

## **The prevalence and sociodemographic characteristics correlates of depressive symptoms among schoolchildren in Cyprus: A cross-sectional descriptive correlational study**

Alexandrou Giorgos<sup>1</sup>, Karanikola Maria<sup>2</sup>, Chatzittofis Andreas<sup>3</sup>, Sokratous Sokratis<sup>4</sup>

**Background and aims:** Mood disorders appear for the first time in childhood, especially depression. The present study aims to: (a) explore the prevalence of depressive symptoms and related predictors in a national sample of primary school children in Cyprus and (b) investigate effect size for any significant group differences.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted. The data were collected from the final year students of elementary education schools, aged 11-13 years, on a nationwide random sample between 2020 -2023. Clinical depressive symptoms were reported as CDI-2 total score  $\geq 20$ , regardless of gender, age, or nationality. Descriptive statistics for all socio-demographic characteristics and depressive symptoms were calculated and stated as frequencies, mean values, and standard deviation. The odds ratio and 95% confidence intervals of depressive symptoms by the sociodemographic characteristics were estimated in logistic regression models before and after controlling for potential confounders

**Results:** The final sample consisted of 552 children. 14.3% of primary education school children in Cyprus, reported clinical symptoms of depression. Concerning the Effect Size (ES) it appeared that family income in combination with parental status had the greatest ES ( $r^2=.047$ , small ES). Although, girls are 1.93 times more likely to report symptoms of clinical depression ( $p=.002$ ), and children with mental health problems are also at greater risk of developing symptoms of depression (OR:5.56,  $p=.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Our findings emphasize the importance of screening school-age children for depression in order to provide early intervention. Programs to prevent mental disorders in children may focus on vulnerable groups.

<sup>1</sup>Alexandrou Giorgos, PhD(c). Mental Health Nurse at Cyprus Mental Health Services, Nicosia.

<sup>2</sup>Karanikola Maria: Associate Professor, Mental Health Nursing, Coordinator of Mental Health Studies & Research, School of Health Sciences, Cyprus University of Technology Chair, Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Cyprus University of Technology

<sup>3</sup>Chatzittofis Andreas: Assistant Professor, Psychiatry, Medical school, Cyprus University.

<sup>4</sup>Sokratous Sokratis: Assistant Professor, specialized in Mental Health Nursing, Mental Health Sector, Erasmus coordinator, Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Cyprus University of Technology