

# Prevalence, Symptomatology, and Risk Factors for Depression Among High School Students in Saudi Arabia

By

A. R. A. Asal, M. M. Abdel-Fattah

## Abstract

**Objectives:** Most studies of depressed mood and its correlates in adolescents' have been conducted in Western countries. The present large scale epidemiological study was designed to assess the prevalence and pattern of depression in a secondary school sample of Saudi Arabia adolescents. **Subjects and Methods:** Secondary school students ( $n = 490$ , 306 males "62.4 %" and 184 females "37.6 %") of age group from (16 to 20) were surveyed using the Arabic Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI) by a team consisting of a psychiatrist and psychologist. **Results:** The prevalence of depression according to the Beck Depression Inventory (CDBI) (cut-off point: 19) was 110 (22.4 %) as moderate (19-29), 36 (7.3 %) as severe (30-40), and 18 (3.7%) as very severe ( $> 40$ ) in this study group, with a clear predominance prevalence of depression in girls than in boys (1.5 times). Multivariate logistic regression analysis demonstrated that the most significant risk factors involved were: sex, birth order, history of psychiatric illness, history of relative loss, and familial history of chronic diseases. Factor analysis revealed that self criticalness, agitation, and loss of energy had the highest scores in the total sample. In the male subgroup, loss of energy, self criticalness, punishment feeling and agitation had the highest score while in the female subgroup, self criticalness, agitation, and crying had the highest scores. **Conclusion:** Our findings provide gender differences in the prevalence and presentation of depressive symptoms. The experience of a stressful life events increase the risk of depression. Assessment using screening is recommended. The increased risk for the onset of depression in adolescents reinforces the importance of early recognition and intervention. **Key words:** Prevalence, risk factors, adolescents, Depression, Beck Inventory scale, Saudi Arabia.

## Introduction

Depression has been considered to be the major psychiatric disease of the 20th century (Murphy et al., 1987). The World Health Organization identified major depression as the fourth leading cause of worldwide disease in 1990 (Murray et al., 1996). Recent studies have shown that greater than 20% of adolescents in the general population have emotional problems and one-third of adolescents attending psychiatric clinics suffer from depression (Kovaks, 1996). Numerous outcome studies have documented several negative effects of depression (Hammen et al., 1994; Birmaher et al., 1996; Kaslow et al., 1994). Major depression often appears for the first time during the teenage years, and early onset depression interferes with a child's psychological, social, and academic functioning, placing him or her at greater risk for problems such as substance abuse and suicidal behavior (Hammen et al., 1994; Birmaher et al., 1996). Significant changes in social functioning, the adolescent's environment, and gender-differentiated

social support concerning sexuality. These factors, as well as the experience of a severe life event have been significantly related to the onset of major depression in adolescence (Cicchetti et al., 1998). Despite the host of new literature on depression in adolescence has appeared in the last decade. The magnitude of child and adolescent depression is clearly a major mental health problem.<sup>5</sup> There have been several efforts to improve the early detection of depression and to develop programs to prevent and treat it as soon as possible (Beardslee et al., 1998). This study was undertaken to find out prevalence and pattern of depression among secondary school students in Saudi Arabia as well as to clarify the degree to which stressful life events lead to depression.

### Material and methods:

**Study design:** This study was conducted on two phases implemented at the same time from January to May, 2005 at Taif city, Saudi Arabia: 1) A cross-sectional study for are presentative sample of