

# Exploring the Role of Income on Depression Severity Among College Students

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## Background

- 2017 Mental Health Annual Report estimates that 83% of the U.S population ages 18-24 has a mental health diagnosis with depression having the highest prevalence (24%) (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2018)
- Low income identified as a risk factor (Patrel & Kleinman, 2003; Piff & Moskowitz, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2019)
- At a subclinical level, depression can be associated with suicidal ideation among college students (Cukrowicz et al., 2011)
- 33.7% of students report that finances were very difficult or traumatic to manage within the past 12 months (American College Health Association – ACHA, 2016)

## Purpose & Hypotheses

- Explore the role of income on depression severity among college atmosphere
- H1: Students with reported low income will report more depressive symptoms.

## Method

### Participants

The final sample included 286 college students

- Male = 51.7%, *M* age = 20.76, *SD* = 11.32

### Procedure

Depressive symptoms

- 10 items derived from BDI-II
- Sum of scores ranging from 10 – 39
- Higher scores → more symptoms

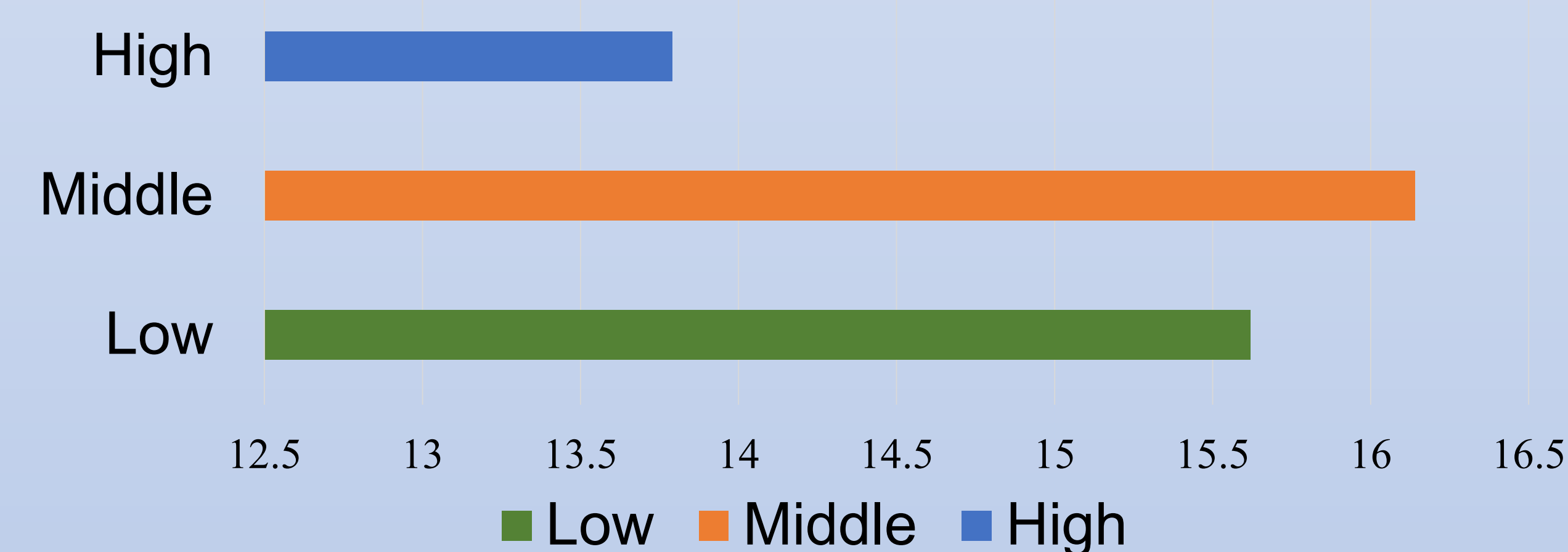
### Income

- Financial classification were made in accord to reported annual income
- Low (income ≤ \$25,000)
- Middle (\$25,000 < income ≤ \$74,999),
- High (\$75,000 ≤ income)

## Results

- An ANOVA yielded a significant difference between depression severity by annual income ( $F(284, 2) = 3.022, p = .050$ )

Depressive Severity by Income



## Conclusions

- Hypothesis was partially supported
- Students of low income reported more depressive symptoms than students from high income
- Students from middle income reported more depressive symptoms than both low and high income students
- Findings are consistent with research posing financial issues as a source of distress for college students



## Future Directions

### Role of parent financial support

- Emotional support has a facilitative effect on low income student success
- Financial support for low income students did not indicate added benefits, perhaps representing a source of guilt for students (Roska & Kinsley, 2019)

### Financial support for graduate students

- Over-reliance on student loans that leads to permanent wealth gap
- Need for financial literacy

### International status

- Acculturative stress
- Distance from social support (e.g., family)
- DACA status students face additional factors (Reagan & McDaniel, 2019)

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