

## THE CAUSES OF DEPRESSION? A SURVEY AMONG MALAYSIANS ABOUT PERCEPTION FOR CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

TAHIR MEHMOOD KHAN<sup>\*1</sup>, SYED AZHAR SYED SULAIMAN<sup>2</sup> & MOHAMED AZMI HASSALI<sup>3</sup>

**Objective:** To explore the perception among Malaysians about the causes of depression

**Methodology :** A cross sectional and descriptive population based survey was conducted in Pulau Penang Malaysia; a 21 items validated Questionnaire was distributed among the respondents using a convenient sampling method to know the public perception about the causes of depression. The causes of depression were classified to three groups 1) medical and non-medical causes, 2) personal and family issues, and 3) Education issues.

**Results :** n=1037 prospective participants were approached, 950 (91.61%) questionnaires were returned and 843 Questionnaires were found completed and complies the criteria for the further analysis with a response rate of (81.29%). Findings show that among education related issues Failure in achievements 618(73.31%), Examination 497(58.96%), Due to the death of loved ones 533(63.23%), Relation break up 497(58.96%) and feelings of Sad and Guilt 621(73.67%) are the most commonly prioritised causes of depression. Race, Gender, Education and marital status are the main demographic variables having association with the causes of depression.

**Conclusion:** Among Malaysians educational and relation ship problems were found to be the main causes of depression. There is an urgent need to review the mental health policy and the methodologies for mental health promotion; because most of the individuals less prioritise the biological reasons of depression this approach will hinder their ability to seek help at the right time.

**Keywords :** Depression, familial issues, educational issues, medical and non medical beliefs.

### INTRODUCTION

The discussion of health is incomplete without mental health<sup>1</sup>. For the nation, mental health is a source which facilitates them to understand their logical and poignant prospective to discover and accomplish their roles in communal and working environment. For the community good mental health of people contributes to affluence, solidarity and social integrity. Inconsistent and low levels of mental health oblige manifold costs, losses and burdens on citizens and societal systems<sup>1</sup>. WHO describes mental health as: "a status of well-being in which the person realizes his or her aptitudes to handle customary strain of life and work efficiently in order to make a contribution to his or her community."<sup>2</sup> While discussing specifically for depression, knowledge and beliefs about the causes of depression is the foundation in the mental health<sup>3</sup>. Efforts to find out the lay publics causal philosophy about mental ailment is the basic requirement to enhance the knowledge level among patients and the public.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that the socio-demographic factors like Living Environment<sup>5,6</sup>, Socio-economic factors are the main causes of depression.

Keeping in view the importance of mental health a population based survey was conducted in Malaysia, aiming to explore the perception among Malaysians about the causes of depression.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In June 2007 a cross sectional and descriptive population

based survey was conducted in Pulau Penang Malaysia; in order to find out the publics perception about causes of depression. Penang is a multicultural state in Malaysia which comprises of Malay (42.5%), Chinese (46.5%), and Indian (10.6%) and other minorities are about (0.4%).<sup>9</sup> A Convenient sampling method was adopted, respondents willing to participate age 18 and over were interviewed. To evaluate the knowledge of respondents regarding the causes of depression a 21 items validated Questionnaire was used covering the socio-demographic factor and the causes of depression. The Questionnaire was translated in Malay language (Bahasha Malyue) for the convenience of those unable to understand English. The idea for the Questionnaire was perceived from the 'European Alliance Against Depression (EAAD), Questionnaire used in Numbergs Project.<sup>10-11</sup>

To avoid any ethical/ legal issues and to conduct this study on a national level, approval from the ethical Committee University Sains Malaysia and Ministry of health Malaysia was obtained. Respondents were briefed verbally about the scope of study and confidentiality of the information provide by them. To conquer the respondents' confidence, information about their names, residence, phone number, passport number and identity card was avoided.

### SAMPLE SIZE AND ANALYSIS

The required sample size for the study was 377<sup>12</sup>, calculated online according to the population of Penang. The questionnaires were distributed among the university

**\*Corresponding author:** <sup>1</sup>School of pharmacy, University Sains Malaysia, Pulau Penang.  
e-mail: mdapharm78@yahoo.co.uk

students and public visiting shopping malls, picnic spot and bistros. Foreigners were also welcomed to share their thoughts; most of them were university students.

Data analysis is performed by using the Statistical package for social sciences (Spss13.0).<sup>®</sup> This study emphasises on the association of socio-demographic variables with the knowledge level about the causes of depression. This study

standard deviation of ±1.16. The information about the marital status, job Status and religion of the respondents is mentioned in Table-3.

The majority believe that they get information from the media about depression the most prioritised source was the newspaper and personal experience. When the respondents were questioned about the type of depression

Table - 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographics	Characteristic	Chinese (35.8%)	Malay (44.60%)	Indian (10.32%)	Foreigners (9.25%)
Job Status	Private	98(32.5%)	40(10.6%)	26(29.9%)	25(32.1%)
	Government	31(10.3%)	98(26.1%)	26(29.9%)	20(25.6%)
	Semi-Govt	13(4.3%)	58(15.4%)	16(18.4%)	6(7.7%)
	Student	160(53.0%)	180(47.3%)	19(21.8%)	26(33.3%)
	Retired				1(1.3%)
Religion	Islam	9(3.0%)	366(97.3%)	19(21.8%)	52(66.7%)
	Christian	39(12.9%)		5(5.7%)	15(19.2%)
	Buddhist	247(81.8%)	8(2.1%)	16(18.4%)	2(2.6%)
	Hindu		2(0.5%)	44(50.6%)	1(1.3%)
	Others	7(2.3%)		3(3.4%)	8(10.3%)
Marital stats	Single	248(40.59%)	279(45.66%)	41(6.71%)	43(7.04%)
	Married	47(24.2%)	79 (40.8%)	34(17.5%)	34(17.5%)
	Widow	5(13.9%)	16(44.4%)	14(38.9%)	1(2.8%)
	Divorced	2(40%)	2(40%)	1(20%)	0

Note: The percentage is calculated on the sum of the frequencies of every group.

Table - 2 Public beliefs about the Education issues resulting depression

	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others	Respondents Agree	Grouping Variable (Education)
Examination	191	216	46	44	497(58.96%)	*P=0.053(S)**
Project	126	140	21	34	321(38.08%)	*P=<0.001(S)**
Failure in achievements	229	271	63	55	618(73.31%)	*P=0.104(NS)***

\*P: (significant at 0.05: Kruskal-Wallis, (S) \*\*= Significant, (NS) \*\*\*= Non-significant

hypothesizes an association between the Socio-demographics and the causes of depression.

## RESULTS

About N=1037 prospective participants were approached, 950 (91.61%) questionnaires were returned and 843 Questionnaires was found complete and complies with the criteria for the further analysis with a response rate of (81.29%). 36.07% of the respondents were male while female were 63.93%. About 83.04% of the respondents had university qualifications and about 66.19% were still continuing their studies. Descriptive statistic reveals the Mean age of respondents was 26 years with a standard deviation of (±1.70). Monthly income of most of the respondents was around Ringgit (RM) 2100 with a

they are familiar with, the majority 67.3% distinguish tension as a type of depression followed by sadness (47.0%) and change in behaviour (28.8%).

The perceptions among respondents about the causes of depression were classified to three groups 1) medical and non-medical causes, 2) personal and family issues, and 3) Education issues. Public beliefs about the education issues resulting in depression are mentioned in Table-2. To examine the association of education *Kruskal-Wallis* test was used.

Beliefs about the personal and family causes of depression are mentioned in Table-3. Marital status was used as a grouping variable to explore the association with Personal and Family Issues using *Kruskal-Wallis* non parametric test. The association of medical and non-medical causes of

depression was examined using race as a grouping variable. Details mentioned in Table-4.

issue was the death of loved ones. 533(63.23%) of respondents they prioritize it as a cause of depression. This

**Table- 3 Public beliefs about the Personal and Family Issues resulting in Depression**

	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others	Respondents Agree	Grouping Variable (Marital status)
Relation break up	186	216	47	48	497(58.96%)	* <i>P</i> =0.04( <b>S</b> ) **
Home /family	185	206	47	38	476(56.47%)	* <i>P</i> =0.465( <b>NS</b> ) ***
Due to the death of loved ones	194	245	44	50	533(63.23%)	* <i>P</i> =0.042( <b>S</b> ) **

\**P*: Kruskal-Wallis, (**S**) \*\*= Significant, (**NS**) \*\*\*= Non-significant

**Table - 4 Beliefs about the medical and non-medical causes of depression among.**

Medical Causes						
	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Foreigners	Total %age	* <i>P</i> value
Chemical imbalance in brain.	105	120	24	28	277(32.86%)	0.558( <b>NS</b> ) ***
Sad and Guilt feelings	230	285	49	57	621(73.67%)	0.002( <b>S</b> ) **
Non-Medical Causes						
	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Foreigners	Total %age	* <i>P</i> value
Occur automatically	69	55	31	12	167(19.81%)	<0.001( <b>S</b> ) **
Un-known reason	85	75	33	22	215(25.50%)	0.002( <b>S</b> ) **

\**P*: (significant at 0.05: Kruskal-Wallis, (**S**) \*\*= Significant, (**NS**) \*\*\*= Non-significant

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study confirms association of demographic factors like education, gender, marital status and race with causes of depression. In Malaysia two main groups are inhabited Malay and Chinese, while discussing racial facts, it revealed death of loved ones and relation ship problems were most prioritised by Chinese, while they emphasise on the feelings of sadness and guilt. About 83.04% of the respondents were qualified with a university higher education or continuing the university education. Due to the tough<sup>15</sup> study schedule they face problems like depression and tension.<sup>13-14</sup> Majority agree that failure in achievements 618(73.31%) is the main cause among the study related issues followed by examinations 497(58.96%), *P*=0.053 and projects 321(38.08%) *P*<0.001. Previous studies prove the fact that Failure in achievement and fear of examination can result depressive disorders among the students.<sup>20</sup> Failures in achievement and low grades in examination are the most commonly observed causes among the student community enrolled in the campus. Among family and personal problems the most highlighted

finding correlates with the previous studies conducted in this regard<sup>16-17</sup>. The second prioritised cause among the familial and person issue was the relation break up with the friend/boy friend/partner, 497(58.96%) of the respondent they agree with the statement that relationship problems can result in depression<sup>16</sup> it was observed that those have good relationship with girlfriends/boyfriend have low prevalence of mental disorders.<sup>21</sup> Detailed exploration reveals about 68% of the females they consider the relation ship problems (*P*=0.04(*chi square*)) as a cause resulting in depression, this fact shows the high rate of relationship problems among women in comparison to men. Home and family.<sup>22</sup> is ranked third, 476(56.47%) of respondents consider it as a cause of depression, but this issue needs more exploration to the cause was either financial problems or relation ship problem with family members.

Regarding the medical and non-medical causes of depression, the majority of the respondents comment depression results due to unknown reasons 215(25.50%), others believe it occurs automatically 167(19.81%). While

in terms of medical issues the majority comment that the state of depression is due to the sadness and guilty feelings<sup>22</sup> by the person 621(73.67%), while about 277(32.86%) agree with the fact that it occurs due to the chemical imbalance in brain these finding are similar to the previous studies.<sup>18</sup>

Among Malaysians educational and relationship problems were found to be the main causes of depression. There is an urgent need to review the mental health policy and the methodologies for mental health promotion, because most of the individuals less prioritise the biological reasons of depression this will hinder their ability to seek help at the right time.<sup>19</sup>

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