

# Effects of Depression on Literature, Human Behaviour and Society

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**Abstract—** Our world is afflicted by a depression pandemic. Adults, children, and teenagers are all affected. This has been found in even the most well-known authors and artists. The figures are mind-boggling. We need to investigate this phenomenon more in order to have a better understanding of it. And how art and literature might help to offer an emotional escape from it. We lead lives that are frequently worthless and empty. Running from one objective to the next without taking time for ourselves causes us to lose touch with loved ones and sets the stage for self-isolation. Depression then establishes itself in a person's thoughts. And in order to mend ourselves, we turn to external and material successes for comfort. A sad individual is frequently treated harshly by society. We tend to dismiss the individual as an outsider and maintain a safe distance from them. Instead of depression, the sad individual is singled out as if he or she has a problem. For someone suffering from depression, art and literature play an important part in this process. For some, it can be a source of comfort. Reading a fictitious book helps readers to leave their everyday life and enter the world of someone else. If only for a minute, we forget about ourselves. Writing novels and painting on canvas give a release for some people, allowing them to express the sorrow of their lives, their anxieties, and their concerns. We need someone to listen to us most of the time, and when that option isn't accessible, we resort to papers and canvas. A blank sheet is a kind stranger who is eager to hear what we have to say. Every one of us requires assistance at some point in our lives. All we have to do is ask for it.

**Keywords—**depression, literature, art, emotional release, psychology

## I. INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Let's take a quick look at what this term means before we get started. Depression is a mental condition that causes a continuous sensation of melancholy and a loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities, according to psychology. It has a detrimental impact on you as well as others around you. Adults, teenagers, and children can all be affected. It can last anywhere from a few weeks to several months and in some cases, even years. [1]

Depression has been a part of humanity's history from the dawn of time. We've been using logical analysis to attempt to make sense of it.

The word 'deprimere,' which means 'to push down,' is derived from the Latin language. Since the 14th century, the word "depress" has been used to indicate "to subdue" or "to knock down in spirits."

**Symptoms:** The symptoms of depression vary from person to person but most commonly, they can include:

- losing interest or happiness in activities or hobbies
- change in appetite
- sleeping too much or too little
- loss of energy, fatigue
- feeling of worthlessness
- In extreme cases, recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It can be lonely to be suffering with any form of disability, whether physical or mental. It may be quite taxing on a person, particularly when there is a lack of emotional support and the ability to communicate one's thoughts with someone. This is where literature steps in.

Many people have utilised books as a sort of therapeutic comfort, whether consciously or unconsciously. Reading gives people the opportunity to be vulnerable, feel emotions, and confront difficult situations. We can find an anchor to keep us afloat through reading stories, listening to music, or just looking at a beautiful picture that represents our own challenges. It gives you the impression that what you're going through is something that others have gone through as well. For a short time, books give the greatest getaway from life's challenges. Isn't that the point of art and fiction?

The sense of community found in literature, as well as a feeling of belonging with the characters, may assist in providing a friend when needed and address one of the symptoms and probable causes of depression: loneliness.

### 2.1 Famous Authors and Artists who Battled Depression and how It Affected Their Work

There have been authors and other artists who have struggled with depression and other mental illnesses. Many of the world's most well-known literary and musical works had their origins in the author's battle with this condition. Here are a few well-known artists that battled this illness:

**a. Emily Dickinson:** Despite the fact that she was never officially diagnosed with depression. Emily Dickinson's loneliness may be seen in the way she wrote her poetry. Her melancholy literary topic has led readers and historians to speculate about her mental state. 'I Felt a Funeral in my Brain' is one of her most powerful poems. She was also known as 'The Lady in White' around town since she never left her family's house. Dickinson died without being recognised for her work, which is a tragedy. [2]

**b. Sylvia Plath:** She is regarded as one of the best poetesses of the twentieth century. Plath attempted suicide for the first time when she was just 19 years old. She battled depression during her brief literary career. Her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, is about a character who is suffering from suicidal depression and how he recovers. At the age of 30, she took her own life by inhaling gas from her cooking oven.

**c. Anne Rice:** Anne Rice is an American novelist who struggled to find popularity as a writer at first. She is claimed to have suffered from depression following the death of her 5-year-old daughter from leukaemia. Rice was inconsolably upset. Writing was her only way out of this misery. *Interview with a Vampire* was her debut novel, and it was followed by many more in the Vampire Chronicles series.

Many authors struggle with their work while also suffering from depression. Writing may be a kind of relief for some people. When you're surrounded by the characters you've created, it might offer you joy and tranquilly.

**d. Stephen King:** He is known all over the world as a contemporary maestro of suspense and horror. He is the author of numerous well-known horror novels, including *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*, and *Salem's Lot*. The majority of people are unaware that King has struggled with substance addiction and alcoholism in order to cope with his despair. The majority of individuals use them as a way to self-medicate and escape from despair.

Apart from authors, there have been many other artists who battled through depression.

**e. Vincent Van Gogh:** He was a prominent Dutch painter and one of the most well-known artists of all time. He produced around 2,100 works of art, including 860 oil paintings. He was not economically successful, suffered from acute despair and poverty, and at the age of 37, he committed suicide. He even used to eat paint and other poisonous substances because he was suicidal. The majority of his well-known masterpieces were created in a hospital room. He did not make the renowned picture 'Starry Night' because he was depressed; rather, he used it to express his hope and love for the world. [3]

**f. Michael Jackson:** Who in today's world hasn't heard of him? Record producer, dancer, actor, composer, and singer known as the "King of Pop." Despite his popularity and money, his personal life was a mess. He was a victim of

child abuse and bullying as a youngster, and he suffered with the trauma throughout his life. Throughout his whole life, he was accused of making false accusations.

### III. DEPRESSION IN INDIAN LITERATURE

From the past few decades, we have seen and felt a lot of change coming over the Indian society. Our literacy rate is increasing as more and more children pour into schools and get education. Topics that were considered taboo not long are being discussed and debated upon, which is a very welcome change. Now, we're breaking stereotypes and old notions of our society and moving towards a new, a better future.

Depression, being one of the taboo topics is now a familiar word among people. But it is essential to see how it is being represented in the common media. Earlier, the books on this subject used to be a very poor representation as most of them used to portray depressed people as psychopaths or as someone with violent tendencies. But now, there are some who are writing about mental health and how mental disabilities present themselves in different manner in different people. This is necessary for the Indian readers so that they can have clear sense of mental disabilities.

Numerous Indian books talk about depression in their own unique ways. Some of them are:

**1. Em and the Big Hoom by Jerry Pinto:** In this novel, Pinto writes about his mother who was suffering from depression. It shows how the family members understood a mental disability and tried to help her, by making little adjustments in their daily lives. It shows how compassion and sensitivity towards the affected person can bring a change in them. The book won Hindu Literary Prize, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize.

**2. Sepia Leaves by Amandeep Sandhu:** Going through tough times, make a family realize how they need to cooperate with each other on this long and hard journey. Sepia Leaves talks about a young boy named Appu and how he deals with his maladjusted family. The arrival of a surrogate mother in the family sends Appu's mother in a schizophrenic madness. Appu slowly comes to terms with it, but in order to support his family, he lets go of his childhood and takes the role of a parent. [4]

**3. The Reason is You by Nikita Singh:** The novel tells a story of a young woman with crippling depression that causes her to almost kill her partner. These kinds of stories are often misunderstood since it shows that people with mental health are prone towards violence and hence are a threat to everyone around them. This in turn fuels the feeling of alienation towards those who have been diagnosed as depressed.

Proper representation in a positive light is necessary so that the stories that young minds read don't add up another layer of stereotype on this already existing stereotypical society. It is the main duty of the authors and publishers to look deeply into this multi-faceted spectrum of literature and mental health issues so that there is no window for misrepresentation.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

##### HOW DEPRESSION AFFECTS SOMEONE'S LIFE

Depression and its symptoms can be overwhelming affecting a person's life and behaviour in a variety of ways. Like any untreated disease, sadness, gloom, and self-doubt colour the sufferer's entire world and change their perspective and outlook from optimism to pessimism. There are therapies and drugs accessible in today's environment, where we now have access to modern medicine.

However, in the past, art and expression were some of the only methods for persons suffering from depression to cope with and make sense of their distressing emotions. Even with all of our meds and therapy treatments, art may still provide a healthy outlet for people to release and express their feelings and grief.

We tend to turn to art and literature for further insight into depression, trying to make sense of the disorder through creative expressions and artistic pursuits.

Art can give an opportunity for the sufferer to convey sentiments and thoughts that are difficult to articulate verbally and can only be fulfilled via a more creative activity. While creativity cannot cure depression, it can provide some comfort to those who are depressed. [5]

In recent years, depression has received more attention, with more artists stepping forward to fight against the depression stigma and highlight the fact that mental illness can happen to anyone.

##### 4.1 A NEW GLORIFIED DEPRESSION

Earlier often we used to avoid this topic, but now depression and suicide have gained attention as modern day media, pop culture and literature, features people suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts. Even though this recent exposure is certainly effective in dispelling some of the stain surrounding mental illness, some methods of exposure through literature and social media have led to an overly idealistic, even a romantic idea of this disability.

Instead of being a mental illness to be concerned about, depression is now taking the shape of a 'beautiful suffering', ultimately ending with a 'beautiful death' which really downplays the seriousness and the ugly nature of the mental illness. In pop culture, particularly in dramas, teenagers struggling with depression are portrayed as cold, mysterious and emotionless, but fascinating and 'aesthetic' at the same time. It is essential to understand that depression and suicide are neither beautiful nor mysterious. [6]

Works of literature that celebrate suicide and depression are not a modern-day phenomenon. For example, William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," one of the most well-known works of literature in the world, relates the narrative of two lovers who both kill themselves for their love. While Shakespeare's work used suicide to underscore the beauty and power of love, it has now been transformed into a means for gaining forbidden love through the ultimate act of defiance: death.

Another recent Netflix teen drama show, "13 Reasons Why" depicts the story of, Hannah Baker, a depressed teenage girl who commits suicide by slitting her wrists as she was bullied and raped. No doubt that the show was intended to raise awareness and to display how harsh circumstances can affect a person's mental health, but it also showcased a 'revenge fantasy'. How you can ruin the lives of others after you are gone. As per many critical reviews, the show ended up glorifying the act of suicide so much that Netflix had to remove the graphic suicide scene from its last episode. [7]

Portrayal like these often discourage people from getting help since it shows mental health problems as unsolvable health diseases and encourage discrimination.

##### 4.2 IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND CREATIVITY?

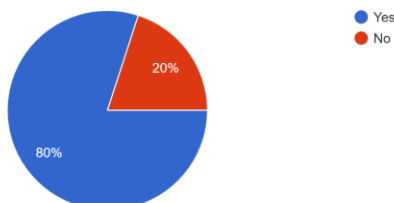
We come to the conclusion that there's a substantial link between creativity and mood disorders. All recent research that has looked at the relationship between depression and creativity have revealed consistent, favourable results. Many of the studies cited have insufficient definitions of both creativity and mood problems. To yet, the forms of creativity that have been examined have been limited. It has mostly concentrated on authors. There remains a vast territory between the study of the relationship between creativity and mental illness. [8]

##### 4.3 SOCIETY - THE MANUFACTURER OF DEPRESSION?

A lot of us live lives that are dull and colourless. Charles Bukowski, a renowned author, has tactfully written this very famous quote "Some people never go crazy, what truly horrible lives they must lead."

The world we live in is fiercely competitive, and financial success and performance are rewarded in it. All we like to be is someone who is always striving for these outward indicators of success. Our emotional and psychological equilibrium is strained by this work culture. It leaves us with no time to engage in activities that offer us with the needed break to relax our brains. Instead, we feel estranged and alone from our loved ones. We don't have time for our families or even ourselves. We are slowly but steadily forgetting how to live healthily.

Q.1 Are you familiar with the term 'depression'?  
75 responses



#### 4.5 SOCIETY'S BEHAVIOR TOWARDS DEPRESSION

It is natural that life will be challenging at times. Our culture makes the mistake of expecting individuals to be happy all of the time, and if they aren't, then something is wrong with them. We want everyone to blend in and adhere to the 'normalcy' that we've established. People that are sad are labelled as "dysfunctional." Human beings are not machines that simply just 'dysfunctional' at any time. This labelling is completely inaccurate. Depression is frequently quite understandable.

Most often people are living lives in which they are struggling, living in loveless relationships, or suffering from loss. Instead of focusing on the depression, society, or rather the majority of it, treats them as outcasts. Rather than treat depression, we need to assist these people to come in terms with their life challenges. What we should understand is that it is essential to treat the person, not the depression. We need to get a better realization of how a depressed person struggles with contextuality in their lives and to appreciate their struggles and challenges.

#### V RESULT

**Contextuality** An independent study was conducted from 15 May, 2022 to 21 May, 2022 to gain the opinion and general consensus of the people. Around 75 people participated in the survey. The age range of the candidates who participated in the survey was from 18 to 40 and above. Questions related to depression and literature were asked to ascertain their understanding on such matters. And also, what is the view of the people towards depression and those who might need help during their difficult period.

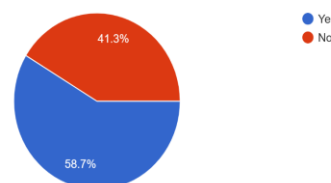
##### 1) DATA ANALYSIS & STUDY

Below given is the data collected and represented in graphic charts. The data was further analysed and new findings were collected.

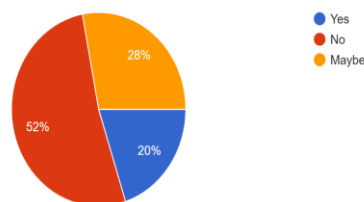
Firstly, the participants were asked about whether or not they were familiar with the term depression and what it stand for. About 80% of them opted for yes, while 20% of the participants said no.

Next, the question was raised about how our participants view depression. Whether or not they are aware of its effects or whether they think that depression is just simply 'being sad'. While, 20% of the participants were unsure about it, about 28% agreed that it is simply inside someone's head and is not real. Only a little more than half of the participant i.e., 52% disagreed and accepted that depression is a real phenomenon, which needs to be taken seriously.

Q.3 Are you familiar with any artist's / musician's / writer's work, who struggled through depression and created masterpieces of art?  
75 responses

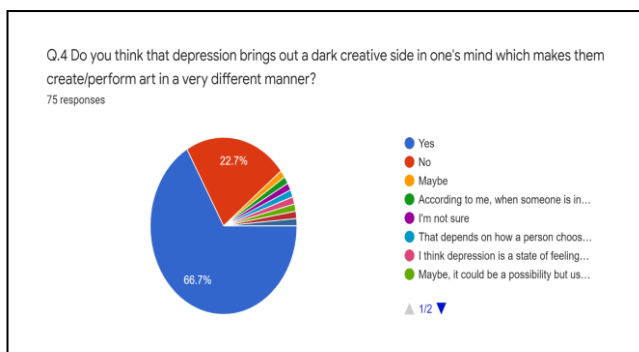


Q.2 Do you think depression is only 'inside someone's head', and isn't a 'real' thing?  
75 responses

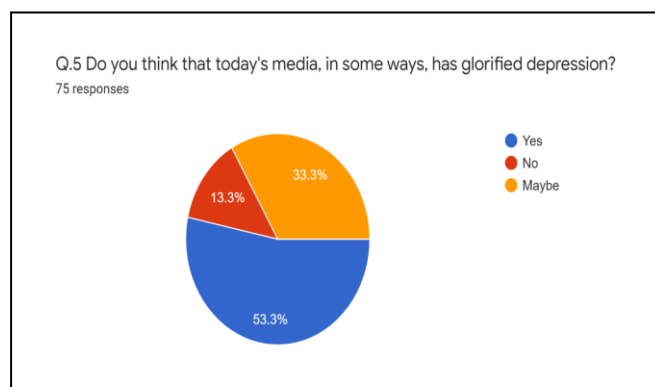


Participants were asked if they have read any novel or heard any music which was written/composed by any artist who has been known to be suffering from depression. This question was asked to ascertain if they are aware of the effect depression can have on an artist's mind and the art which they produce. About 58.7% said yes, while 41.3% said no. It shows how aware the society is about mental disabilities, in general.



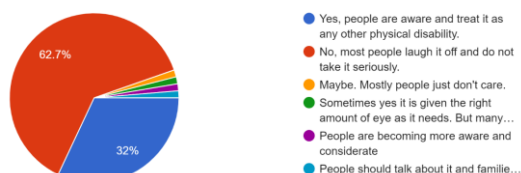


When asked if whether or not depression brings out a different side of art from the artists' minds, 66.7% agreed to it and said that depression does bring out a sort of creative side which makes them produce art differently. While about 22.7% participants disagreed with it, the rest of the participants had mixed answers. Some were of the opinion that depression instead devoid one of any feeling or creativity, and leads to numbness of emotions.



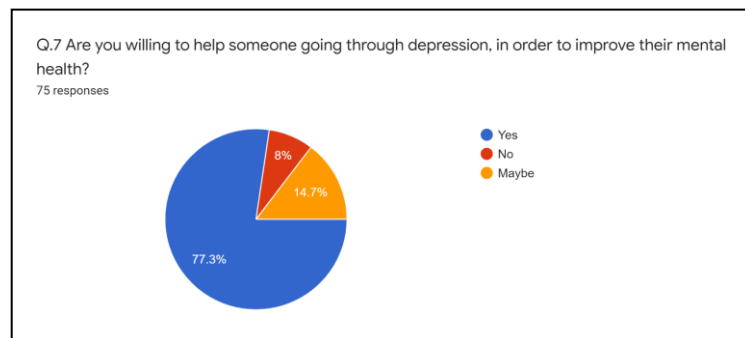
53.3% participants agreed with it and said that media today has glorified depression to a large extent. About 33.3% participants were not clear and said that maybe, it does. While the rest of the 13.3% participants disagreed.

Q.6 Do you think society accepts depression and treats it as it should be?  
75 responses

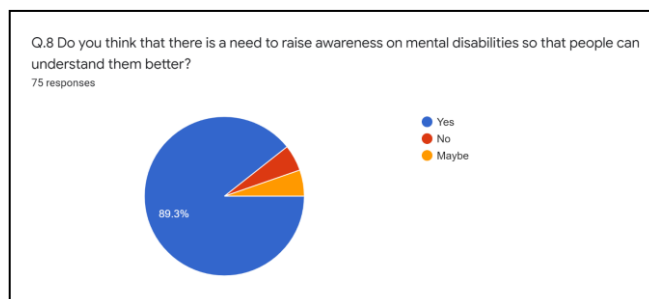


A jarring 62.7% said that most people just laugh it off, and pretend that it is not a real thing. Even though 32% said

disagreed and said that people are aware and take it as a serious disability. The rest of the participants had mixed ideas about it. Some said that there needs to be more awareness so that more and more people would talk and discuss it, thus normalizing it in a positive manner.



When asked with the possibility if the participants were eager to help someone who is struggling with depression, majority of them, about 77.3% readily said yes. The rest of the participants disagreed by saying that they ought to take care of their own mental health as well. Depression can be very difficult and we need to be there to support others, or just be someone to listen to them.



Lastly, we asked the participants whether or not they felt the need for more awareness in our society regarding depression. Almost 90% participants agreed that we need to focus on spreading awareness.

## 2) FINDINGS

By conducting the survey above, we reach upon the following deductions:

- Even though, majority of the people are aware about it, there remains a portion which is still unaware of depression.

- Many people still do not take depression seriously and laugh it off. We need to work on it and improve this.
- Those aware about depression know that it can affect anyone. They are aware how it affects someone's creativity and happiness level. They have read books or heard songs created by those who have been diagnosed as depressed.
- Depression can have serious effects on a person's mental health. For artists, the simple act of painting, writing, or even playing music can provide an emotional release from their tough ordeal.
- Often we see pictures on social media portraying scarred bodies, with a hue of cigarette smoke, making it look like an aesthetic representation of depression and its ill effects. It sends a wrong message where depression is glorified, desired and turned into something beautiful.
- One of the most crucial issues today is whether the society that we live in is aware or not about depression and other mental disabilities. But this scenario is changing steadily and more and more people are being aware of it.
- People are willing to help someone who is depressed.

## VI CONCLUSION

Depression and other mental disabilities can severely turn around a person's life. Making them feel melancholic and secluded from the general public. While modern medicine and therapy can help a person overcome this hurdle. Literature and art play a huge role in a person's mental health as well. It is essential to focus on the proper representation of mental disabilities in books and art, so that the readers can understand it better. It will help in raising

awareness in society and normalizing the topic. We also should take care as to how it is portrayed in literature and art in a sensitive manner, as it can be misrepresented sometimes. Bad representation can affect the inclusion of people in our society in a severe manner. At the same time, we also have to make sure that people with depression can feel comfortable in stepping up and seeking out help from their loved ones.

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