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Prevalence and Influencing Factors of Depressive Symptoms among Adolescents in a Rural Area, Sri Lanka

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Background: Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that normally occurs during the period from childhood to adulthood. Due to the physical, social and psychological changes as well as educational stresses, adolescents are more prone to develop stress and depression.

Objective: To assess the prevalence and influencing factors of Depressive Symptoms (DS) among adolescents in a rural area

Methods: Nine schools were selected in the Dehiowita Educational Zone, Sabaragamuwa, Sri Lanka. Convenient sampling method was used. Students aged 15-17 years in Grade 10, 11, 12 were assessed using the Sinhala version of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and self-administered questionnaire used in previous studies, Sri Lanka. Data were analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS version 20.

Results: The mean (\pm SD) age of the students was 16.8 (\pm 0.4) years. Sample ($n = 270$) consisted of 59% females. Among the respondents, 52% had DS. Out of them, 57% had mild DS, 28% had moderate DS, 12% had moderately severe DS and 4% had severe DS. Female students were more prone to get DS (2.01 ± 1.06) than male students (1.33 ± 0.90 ; $p = 0.003$). DS was significantly associated with broken close relationship ($p = 0.02$), financial problems in the home ($p = 0.03$), different harassments such as physical, mental, verbal or sexual ($p = 0.01$), and exposure to violence ($p = 0.002$).

Conclusions: A considerable proportion of adolescents in this rural area had DS. They need mental health assistance to face broken close relationships, financial problems, different harassments and violence. The awareness programmers for parents and students (school-based mental health literacy programs) and early help-seeking from professionals should be improved and recommended.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Depression, Influencing factors, Prevalance, Rural area*