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**Mental Health Impacts of Using Social Media Among
University of Halabja Students (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)**

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Abstract

In the recent years, the use of social media has increased. Social media is the fastest way to reach information and make online communication. According to worldwide digital population- Internet - Statista on Jul 26, 2022, there are five billion internet users worldwide, which means 63 percent of the population in the world. This data further indicates that the male's use of social media was higher than females. The Kurdish version of Hopkins Symptoms CheckList -25 and Perceived Stress Scale was used to assess psychological distress among

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university students that used social media. The questionnaire was distributed randomly among university students. Finally, 143 university students participated in the study. The prevalence of depression and anxiety was 65.03%, 62.24%, the level of stress was ($M = 17.77$, $SD = 5.570$). As a result, high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among both females than males Halabja University students were found. This study aimed to indicate the impacts of social media on mental health among Halabja University students. The study found out that the use of social media has been making negative impacts on students' mental health.

Abstrak

Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, penggunaan media sosial semakin meningkat. Media sosial adalah cara tercepat untuk menjangkau informasi dan melakukan komunikasi online. Menurut populasi digital di seluruh dunia - Internet - Statista pada 26 Juli 2022, terdapat lima miliar pengguna internet di seluruh dunia, yang berarti 63 persen populasi di dunia. Data ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan media sosial laki-laki lebih tinggi daripada perempuan. Daftar Periksa Gejala Hopkins versi Kurdi -25 dan Skala Stres yang Dirasakan digunakan untuk menilai tekanan psikologis di kalangan mahasiswa yang menggunakan media sosial. Kuesioner didistribusikan secara acak di antara mahasiswa. Akhirnya, 143 mahasiswa berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Prevalensi depresi dan kecemasan 65,03%, 62,24%, tingkat stres sedang ($M = 17,77$, $SD = 5,570$). Akibatnya, ditemukan tingkat depresi, kecemasan, dan stres yang tinggi pada mahasiswa Universitas Halabja baik perempuan dibandingkan laki-laki. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui dampak media sosial terhadap kesehatan mental di kalangan mahasiswa Universitas Halabja. Studi tersebut menemukan bahwa penggunaan media sosial telah berdampak negatif pada kesehatan mental siswa.

Key words: *Depression; Anxiety; Stress; Social media; Halabja; University students.*

Introduction

In the modern day, most university students spend their time on social media platform (Karim, Oyewande, Abdalla, Chaudhry Ehsanullah, & Khan, 2020). Social media platforms are important to share scientific information between students where they can improve their knowledge. Likewise, students can exchange ideas and knowledge with specialists or other individuals. Indeed, the use social

media in a healthy way that makes a positive impact on learning (Kolhar, Kazi, & Alameen, 2021). However, social media affects the student's mental health. In more details, Mental health is a state of well-being where people understand and better their abilities such as problem-solving, work ethic, and make a significant contribution to the lives of their communities (Karim, Oyewande, Abdalla, Chaudhry Ehsanullah, & Khan, 2020; Kareem, 2022; Faraj & Jafr, 2021). Based on many studies, it is known that social media has had both positive and negative impacts on student's mental health; the positive sides such as: managing depression, emotional support, self-expression, and self-identity; as well as, the negative sides such as: depression, loneliness, stress, anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and cyber bullying (Akram & Kumar, 2017; Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021; Sharma, John, & Sahu, 2020; Salih et al., 2022).

According to Vannucci, Ohannessian, & Gagnon (2019) study, it is apparent that in the United States students used a more variety types of social media platforms; they were reported to have had high levels of anxiety, depression, and substance use. Which is why social media is thought to have been the cause of many psychological distresses especially depression, anxiety, and stress among university students (Malaeb et al., 2021; Thapa, 2018). Besides, many studies found high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among university students that use social media, for example, Pungpapong & Kalayasiri (2020) study showed that the prevalence of depression was 58.7%, anxiety was 40.3%, and high level of stress among students in secondary schools from UK and Thailand. In addition, a cross-sectional study by Hammad & Alqarni (2021) found that the prevalence of depression and anxiety among university students were 47.57% and 47.82% in Saudi Arabia society. They found that there was a significant gender difference in the level of depression and anxiety; females were highly anxious and more depressed than males; also, there was a significant age difference in the level of depression and anxiety, the higher levels of depression and anxiety among students were at the ages of 16 – 25 years than over 60 years. Based on the results of the study, it was shown that there was no significant gender difference in the level of depression, anxiety, and stress, instead, it revealed that the higher level of depression, anxiety, and stress were more prevalent in females than males among students in Iran's high school (Gholamian, Shahnazi, & Hassanzadeh, 2017).

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Moreover, there are complex findings in the previous study where some studies indicated lower prevalence than another studies, indicating the high prevalence of psychological and mental disorders impacts of using social media in the world. Likewise, there isn't a study and scientific data about mental health impacts of using social media among university students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Because of this, it makes a gap in our knowledge and understanding about mental health and the impacts of using social media on mental health among university students.

Aims of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to discover the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and level of stress impacts of using social media. The study also attempted to find out the percentage of each of the symptoms of anxiety, depression, and items of stress among Halabja university students. Another aim is to find out significant gender and age differences in the level of psychological distress impacts of using social media among university students in University of Halabja (Kurdistan Region of Iraq).

Method

Research design

A descriptive quantitative method is used in this study, this method is a pleasant method with the nature of the study. In the present study, the data was collected from March 9th to May 18th, 2021. Convenience sampling was used to collect it. The questionnaire was distributed randomly among university students that use social media in dormitories, cafes, departments, and all of the places in Halabja University. The questionnaire consisted of confidentiality; informed consent, demographic information, and the scales of depression, anxiety, and stress. The participants of the study consisted of 143 Halabja University students.

Instruments

Hopkins Symptoms CheckList -25 consisted of two sections:
Anxiety section of Hopkins Symptoms CheckList-10

The anxiety section of Hopkins Symptoms CheckList -10 (AHSCL-10) was the first section in the HSCL-25. AHSCL-10

Kurdish version has been used to assess anxiety symptoms within Kurdish society. It is a self-report inventory that consists of 10 items on the 4 Likert type scale (not at all, a little, quite a bit, extremely) that are rated from 1 to 4. HSCL-25 is an important tool used to assess anxiety and depression in the cross-cultural study (Tinghög & Carstensen, 2010). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability of AHSC-10 was high level (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$).

Depression section of Hopkins Symptoms CheckList-15

The Depression section of Hopkins Symptoms CheckList -15 (DHSC-15) is a second section of (HSCL-25). The Kurdish version of DHSC-15 was used to examine depression symptoms among university students. DHSC-15 is a self-report inventory scale that consists of 15 items that rated from 1 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). This scale was used previously within other studies among Kurdish society (Ibrahim, Catani, Ismail, & Neuner, 2019), as well as high level of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$) among Halabja university students.

Perceived Stress Scale

The perceived stress scale (PSS) is the most commonly used measure of the perception of stress among all age, ethnicities, and races (Cohen, 1994). PSS consists of 10 items in which four items are reversed include (4, 5, 7, & 8). Likewise, the rates of PSS are started from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). A final score on the perceived stress scale ranging from 0-13 is considered a low level of stress while ranging from 14-26 is considered a moderate level of stress. A final score ranging from 27-40 on the PSS is considered a high level of stress. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability for PSS among Halabja university students was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$).

Statistical analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program version 22 was used to analyze the data. Internal consistency reliability (Alpha Cronbach's) was used to assess reliable scales among Kurdish university students. Descriptive statistic (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and bar chart) was used to interpret the demographic information and each symptoms and items of anxiety, depression, and stress. A two-tail independent sample t-test was

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carried out on the significant gender and age differences in the level of depression, anxiety, and stress.

For analysis, the prevalence of depression and anxiety was carried out manually. In the present study, 1.75 cuts off score were used to analyze the prevalence of depression and anxiety. The score of depression or/and anxiety were higher and equal to 1.75 score. for depression and/or anxiety. Those students included in that higher and equal score than 1.75, then sum of all of the students and divided by the number of the sample (143) and multiply by 100.

Percentage = sum of all of the students that higher and equal than 1.75 a score \div 143 \times 100.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 143 university students; 88 of them were females, and 55 were males. 119 university students aged between 18 to 21 years, and the other 24 students aged between 22 to 25 years. Every participant of this study used different types of social media. Most students started to use social media when their ages were 16 to 20 years. Based on the data collection of this study, most of the participants used social media more than 1h daily. University students used social media for any purpose such as academic, entertainment, building relationships and communication, spending time, and work. About the domain of economics, generally, university students who participated in this study were used social media that they had a medium level of economic state (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio demographic information of university student's

Variables		Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	88	61.5%
	Male	55	38.5%
Age	18-21 years	119	83.2%
	22-25 years	24	16.8%
Colleges	Human sciences	81	56.6%
	Basic education	37	25.9%
	Science	24	16.8%
	Low and administration	1	0.7%

Stage of the study	1 st	77	53.8%
	2 ^{ed}	60	42%
	3 rd	4	2.8%
	4 th	2	1.4%
Life place	Inside the city	28	19.6%
	Outside the city	18	12.6%
	Dormitory	97	67.8%
Marital status	Single	130	90.9%
	Married	9	6.3%
	Divorce	2	1.4%
	Separate	2	1.4%
Economic status	Low level	9	6.3%
	Medium level	63	44.1%
	Good level	60	42%
	Very good level	10	7%
	Excellent level	1	0.7%
Age of used social media	8-11 years	12	8.4%
	12-15 years	62	43.4%
	16-20 years	69	48.3%
Hours of using social media	1-5h	57	39.9%
	6-10h	51	35.7%
	11-15h	19	13.3%
	16-20h	6	4.2%
	21-24h	10	7%

Prevalence of anxiety and depression, the level of stress

The first aim of this study is to find out the prevalence of depression, and anxiety, also the level of stress among university students that use social media in Halabja. The result of this study showed that the impact of using social media on the prevalence of depression was 65.03%, and anxiety was 62.24%, the level of stress was ($M = 17.77$, $SD = 5.570$) among Halabja university students.

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The percent of each anxiety, and depression symptoms, and each items of stress

Percent of each anxiety symptoms among Halabja university students

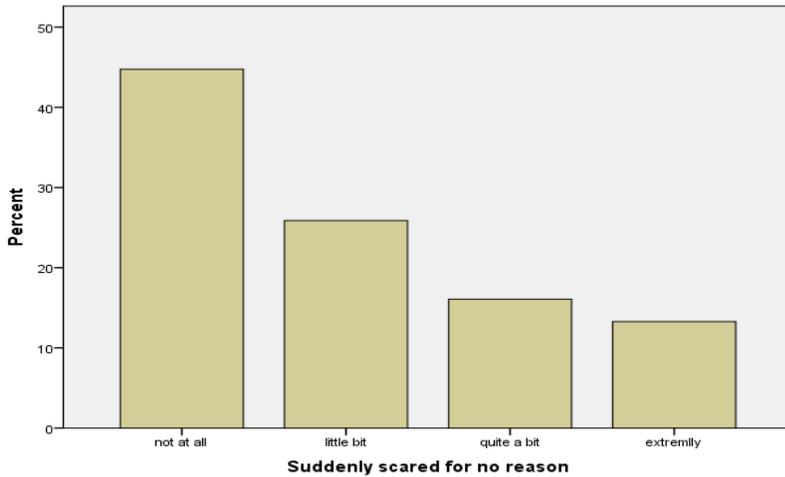


Figure 1: Suddenly scared for no reason

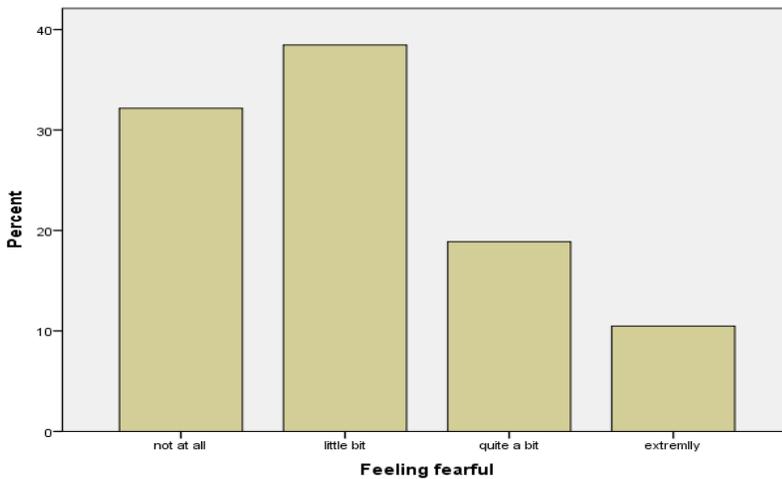


Figure 2: Feeling fearful

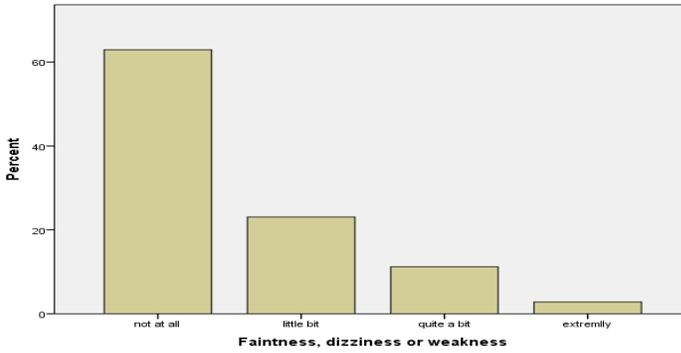


Figure 3: Faintness, dizziness or weakness

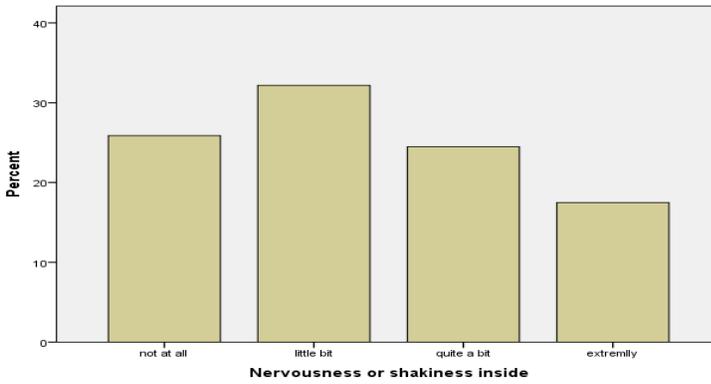


Figure 4: Nervousness or shakiness inside

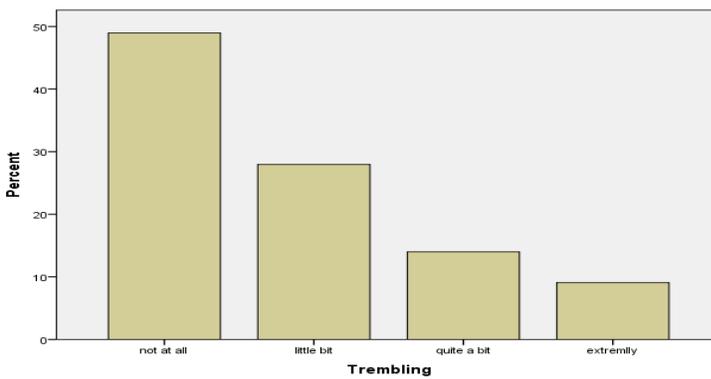


Figure 5: Trembling

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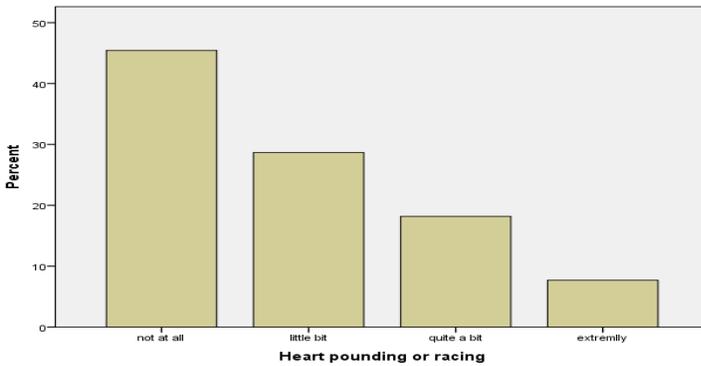


Figure 6: Heart pounding or racing

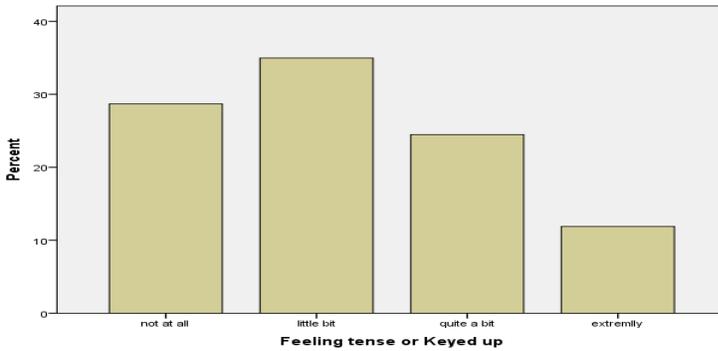


Figure 7: Feeling tense or Keyed up

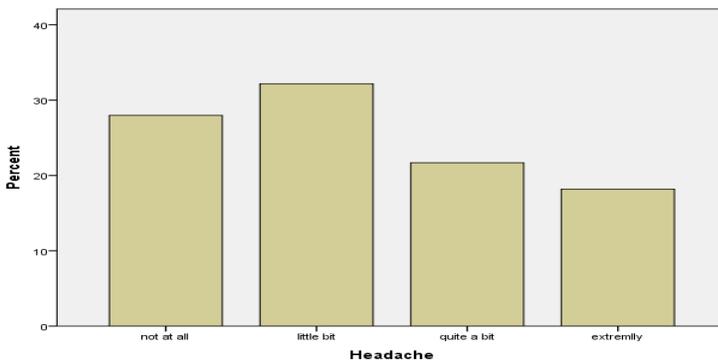


Figure 8: Headache

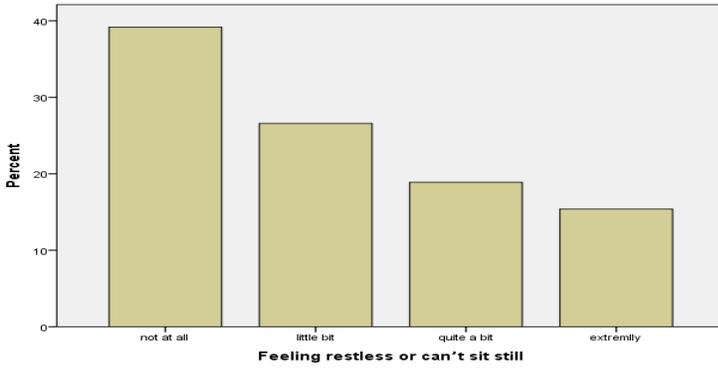


Figure 9: Feeling restless or can't sit still

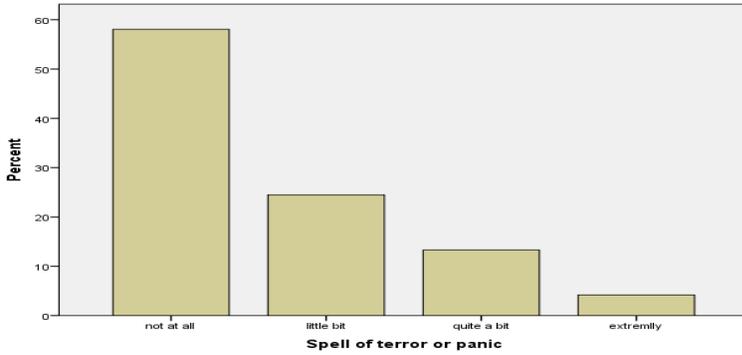


Figure 10: Spell of terror or panic

Percent of each depression symptoms among Halabja university students

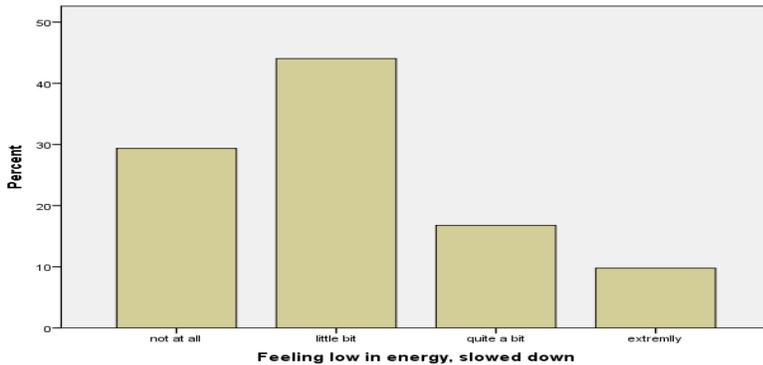


Figure 11: feeling low in energy, slowed down

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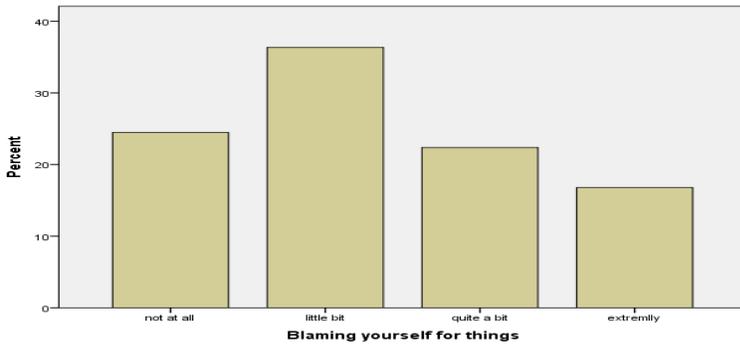


Figure 12: blaming yourself for things

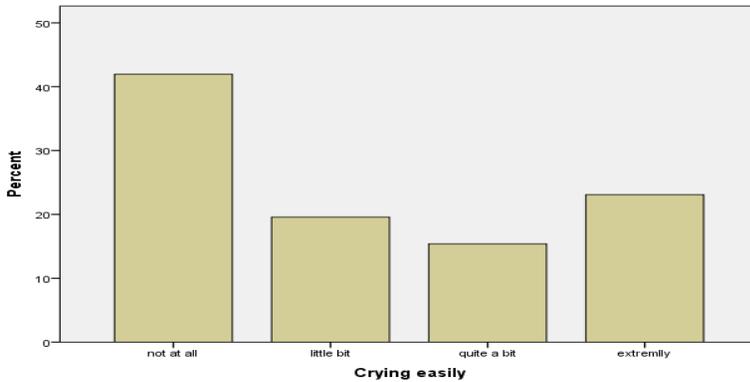


Figure 13: crying easily

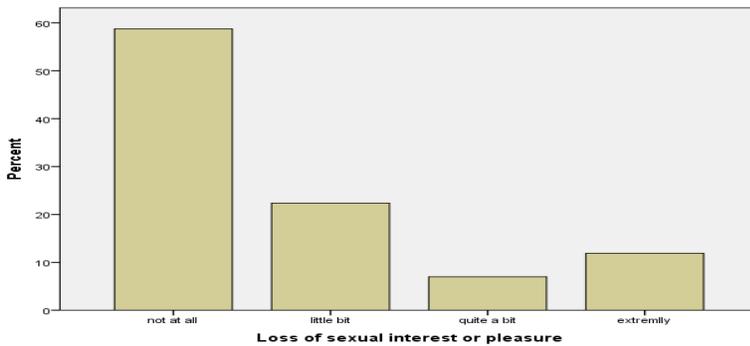


Figure 14: loss of sexual interest or pleasure

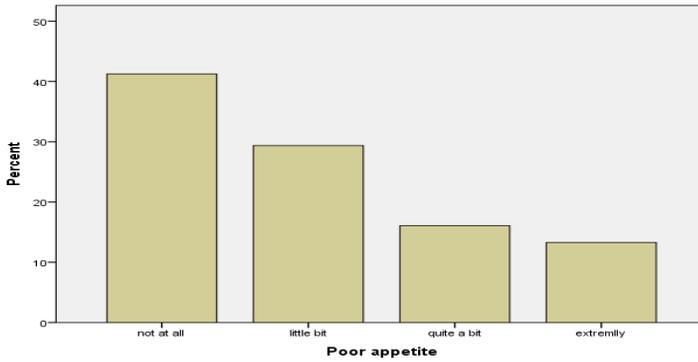


Figure 15: poor appetite

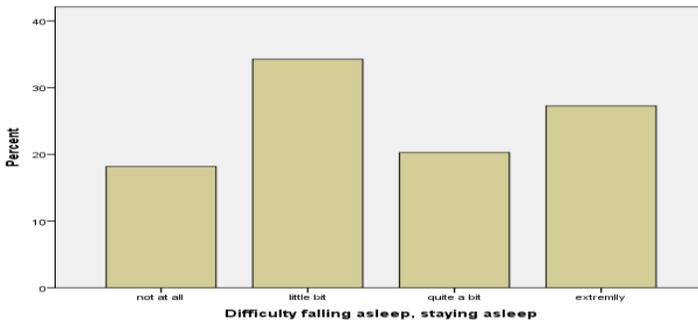


Figure 16: difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep

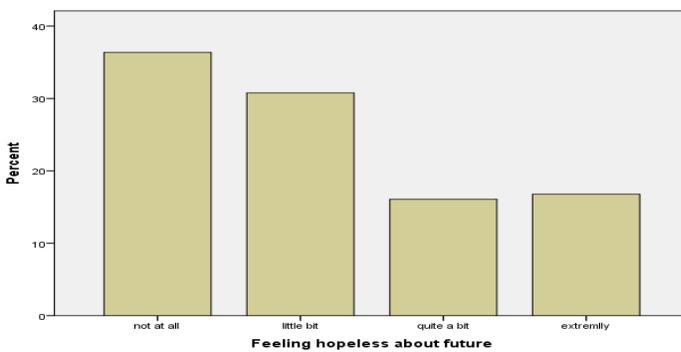


Figure 17: feeling hopeless about future

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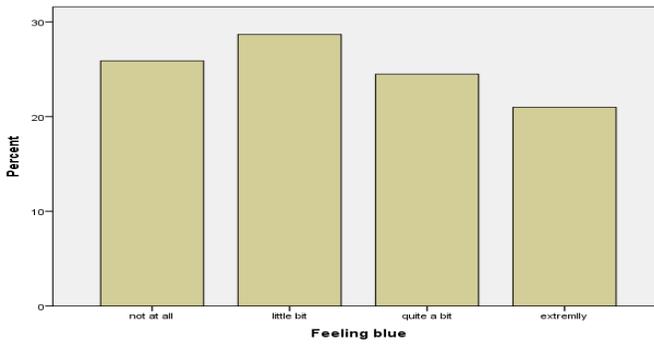


Figure 18: feeling blue

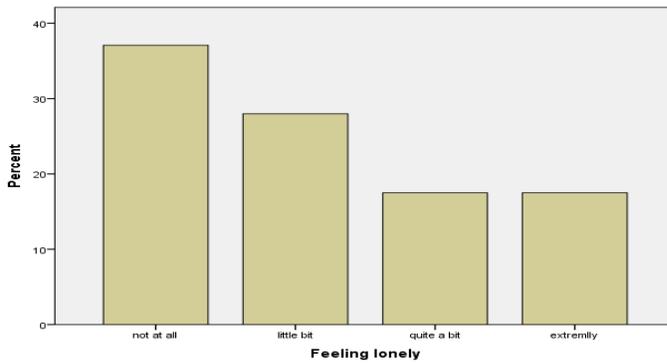
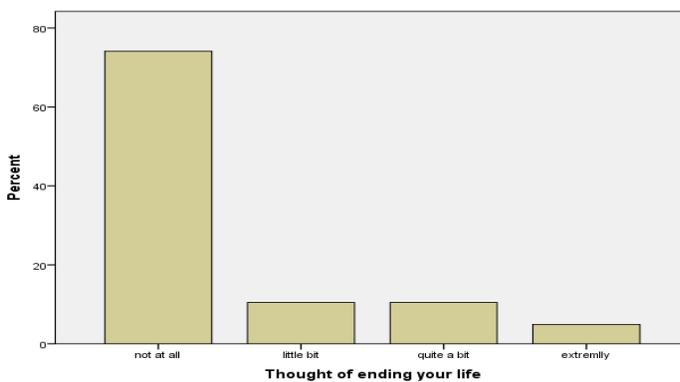


Figure 19: feeling lonely



Feeling 20: thought of ending your life

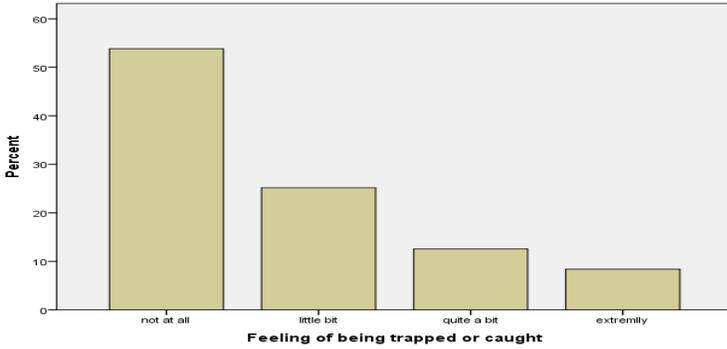


Figure 21: feeling of being trapped or caught

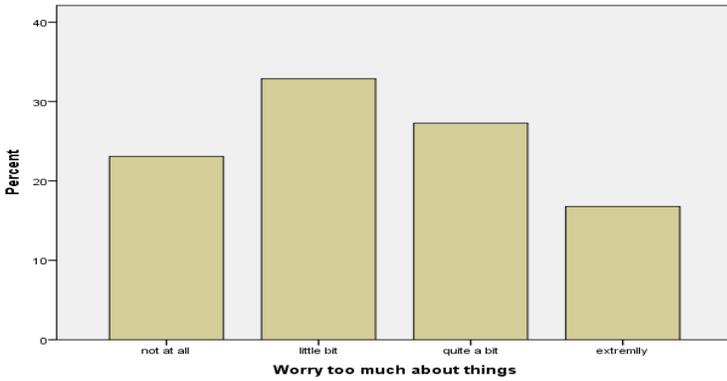


Figure 22: worry too much about things

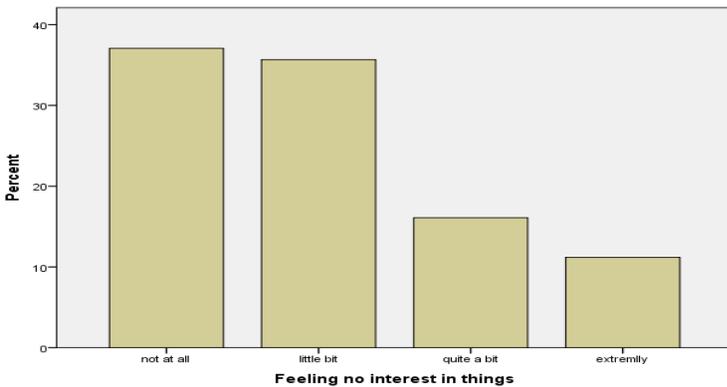


Figure 23: feeling no interest in things

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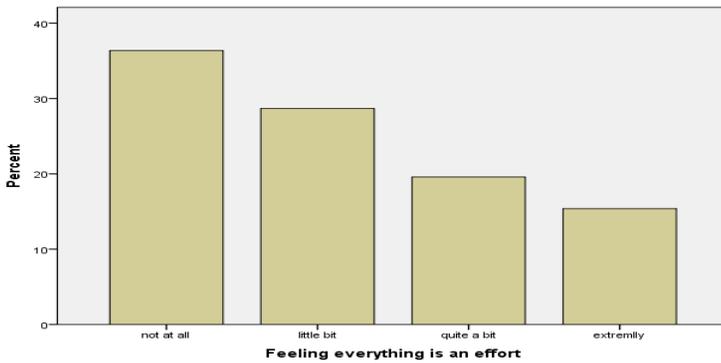


Figure 24: feeling everything is an effort

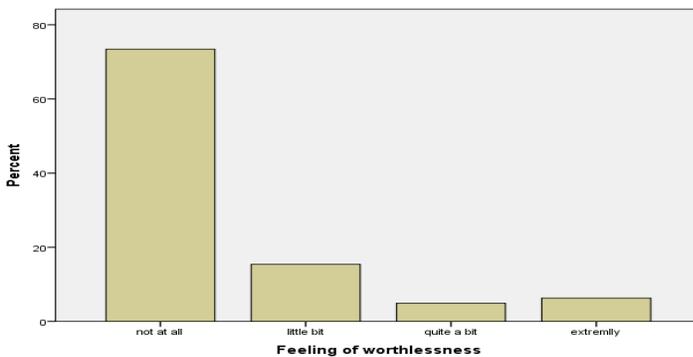


Figure 25: feeling of worthlessness

Percent of each items of stress among Halabja university students

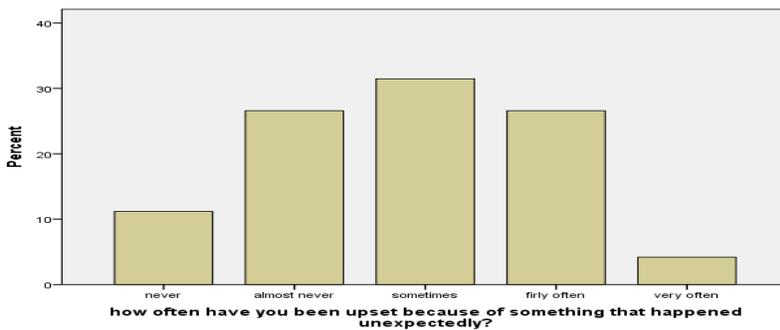


Figure 26: how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

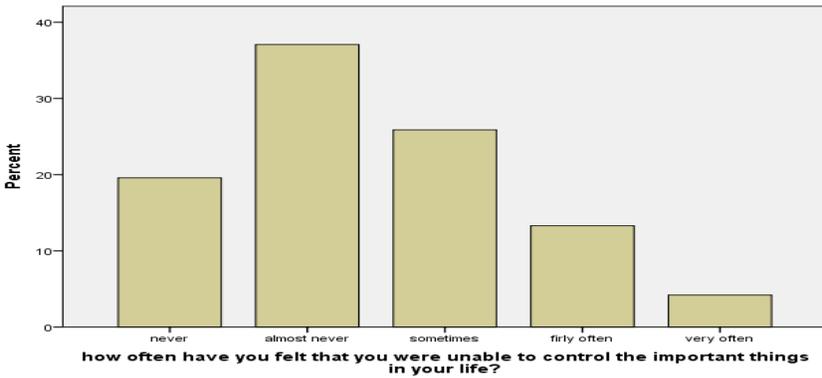


Figure 27: how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

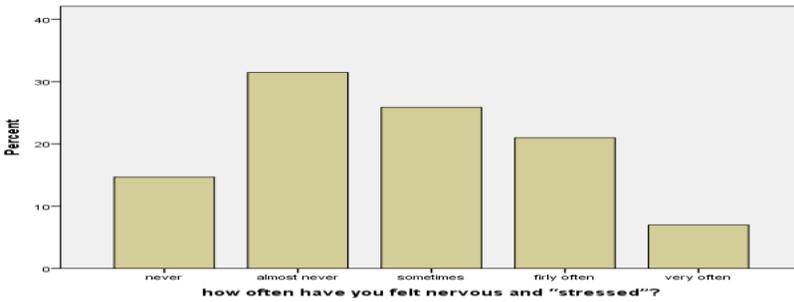


Figure 28: how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?

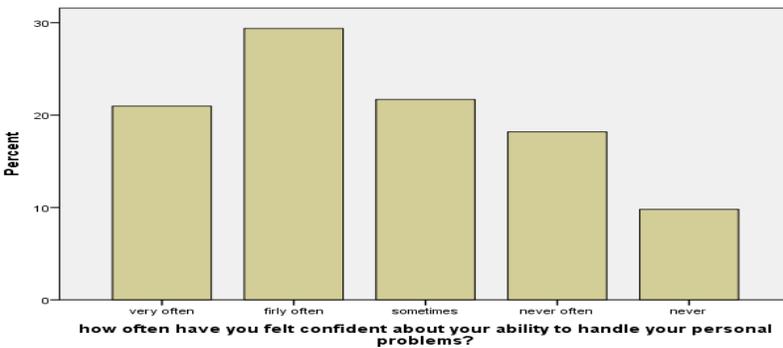


Figure 29: how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

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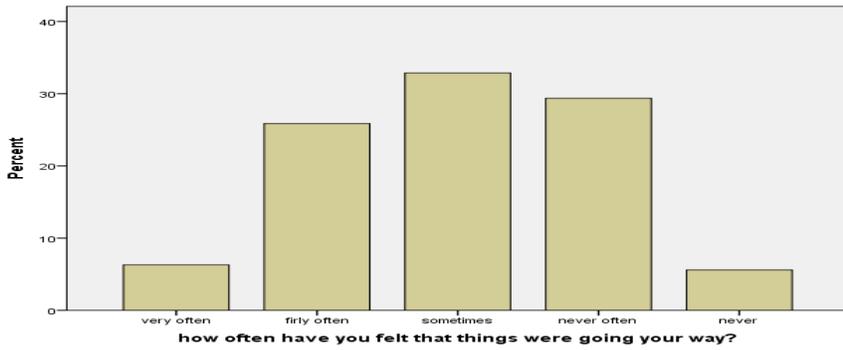


Figure 30: how often have you felt that things were going your way?

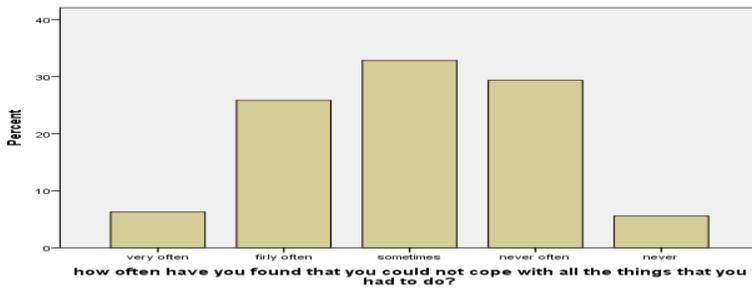


Figure 31: how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

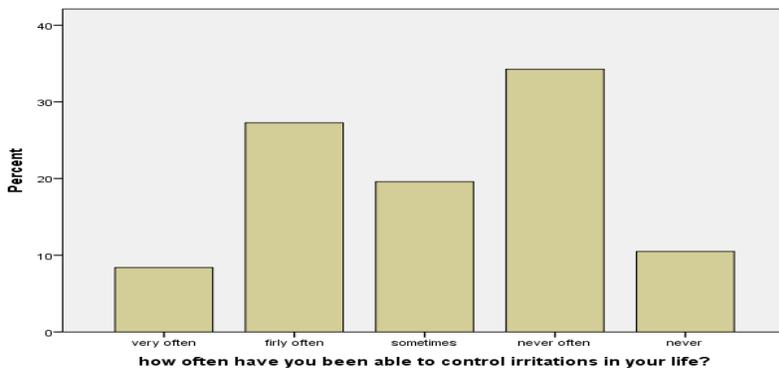


Figure 32: how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

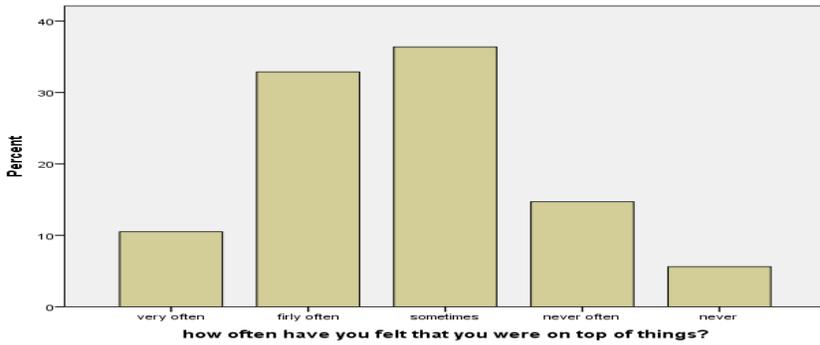


Figure 33: how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

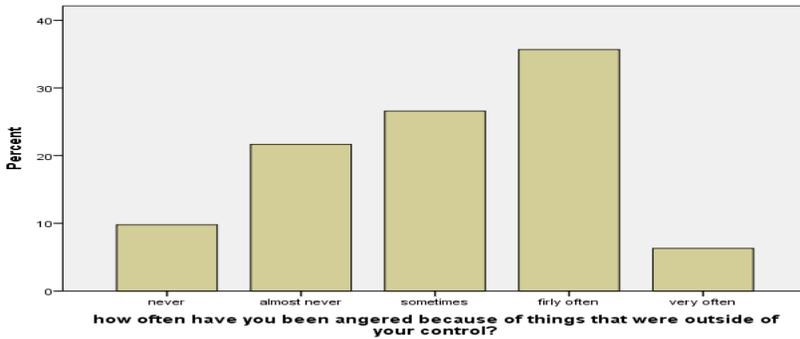


Figure 34: how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?

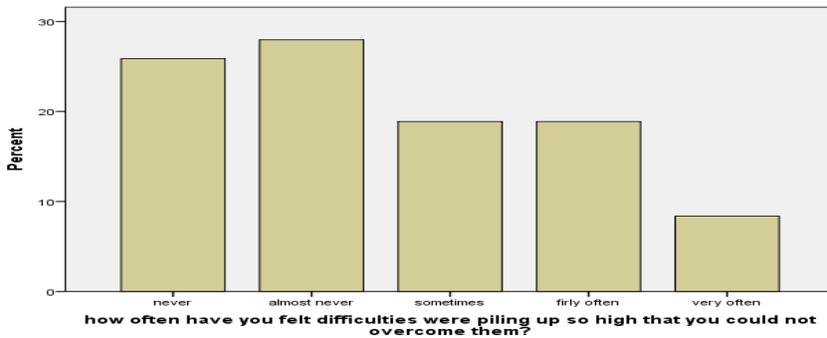


Figure 35: how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Gender and age differences in the level of depression, anxiety, and stress

The second aim of this study was to find out gender and age differences in the level of psychological distress. The results showed that there was a significant gender difference in the level of depression ($t(141) = 3.192, p = 0.002$). Although, the level of depression among females was ($M = 32.55, SD = 8.9$) and males was ($M = 27.9, SD = 7.6$). Likewise, it was unveiled that a significant difference in the level of anxiety among males and females ($t(141) = 2.98, p = 0.003$), the level of anxiety among females was ($M = 21.1, SD = 6.73$) and males were ($M = 17.9, SD = 5.4$) on use social media platforms. In addition, the present study indicate that there was no significant gender difference in the level of stress ($t(141) = 1.153, p = 0.25$), and the level of stress among females was ($M = 18.1, SD = 5.85$) and males was ($M = 17, SD = 5.06$).

The age difference in the level of psychological distress impacts of using social media among Halabja university students. The study indicated no significant age difference in the level of depression, anxiety, and stress among students ($t(141) = 1.11, p = 0.27$), ($t(141) = 1.37, p = 0.17$), and ($t(141) = 1.31, p = 0.19$). However, the level of depression, anxiety and stress in the age of 18 to 21 was ($M = 31.1, SD = 8.7$), ($M = 20.2, SD = 6.4$), and ($M = 18, SD = 5.5$); and the 22 to 25 years old was ($M = 29, SD = 9$), ($M = 18.3, SD = 6.3$), and ($M = 16.4, SD = 6$) among Halabja university students.

Discussion and Result

Based on previous studies that indicated social media platforms cause psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, and stress especially among university students (Alammar & Al-garni, n.d.; Deepa & Priya, 2020; Scott & Canivet, 2020; Thapa, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2022). The present study found high prevalence of depression and anxiety ($D = 65.03\%$, $A = 62.24\%$), as well as a moderate level of stress ($M = 17.77, SD = 5.570$) in the impacts of using social media platforms among Halabja University students. Many studies supported these findings such as (Hammad & Alqarni, 2021; Pungpapong & Kalayasiri, 2020) by showing a high prevalence of depression, and anxiety among university students in the UK, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia society; In

contrast the finding of the present research, Pungpapong & Kalayasiri (2020) found higher level of stress among students in Saudi Arabia society. In addition to findings, the presence of even a little level in anxiety symptoms due of feeling fearful, nervousness or shakiness inside, and having headaches are high. The presence of feeling low in energy, slowing down, blaming yourself for things, difficulty falling asleep or staying a sleep, feeling blue, and worrying too much about things are of low significance. The presence of three items of stress include you often have been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly, you often have found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do, and you often have been angered because of things that were outside of your control are high in the level of some times and fairly often level.

While the study found out a significant gender difference and high level of depression, and anxiety among females than males Halabja University students, it showed that no significant gender difference in the level of stress, and high level of stress in females than male university students. Likewise, it showed no significant age difference but high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among 18-21 years than 22-25 years' university students. The Hammad & Alqarni (2021) study supports the significant gender difference and high level of depression and anxiety among females than males, but they support no significant age difference in the level of depression and anxiety.

There are some differences between findings in studies. It may be because of the Corona Virus disease -19 (COVID-19) that some studies conducted during the high prevalence of COVID-19; different samples such as high school student and university students in the UK, Thailand, and Saudia society; also the different methods used in the studies such as online cross-sectional study, a cross-sectional design.

There are some limitations in this study such as there being fewer students participating in the study due to COVID-19 as it closed most of the places, one of them being universities; students have little information about the complete questionnaire; and some of the students had a stigma about mental and psychological distress and disorders. Although, only those students who use social media are included in the study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study uncovers that social media has negative impacts on students' mental health. It also indicated a high prevalence of depression and anxiety, and a moderate level of stress among Halabja university students. It was apparent that there were higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among females than male university students. About the age differences, those students who were

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aged between 18 to 21 years were more depressed, anxious, and stressed than other students were aged between 22 to 25 years. Based on these findings, students will need to be more aware of the impacts of using social media on their mental health.

Likewise, researchers recommended that they should try to reduce the time of using social media and healthily use social media until each symptom of anxiety, depression, and stress are decreased. So that social media may bring about a positive impact on their mental health.

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