

Depression in young adults linked to higher risk of early death

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Depression in young adulthood can have long-lasting effects, potentially leading to a higher risk of death even decades later, suggests a new study in the *Annals of Epidemiology*. These findings highlight the importance of identifying and treating depression early.

According to study author Lisa Wyman, Ph.D., M.P.H., of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, most recent studies have focused on how depression affects [mortality](#) in the elderly, with few studies exploring the [repercussions](#) of depression in young adults.

Researchers reviewed data from the Community Mental Health Epidemiology Study, a survey that gathered information on the mental

health of residents of Washington County, Maryland in the early 1970s and [death certificates](#) for [respondents](#) up to 2011, comparing [survey results](#) that indicated depression with results indicating the absence of depression.

Results showed that over the 40 years that had passed, 1547 of the original 2762 [study participants](#) had died—not surprising, given that many of the group were middle-aged to elderly when they took the survey. However, of those aged 18-39 at baseline, the researchers found some surprising results along gender lines: Young adult males who scored positive for having a depressed mood were nearly twice as likely to have died from any cause by the 2011 follow-up compared to those who didn't have a depressed mood in the original survey.

A slightly higher percentage of deaths occurring in young adult males with depressed mood were from injuries, a category in which the researchers included accidental deaths, suicides, and homicides. Of the young adult females who scored positive, about half of deaths in this group were from cardiovascular causes 30-40 years after baseline, compared to about 13 percent of those who scored negative for depressed mood.

Though the research team didn't speculate on potential causes for the link between depression and earlier deaths or specific causes of mortality, Wyman noted that the findings suggest that the effects of depression in early life make a lasting impression on physical health.

“We're unveiling a crucial piece of evidence that depressed mood in [young adulthood](#) can haunt people throughout their lives,” she says. “Even decades after baseline, we still see this association between risk of death and depressed mood.”

Bryan Bruno, M.D., chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Lenox

Hill Hospital in New York City, who wasn't involved with this study, adds that the new research stresses how seriously depression can affect patients, as well as the need for comprehensive and effective interventions.

“It emphasizes the importance of [treating depression](#) aggressively,” he says, “not just because of potential disability, lack of functioning, or the other acute risks from depression itself, but because of the longer term additional impact on risk of mortality.”

More information: Wyman L, et al., Depressed mood and cause-specific mortality: a 40-year general community assessment, *Annals of Epidemiology* (2012), [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2012.06.102](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2012.06.102)

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