varied year by year, starting at 11.9% in 2007 and ending at 7.7% in 2018-2019 ($p<0.0001$). The proportion of students who discussed the use of psychiatric medication with their physician or other healthcare professional three or more times in the previous year increased from 39.2% in 2007 to 49.5% in 2018-2019 ($p<0.0001$). Therefore, the proportion of college students taking psychiatric medications of all categories has increased in the last decade; these students are increasingly likely to take more than one type of psychiatric medication and to be treated by health professionals more often (Morris *et al.*, 2021).

In this regard, depression among teenagers is on the rise. Only about 40% of depressed teenagers receive treatments. A meta-analysis study examined the effects of mindfulness interventions on depression among adolescents and explored the moderating effects of participants, methods, and intervention characteristics. In 29 studies ($N = 3,688$), 1,839 adolescents participated in mindfulness interventions; 1,849 served as a control. Mean ages ranged from 10.2 to 19.5 years. Mindfulness groups showed reduced depression compared to control groups. Funded studies showed greater improvement in depression compared to unfunded studies. Interestingly, although only two research teams studied mindfulness-

based cognitive therapy, they showed improved trends in depression compared with mindfulness-based mindfulness-adapted or stress-reduction interventions. Mindfulness interventions with individual counseling tended to improve depression more than without (Reangsing, 2021). In this sense, this research allowed us to know the use of antidepressants and their characterization in students of the Nutrition course. Scientific production: the data collected throughout the study resulted in an article and presentations at events, all of a scientific nature. Training of human resources: the development of this study will contribute to professional training at the undergraduate level.

CONCLUSION

With the data obtained, it was found that the students who most use antidepressants are those with an income of up to 5 minimum wages, who work and have children, in relation to the other items, no significant changes were evidenced. As a benefit, the survey showed greater knowledge about the use of antidepressants among university students in a Nutrition course.

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