

Depression and suicidal ideation among adolescents

Navin Kumar Devaraj, MMed

Department of Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the article titled "Prevalence and predictors of depression and suicidal ideation among adolescents attending government secondary schools in Malaysia" by Ibrahim, et al.¹ It is indeed worrying that the prevalence of depression and suicidal ideation detected in the study was found to be a very high at 32.7% and 27.9%, respectively.¹ This is way higher than the prevalence of psychiatric morbidities reported by Third National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS III) among children and adolescents aged five to sixteen years old by about 1.6 times for depression and 1.4 times for suicidal ideation, respectively just in the space of 10 years.²

Interestingly, this study found that other psychiatric comorbidities such as anxiety and stress were significant predictors of both depression and suicidal ideations among adolescent.¹ This implies the need to tackle both these disorders early before it leads to the occurrence of depression and suicidal ideation.

With much emphasis placed now on students to excel in studies and remodelling of examinations such as UPSR and PT3 to include higher order thinking skills questions in which students find great difficulty in answering, this has led to increased anxiety and stress levels among school going adolescents. Adding is the burden of the need to attend after school hour's tuition classes and motivations camps that are usually held in term school holidays, therefore robbing these young souls of time for self-exploration and leisure activities that is compounded further by extreme hormonal change in their bodies.

I agree with the authors that something urgent need to be done in view of the important findings of this study. Possible intervention to increase case detection is for school teams of nearby government health clinics ('Klinik Kesihatan') to start using the validated English and Malay version of the

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS -21) for selected question to detect stress levels and also validated version of Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) in both these languages for detection of anxiety states. This will enable early diagnosis and appropriate management to be provided to these adolescents to reduce the risk of the occurrence of depression and suicidal ideation. Other possible interventions include broadening of the school counselling services to especially target students whom are identified as low academic performers by class teacher to detect for the presence of anxiety and stress in these individuals and incorporation of psychological modules in secondary school textbooks, that emphasises the need for good mental health and describes common psychological illness among school going children and adolescents. School counselling services after all have been found to be an useful tool to address these psychological morbidities among school children and should therefore be utilised to achieve these goals.³ Another groundbreaking intervention that can be implemented especially for prevention of psychiatric disorders and maintenance of pro-social behaviour is community-, school- or family-based behaviour management in which a qualified behavioural management therapist collaborates with a child or their family to develop specific and targeted mutually agreed-upon behavioural objectives and interventions to encourage specific positive behaviours.

REFERENCES

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This article was accepted: 26 February 2018
 Corresponding Author: Navin Kumar Devaraj
 Email: knavin59@yahoo.com