The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence depression among university students in Korea. The subjects of this study were students attending N university, and the survey was conducted in 2014. Answer sheets from 375 respondents were gathered, and 353 of them were analyzed except for 22 incomplete ones. The level of depression of the university students was 1.58±0.51 point and the level of anxiety of the university students was 2.04±0.60 point. Multiple regression was conducted to examine the effects of risk factors on depression. Peer support (t=-4.164, p<.001) and aggression (t=11.497, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with depression. These variables explained 37.0% of depression among university students. Multiple regression was conducted to examine the effects of risk factors on anxiety. Gender (t=2.406, p=.017) and aggression (t=10.623 p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with anxiety. These variables explained 29.7% of anxiety among university students. Based on the findings of this study, school health professionals should assess important factors influencing depression and anxiety and develop continuously intervention strategies to reduce depression and anxiety among university students.

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence depression among university students in Korea. The subjects of this study were students attending N university, and the survey was conducted in 2014. Answer sheets from 375 respondents were gathered, and 353 of them were analyzed except for 22 incomplete ones. The level of depression of the university students was 1.58±0.51 point and the level of anxiety of the university students was 2.04±0.60 point. Multiple regression was conducted to examine the effects of risk factors on depression. Peer support (t=-4.164, p<.001) and aggression (t=11.497, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with depression. These variables explained 37.0% of depression among university students. Multiple regression was conducted to examine the effects of risk factors on anxiety. Gender (t=2.406, p=.017) and aggression (t=10.623 p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with anxiety. These variables explained 29.7% of anxiety among university students. Based on the findings of this study, school health professionals should assess important factors influencing depression and anxiety and develop continuously intervention strategies to reduce depression and anxiety among university students.

**Keywords:** Aggression, Anxiety, Depression, Peer Support, University Students

1. **Introduction**

Depression is a critical public health problem characterized by persistent low mood that is accompanied by low self-esteem and by a loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities. Depressed people cannot control their emotions, and the symptoms last for a long time. If left untreated, depression can lead to serious incidents and fatalities. In Korea, the prevalence rate of depression was 18.1% for female and 5.8% for male in the 20–29 age bracket. Depression may specifically lead to suicide that is ranked as the leading cause of death among the 20–29 year age group according to the Korean Statistical Information Service. In addition, eight out of every 100 South Korean adults or 2.64 million people suffer from one or more mental disorders according to a recent survey by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

The survey shows a steady increase in the number of people suffering from depression a serious medical condition that, if left untreated, can lead to suicide or criminal behavior. In the USA, recent research indicates that young adult college students experience increased levels of depression and anxiety. The rate of college students diagnosed with depression increased from 10% in 2000 to 15% in 2006. Anxiety is an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, often accompanied by nervous behavior, such as pacing back and forth, somatic complaints, and rumination. It can be a subjectively unpleasant feeling of dread over anticipated events, such as the feeling of imminent death. Anxiety is a feeling of fear, worry, and uneasiness, usually generalized and unfocused as an overreaction to a situation that is only subjectively seen as menacing. It is often accompanied by muscular tension, restlessness, fatigue, and problems in concentration.
Anxiety is an inevitable part of life in contemporary society. It is important to realize that there are many situations that trigger anxiety in everyday life. The nature of anxiety among university students is based more on social comparisons, academic failure, criticism, and physical appearance. Fears and worries during adolescence are therefore normal but become problematic when they become persistent, severe, and incapacitating, and when they interfere with or limit the significant. Nearly a quarter of the adult population will suffer from an anxiety disorder at some point during their life. University students are at a transitional period that can cause emotional upset in vulnerable youth. Many university students experience frustration because of the pressure of competition for good grades and the failure to find work. As a result, depression is common among university students and, in extreme cases, may lead to suicide. The risk for suicide is often higher among college students compared with same-age non-collegiate peers. It may also be exacerbated by the quality of social support and interaction an individual receives. Depression among university students is often accompanied with social rejection by peers, which accentuates the course of that emotion. Despite the documented association between anger and depression, little is known about the impact of the interaction of both emotions on peer relations. Previous studies have shown that young adult college students’ depression and depression among nursing students necessitate a pilot for improving depression care on college campuses. A relationship study between depression and anxiety, aggression, and peer support for college students have scarcely been conducted in Korea. Thus, in the current study, we are interested in examining the factors that influence depression among university students in Korea.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design to investigate the factors that influence depression among university students in Korea.

2.2 Study Samples

The subjects of this study were the students in N university, and the survey was conducted in 2014. The answer sheets from 375 respondents were gathered, and 353 of them were analyzed except for 22 incomplete ones.

2.3 Measurements

2.3.1 Depression: Short Version

The depression scale, developed by Kim and Ann, was used to measure the adolescents’ depression level. There were a total of 8 items, which included the feeling of sadness or hopelessness. The items were based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a higher depressive level. Cronbach’s alpha for aggression in this paper was .90.

2.3.2 Anxiety: Short Version

The anxiety scale, developed by Kim and Ann, was used to measure the adolescents’ anxiety level. There were a total of 8 items, which included worry or tension about small things. The items were based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a higher anxiety level. Cronbach’s alpha for aggression in this paper was .90.

2.3.3 Aggression: Short Version

The aggression scale, developed by Kim and Ann, was used to measure the adolescents’ aggressive level. There were a total of 8 items, which included anger or aggressive feeling around people. The items were based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a higher aggressive feeling. Cronbach’s alpha for aggression in this paper was .88.

2.3.4 Peer Support: Short Version

The Peer Support Scale, developed by Lee and Shin, was used to measure an adolescent’s perceived support from peers. There were a total of 5 items, which included emotional support and encouragement from friends. The items were based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a higher peer support. Cronbach’s alpha for peer support in this paper was .92.

2.4 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out on March 7-8, 2014. The subjects of this study were the students in N university, and the survey was conducted during a member’s training for the new semester in 2014. The answer sheets from 250 respondents were gathered, and the answer sheets from 226 respondents were analyzed except for 24 incomplete ones.
2.5 Data Analyses

The collected data were analyzed with SPSS18.0 statistical program. Descriptive statistics for all study variables as well as the reliability assessment of the study instruments were computed. To analyze the differences in the independent and dependent variables, t-tests were used. The factors that influenced depression were analyzed using multiple regression analysis.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to collecting the data, the decision regarding consent for participation was made by university students. Participants also received information on this study including purpose, potential risks, and benefits of this study and the data collection procedures. Participants who were reluctant to participate in this study could refuse participation at any time.

3. Results

3.1 Participant Characteristics

The baseline characteristics of the study participants are shown in Table 1. The mean age of the participants was 20 years old; 244 students (69.1%) of them were female. All respondents were university students: 144 students (41.3%) of the participants were in their first year at the university. 187 students (53.7%) of the participants were majoring in health. Regarding religion, 86 students (25.0%) of the participants were Christian and 34 students (9.9%) were Catholic. Of the 353 participants, 90 students (25.8%) didn’t drink alcohol and 318 students (91.1%) were nonsmokers.

Table 1. General characteristics (N=353)

| Variables      | Categories | Mean± SD, n(%) |
|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Age            |            | 20.27± 3.94    |
| Gender         | Male       | 109(30.9)      |
|                | Female     | 244(69.1)      |
| School year    | 1<sup>st</sup> | 144(41.3)      |
|                | 2<sup>nd</sup> | 88(25.2)       |
|                | 3<sup>rd</sup> | 56(16.0)       |
|                | 4<sup>th</sup> | 61(17.5)       |
| Department     | Engineering | 67(19.3)       |
|                | Economic   | 33(9.5)        |
|                | Art        | 19(5.5)        |
|                | Humanity   | 42(12.1)       |
|                | Health     | 187(53.7)      |
| Religion       | Christian  | 86(25.0)       |
|                | Catholic   | 34(9.9)        |
|                | Buddhism   | 22(6.4)        |
|                | Others     | 10(2.9)        |
|                | None       | 192 (55.8)     |
| Residence      | Home       | 223 (64.3)     |
|                | Dormitory  | 75(21.6)       |
|                | Boarding   | 47(13.5)       |
|                | Relatives  | 2(0.6)         |
| Alcohol intake | ≥4times/wk | 6(1.7)         |
|                | 2~3times/wk| 42(12.0)       |
|                | ≤1time/wk  | 211(60.5)      |
|                | No alcohol | 90(25.8)       |
| Smoking        | Yes        | 31(8.9)        |
|                | No         | 318(91.1)      |
3.2 Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Descriptive statistics for depression, anxiety, aggression, and peer support are shown in Table 2. The level of depression is 1.58±.51 point (ranging 1-4) and the level of anxiety is 2.04±0.60 point (ranging 1-4). The level of aggression is 1.76±.54 point (ranging 1-4). The level of peer support is 3.93±.61 (ranging 1-4).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for variables (N=353)

| Variables       | Range | Mean±SD |
|-----------------|-------|---------|
| Depression      | 1-4   | 1.58±.51|
| Anxiety         | 1-4   | 2.04±.60|
| Aggression      | 1-4   | 1.76±.54|
| Peer support    | 1-5   | 3.93±.61|

3.3 Depression According to General Characteristics

Table 3 shows depression according to general characteristics. There were no significant differences in gender, school year, department, religion, residence type, alcohol, and smoking.

Table 3. Depression according to general characteristics (N=353)

| Variables     | Categories       | Mean±SD | t or F | p     |
|---------------|------------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Gender        | Male             | 1.52±0.51| -1.371 | .171  |
|                | Female           | 1.60±0.50|        |       |
| School year   | 1st              | 1.56±0.49|        |       |
|                | 2nd              | 1.62±0.50| 0.442  | .723  |
|                | 3rd              | 1.58±0.48|        |       |
|                | 4th              | 1.53±0.49|        |       |
| Department    | Engineering      | 1.51±0.50|        |       |
|                | Economic         | 1.49±0.49|        |       |
|                | Art              | 1.67±0.51| 0.946  | .437  |
|                | Humanity         | 1.64±0.50|        |       |
|                | Health           | 1.58±0.48|        |       |
| Religion      | Yes              | 1.63±0.53| 1.345  | .179  |
|                | No               | 1.55±0.49|        |       |
| Residence type| Home             | 1.57±0.48|        |       |
|                | Dormitory        | 1.59±0.52| 0.740  | .529  |
|                | Boarding         | 1.57±0.50|        |       |
|                | Relatives        | 1.06±0.08|        |       |
| Alcohol       | Yes              | 1.60±0.51| 1.192  | .234  |
|                | No               | 1.52±0.49|        |       |
| Smoking       | Yes              | 1.49±0.56| -0.855 | .399  |
|                | No               | 1.58±0.48|        |       |
3.4 Anxiety According to General Characteristics

Table 4 shows anxiety according to general characteristics. There was significant difference in gender. Female students felt higher anxiety than male students. There were no significant differences in school year, department, religion, residence type, alcohol intake, and smoking.

Table 4. Anxiety according to general characteristics (N=353)

| Variables       | Categories | Mean±SD | t or F | p    |
|-----------------|------------|---------|--------|------|
| Gender          | Male       | 1.93±0.61 |        | -2.398 | .017 |
|                 | Female     | 2.09±0.58 |        |        |      |
| School year     | 1st        | 2.06±0.58 |        | 1.525  | .208 |
|                 | 2nd        | 2.11±0.59 |        |        |      |
|                 | 3rd        | 1.99±0.62 |        |        |      |
|                 | 4th        | 1.91±0.58 |        |        |      |
| Department      | Engineering| 1.94±0.58 |        | 0.708  | .587 |
|                 | Economic   | 2.13±0.56 |        |        |      |
|                 | Art        | 2.08±0.51 |        |        |      |
|                 | Humanity   | 2.09±0.64 |        |        |      |
|                 | Health     | 2.03±0.60 |        |        |      |
| Religion        | Yes        | 2.11±0.58 |        | 1.591  | .112 |
|                 | No         | 2.00±0.61 |        |        |      |
| Residence type  | Home       | 2.03±0.61 |        | 0.140  | .936 |
|                 | Dormitory  | 2.06±0.56 |        |        |      |
|                 | Boarding   | 2.03±0.58 |        |        |      |
|                 | Relatives  | 1.81±0.44 |        |        |      |
| Alcohol intake  | Yes        | 2.06±0.61 |        | 1.243  | .215 |
|                 | No         | 1.97±0.56 |        |        |      |
| Smoking         | Yes        | 2.03±0.73 |        | -0.430 | .966 |
|                 | No         | 2.04±0.58 |        |        |      |

3.5 Aggression According to General Characteristics

Table 5 shows aggression according to general characteristics. There was significant difference in religion. Students with religion showed higher aggression level than students without religion. There were no significant differences in gender, school year, department, religion, residence type, alcohol intake, and smoking.

3.6 Peer Support According to General Characteristics

Table 6 shows peer support according to general characteristics. There were no significant differences in gender, school year, department, religion, residence type, alcohol intake, and smoking.

3.7 Correlation Analysis among Depression, Anxiety, Aggression and Peer Support

Correlation analysis for depression, anxiety, aggression, and peer support is shown in Table 7. Depression was significantly correlated with anxiety (r= -.683, p<.001), aggression (r= .584, p<.001), peer support (r= -.312, p<.001).
## Table 5. Aggression according to general characteristics (N=353)

| Variables   | Categories | Mean±SD | t or F | p   |
|-------------|------------|---------|--------|-----|
| Gender      | Male       | 1.73±0.61 | -0.380 | .704|
| Gender      | Female     | 1.76±0.50 |        |     |
| School year | 1st        | 1.70±0.52 |        |     |
| School year | 2nd        | 1.88±0.57 | 2.518  | .058|
| School year | 3rd        | 1.76±0.54 |        |     |
| School year | 4th        | 1.68±0.48 |        |     |
| Department  | Engineering| 1.72±0.57 |        |     |
| Department  | Economic   | 1.77±0.56 | 0.077  | .989|
| Department  | Art        | 1.80±0.59 |        |     |
| Department  | Humanity   | 1.75±0.53 |        |     |
| Department  | Health     | 1.75±0.52 |        |     |
| Religion    | Yes        | 1.85±0.56 | 2.481  | .014|
| Religion    | No         | 1.70±0.52 |        |     |
| Residence type | Home    | 1.76±0.50 | 0.140  | .936|
| Residence type | Dormitory | 1.72±0.57 |        |     |
| Residence type | Boarding | 1.84±0.60 |        |     |
| Residence type | Relatives | 1.06±0.09 |        |     |
| Alcohol intake | Yes      | 1.79±0.54 | 1.663  | .175|
| Alcohol intake | No       | 1.67±0.54 |        |     |
| Smoking     | Yes        | 1.80±0.72 | 0.383  | .704|
| Smoking     | No         | 1.75±0.51 |        |     |

## Table 6. Peer support according to general characteristics (N=353)

| Variables   | Categories | Mean±SD | t or F | p   |
|-------------|------------|---------|--------|-----|
| Gender      | Male       | 3.91±0.67 | -0.296 | .767|
| Gender      | Female     | 3.93±0.58 |        |     |
| School year | 1st        | 3.99±0.60 |        |     |
| School year | 2nd        | 3.82±0.59 | 1.405  | .241|
| School year | 3rd        | 3.91±0.64 |        |     |
| School year | 4th        | 3.94±0.58 |        |     |
| Department  | Engineering| 3.87±0.71 |        |     |
| Department  | Economic   | 4.01±0.52 | 1.344  | .253|
| Department  | Art        | 4.19±0.60 |        |     |
| Department  | Humanity   | 3.97±0.49 |        |     |
| Department  | Health     | 3.90±0.60 |        |     |
| Religion    | Yes        | 3.91±0.64 | -0.296 | .768|
| Religion    | No         | 3.93±0.58 |        |     |
| Residence type | Home    | 3.96±0.59 | 0.732  | .533|
| Residence type | Dormitory | 3.87±0.64 |        |     |
| Residence type | Boarding | 3.85±0.62 |        |     |
| Residence type | Relatives | 3.80±0.28 |        |     |
| Alcohol intake | Yes      | 3.95±0.58 | 1.237  | .217|
| Alcohol intake | No       | 3.86±0.68 |        |     |
| Smoking     | Yes        | 4.07±0.72 |        |     |
| Smoking     | No         | 3.92±0.59 | 1.368  | .172|
Table 7. Correlation analysis among depression, anxiety, aggression, and peer support (N=353)

| Variables     | Depression |
|---------------|------------|
|               | r  | p     |
| Anxiety       | .683| <.001 |
| Aggression    | .584| <.001 |
| Peer support  | -.312| <.001 |

Table 8. Factors influencing depression (N=353)

| Variables             | B     | SE   | Beta  | t    | p      |
|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|
| Gender\(^1\)          | .028  | .050 | .026  | 0.552| .581   |
| School year           | -.014 | .019 | -.032 | -.742| .459   |
| Religion\(^2\)        | -.026 | .044 | -.026 | -.590| .556   |
| Alcohol intake        | .045  | .049 | .041  | 0.922| .357   |
| Smoking\(^3\)         | -.055 | .082 | -.032 | -.673| .501   |
| Peer support          | -.155 | .037 | -.191 | -4.164| <.001 |
| Aggression            | .484  | .042 | .533  | 11.497| <.001  |

F = 29.084\(^***\)  adj. R\(^2\) = .370

1) Gender (male=0, female=1), 2) Religion (no=0, yes=1), 3) Smoking (no=0, yes=1), ***: p<.001

3.8 Factors Influencing Depression

Multiple regression was conducted to examine the effects of risk factors on depression. Peer support (t=-4.164, p<.001) and aggression (t=11.497, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with depression. These variables explained 37.0% of depression among university students Table 8.

3.9 Factors Influencing Anxiety

Multiple regressions was conducted to examine the effects of risk factors on anxiety. Gender (t=2.406, p=.017) and aggression (t=10.623, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with anxiety. These variables explained 29.7% of anxiety among university students Table 9.

Table 9. Factors influencing anxiety (N=353)

| Variables            | B     | SE   | Beta  | t    | p      |
|----------------------|-------|------|-------|------|--------|
| Gender\(^1\)         | .154  | .064 | .120  | 2.406| .017   |
| School year          | -.045 | .024 | -.086 | -1.856| .064   |
| Religion\(^2\)       | .014  | .057 | .011  | .241 | .810   |
| Alcohol intake       | .048  | .064 | .035  | .747 | .455   |
| Smoking\(^3\)        | .055  | .106 | .026  | .518 | .605   |
| Peer support         | -.026 | .048 | -.027 | -.551| .582   |
| Aggression           | .575  | .054 | .521  | 10.623| <.001  |

F = 21.140\(^***\)  adj. R\(^2\) = .297

1) Gender (male=0, female=1), 2) Religion (no=0, yes=1), 3) Smoking (no=0, yes=1), ***: p<.001

4. Discussion

The present study was designed to determine the factors that influence depression and anxiety among university students to find out solutions that could improve the students’ mental health. In this study, the level of depression was 1.58±.51 point (ranging 1-4) and relatively low. It showed that the students’ mental health in this study was not bad.
The result was similar in a previous study\(^7\). Park\(^7\) reported that the level of depression was 43±38 (ranging 0-2), lower in level than the median of the scale. Nevertheless, according to the Korean nationwide survey, some 8.3 percent of respondents had suffered from one or more mental illnesses for the past year\(^2\). Compared with the 2001 survey, cases of depression have risen, from 1.8 percent in the population in 2001 to 2.5 percent in 20062. The number of students who suffered from depression has increased in Korea.

In multiple regression of depression, peer support (t=-4.164, p<.001) and aggression (t=11.497, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with depression. It showed that peer support had an influence on lowering the level of depression. This result was partly consistent with the previous result\(^18\). In order to decrease the level of depression among university students, student consultants run by boards of administration or school districts should watch the state of peer support thoroughly. Peer support is face-to-face relationship and is likely to be important for the prevention of depression\(^7\). Additionally, government, schools, and boards of education should provide a depression screening test for university students as primary assessment of mental health. Furthermore, to carry out this project well, recruiting professional manpower, having budget support for university organization, and installing a policy for mental health promotion should be reinforced. The health education contents for preventing depression may include the definition of depression, its symptoms, risky characteristics of depression, information about recent incidents of suicide inducing depression in the district, and resources available if they have concerns\(^17\). In addition, free online screening test provided from the Web site of a mental health center will be helpful for regional university students.

Meanwhile, this study has shown that aggression among university students has influence on their level of depression. This result is partly consistent with a previous study\(^7\). An empirical research showed that having some personality characteristics increases the risk of developing depression\(^19\). Aggression usually is caused by desire frustration. A study explained that anger or aggression in youth could elusively display as depression\(^20\). Sometimes aggression turns into depression or helplessness. In modern society, university students are surrounded by many technologies such as Internet games and smart phones. Such technology devices perpetrate any kind of aggression. For example, anonymously, they express their feeling or thinking without filtration, such as harassment, bullying, teasing, telling lies, making fun of someone, making rude or mean comments, spreading rumors, or making threatening or aggressive comments through e-mail, chat room, instant messaging, Web site, blog, or text messaging\(^11\). Clearly, not only university students but also school health care professionals should be empowered and responsible for online aggression. School police must explore current aggression in schools and work collaboratively to develop new policies. School districts and boards of education must work in conjunction with public health centers to create a positive school atmosphere. A researcher\(^11\) indicates that students who feel connected to their school, who think their teachers care about them and are fair, and who think the school rules are clear and fair are less likely to commit any type of aggression.

In multiple regression of anxiety, gender (t=2.406, p=.017) and aggression (t=10.623 p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with anxiety. Consistent with findings from a previous study\(^6\), female students reported higher levels of anxiety than male students. This result can explain that female students are, by nature, more persistently anxious about small and minor things happening in the present and future than male students. On the other hand, male students’ employment rate is 55.6%, and female students’ employment rate is 51.3% in 2014\(^11\). Thus, job insecurity among female students may cause severe tension due to uncertainty about the future. Based on the findings of this study, school health professionals develop continuously intervention strategies to reduce depression among university students.

### 5. Conclusion

The current study is an important first step in illuminating the characteristics of university students’ depression and anxiety. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence depression and anxiety among university students in Korea. The subjects of this study were students attending N University, and the survey was conducted in 2014. Answer sheets from 375 respondents were gathered, and 353 of them were analyzed except for 22 incomplete ones. The level of depression of the university students was 1.58±.51 point and the level of anxiety of the university students was 2.04±.60 point.
In multiple regression model predicting depression, peer support (t=-4.164, p<.001) and aggression (t=11.497, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with depression. In the multiple regression model predicting depression, peer support (t=-4.164, p<.001) and aggression (t=11.497, p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with depression. In multiple regression model predicting anxiety, age (t=2.406, p=.017) and aggression (t=10.623 p<.001) were found to be factors significantly associated with anxiety. Based on the findings of this study, university administrators should assess important factors influencing depression and anxiety.

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