



## **DEPRESSION: CHILDREN ARE NOT EXCLUSIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Abraham Lincoln once wrote to a friend, "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole world human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better I cannot tell; I awfully forebode I shall no. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better it appears to me" (Thomas 1952, 72). What exactly is depression? Does it occur only to adults? Depression is a serious mental disorder and can occur at any age. Not only adults become depressed but children and teenagers too. It is common for children to diagnose with both depression and an anxiety disorder, or depression and general anxiety. Depression is the experience of irritable or sad mood and the loss of pleasure or interest in nearly all the activities. Clinical Depression is more than just having a bad day or feeling blue and it's different from the feeling of sorrow or grief that might be the consequences of loss, such as death in the family (Psych Central, 2014).*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Papolos and Papolos, 1992 , the written attempts to describe Depression dates back at least 4,000 years. To think of the literal meaning of depression it means

“The movement from high to low captures much of the flavour of psychological depression, which involves a lower amount of energy, lower self-esteem, a lowering of mood, and in general

a lowered appetite for life. In fact, ask depressed people how they're feeling and there's a good chance they will respond, Low" (Tan and Ortberg, 2005).

The World Health Report 2001 estimated that there are 121 million people worldwide suffering from depression and it has identified unipolar depression as the 1<sup>st</sup> cause of YLD (Years of Life Lived with Disability) in all ages, 2<sup>nd</sup> cause of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in the age group of 15-44 years, and the 4<sup>th</sup> cause in all ages. Thus this shows that even children are not excluded from this mood disorder called "Depression". The most important feature of depressed mood is the sadness mood, loss of interest and /or pleasure in almost all activities (pervasive sadness), present throughout the day (persistent sadness). This results in social withdrawal, decreased involvement in previously pleasurable activities and decreased ability to function in occupational and interpersonal areas. The depressed mood is not responsive to the environmental stimuli and it varies little from day to day (Ahuja, 1990).

## **IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD DEPRESSION**

Depression in children has the potential to interfere with the emotional, social and cognitive development occurring at a young age. The manifestation of depressive symptoms is influenced by the age, developmental stage, and cultural background (Pattanayak & Mehta, 2012). Often Depression is of two types:

- **Dysthymia:** It is a chronic form of depression but less severe and it tends to last for at least two years.
- **Major Depression:** the child may experience this type of depression after experiencing a traumatic event such as the death of a friend or relative. It lasts at least for two weeks but/ and occur more than once throughout the child's life (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2010)

Depression is caused not only by one reason but is usually the result of several factors. It can be caused by lowered levels of neurotransmitters (chemicals that carry signals through the nervous system) in the brain which limits a person's ability to feel good. Genetics are likely involved because depression can also run in the family. Someone who has a close relative with

depression is more likely to experience depression (Lyness, 2011). “Children of Depressed mothers have a risk three to four times higher than the general population” (Nauert, 2009). Life events factors like a divorce, death of a loved one, move to a new area, a breakup, victim of calamities can bring symptoms of depression. Teen years can be a time of social and emotional turmoil and this create stress in the teen if they cannot handle it, so this also leads to depression. About 2.5 % of children in the U.S. have depression and it is prominent more in boys under 10 years. But by the age of 16, depression incidences are more on girls (Lyness, 2011). If the cause of the child’s depression is wholly or in part by psychological factors, medication alone cannot cured the underlying cause of depression, though it may relieve the depression (Wing of Madness Depression Guide, 2013).

A study shown that teens who are depressed as children are more likely to be sedentary, to smoke or become obese and it can also increase the risk of heart problem later in life. It also shows that the teens who are depressed are physically less active than those in the control group. These findings are cause for concern because "a number of recent studies have shown that when adolescents have these cardiac risk factors, they're much more likely to develop heart disease as adults and even to have a shorter lifespan," and "Active smokers as adolescents are twice as likely to die by the age of 55 than nonsmokers, and we see similar risks with obesity, so finding this link between childhood depression and these risk factors suggests that we need to very closely monitor young people who have been depressed"(Health Day News, 2013). In children Major Depressive Disorder occur approximately at the same rate in girls and in boys, but in adolescents the female: male ratio is 2:1, again similar to that in adults. Population studies have reported prevalence rates of depressive disorders, ranging between 0.4% to 2.5% in children and 0.4% to 8.3% in adolescents (John & Cherian, 2001)

Another study shows that seven cases of suicide occur among the 159 children who are from major depressive disorder group and to assess the psychological status of those seven who committed suicide, a psychological autopsy was conducted since the initial assessment and at the time of death. The onset of the first depressive episode was around puberty in these victims, the suicide usually occur until late adolescent or early adulthood. Five of the seven were clinically depressed at the time of their death. Thus these findings suggest that major depressive disorder in childhood has significant mortality to suicide (Rao, Weissman & Martin, 1993).

What often happens when people are depressed is that they feel wretched, so they start withdrawing themselves from friends and family which makes them feel more reclusive. Therefore, they withdraw even more and they get caught in this cycle. This is not a minor problem and estimates suggest that 1 out of 18 adolescents and 1 out of 36 children experiences major depression. By the age of 18, 1 in 17 has experienced at least one episode of major depression (Nauert, 2009).

## **MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN**

Historically, the concept of childhood depression was considered to be implausible due to absence of a fully mature superego in children. Subsequent researchers proposed that depression in young age was primarily masked, evident only through behaviors such as somatic symptoms, poor scholastic performance, school refusal and conduct problems. The concept of masked depression was gradually sidelined, as the overt, directly observable nature of childhood depressive symptoms become clearer (Pattanayak & Mehta, 2012).

“One of the most common responses to hearing that a child has depression is, “But what does he/she have to be depressed about?” This statement reveals two major misconceptions. One is the lack of understanding about clinical depression. It is not the same as the “blues” or “down” moods that everyone has from time to time, which may actually be caused by unhappiness with one’s job, home life or other factors. Clinical depression may resemble these emotional dips, but it is much more pervasive, long-lasting, and life-threatening. It is not necessarily caused by an event or state of affairs in a child’s life. The other misconception is that childhood is a carefree, trouble-free period in our lives. How many people can say that they didn’t worry about peer acceptance, grades, or parental expectations? Adults often forget that children are powerless and have no control over their own lives. This can be a frightening and frustrating state of affairs to live through day after day” (Wing of Madness Depression Guide, 2013)

## **CONCLUSION**

Childhood depression still remains under-recognized entity leading to morbidity and mortality. It is not just an occasional melancholy and bad moods, nor just feeling down or sad neither. It is normal for kids to have these kind of feelings but the negative feeling should lessen with time. But, if it lingers for a long time and limits the ability of the person to function

normally, it can be diagnosed as depression. At any given point about 5 percent of children and adolescent in the general population suffer from depression. Depression tends to runs in families and children under stress (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2013). Approximately 1 in every 33 children and 1 in every 8 adolescents (Pattanayak & Mehta, 2012). Depressive disorders have been noted to have an increasing incidence and cause significant morbidity and mortality (John & Cherian, 2001) Thus, Childhood Depression should not be overlook because it can be the cause of many other sicknesses like obesity, heart disease and so on. It can also lead to suicide and this will not only affect the victim but also the family that they live in. Social stigma will associate with the family of the victim so to avoid all the chaos, early onset of depression should be identified at the earliest and action should be taken to help the child.

Because when proper treatment is being given, they learn how to overcome the issues that affects them without their consent thus make them to live a more happy, promising and productive life, filled with peace, love and great mental health (Kids Mental Health, 2014).

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