Adolescent Subthreshold-Depression and Anxiety: Psychopathology, Functional Impairment and Increased Suicide Risk


12,935 European adolescents participated in a study investigating the relationships between adolescent depression and anxiety and functional impairment and suicidality. Both subthreshold and threshold depression and anxiety were related to functional impairment and suicidality.

**Key Findings:**

- 11% of participating adolescents were classified as depressed, 29% as subthreshold depressed, 6% as anxious, and 32% as subthreshold anxious.
- Girls were more likely than boys to be depressed, anxious, subthreshold depressed, or subthreshold anxious.
- Adolescents who were depressed, subthreshold depressed, anxious, or subthreshold anxious were more likely to report functional impairment than non-depressed or non-anxious adolescents.
- Anxiety and depressive symptoms significantly increased the likelihood of adolescents experiencing suicidal ideation, with a stronger relationship existing for depression comparatively.

**Implications for Programs:**

- Programs could offer classes for parents to help them recognize and manage mental health concerns in their children.
- Programs could collaborate with public schools with high numbers of military children to identify military youth who are experiencing emotional difficulties and to intervene appropriately.

**Implications for Policies:**

- Policies could allocate funding to train family program workers in effective means of supporting families who are managing mental health concerns in their children.
- Policies could recommend that public schools with high numbers of military children be offered professional development on how to most effectively engage and assist these students and their families.

**Avenues for Future Research:**

- Future research could use a longitudinal design to examine how these relationships change over time.
- Additional studies could examine cross-cultural differences in these relationships.
Adolescents aged 14-16 years old in 11 European countries at randomly selected schools were recruited to participate; no information on consent rate was presented.

Students completed self-report questionnaires of depression, anxiety, psychopathology, functional impairment, and suicidal ideation.

Adolescents were divided into three groups based on their depression score: depressed, subthreshold depressed, and non-depressed. They were also categorized into three groups based on their anxiety score: anxious, subthreshold anxious, and non-anxious.

Analyses of covariance assessed differences in psychopathology, suicidal ideation, and functional impairment among the groups.

12,935 adolescents participated

55% of the youth were female.

Average age = 14.91 years (SD=0.90 years).

No other demographic data were presented.

The participants were European; it is unknown how these findings generalize to American youth.

All data are cross-sectional, and causal conclusions are not appropriate.

All data were self-report, rather than the preferred clinical interview.

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Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications

Overall Quality Rating: ★★★★☆