

# Research identifies invisible risk group for adolescent depression

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There is no health without mental health, and the foundation for good mental health is laid in the early and adolescent years of our lives. Mental health issues developed in younger years often increase with age and impact not only on the individual, but also on their family and society as a whole. While the majority of young people in the EU are said to enjoy good mental health, 20 percent of children and adolescents suffer from developmental, emotional or behavioural problems and approximately 12 percent have a clinically diagnosed mental disorder. These are only the young people that have been diagnosed, beyond them there are many more young people who are considered 'at risk'.

Most of us are familiar with the obvious risk factors traditionally

associated with depression. Behavioural problems or alcohol and drug use trigger immediate alarm bells in our heads. However, a recent study led by researchers at Karolinska Institutet in Sweden as part of the SEYLE ('Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe') project, has revealed more subtle risk factors that should also be considered. According to the study, adolescents who demonstrate a combination of low physical activity, high media use, and reduced sleep comprise an 'invisible-risk' group that displays a high prevalence of depression and psychiatric symptoms. The study found that 58 percent of respondents comprised the 'low-risk' group, 13 percent of individuals were clustered in the 'high-risk' group and the remainder occupied this 'invisible' group. It may be easy to dismiss these warning signs simply as 'typical teenage behaviour' but this 'invisible' risk group was found to have similar prevalence of suicidal thoughts, anxiety, sub-threshold depression and [depression](#) as the 'high' risk group whose behaviour was more extreme and explicit.

Vladimir Carli, first author of the study from the National Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention of Mental Ill-Health (NASP) at Karolinska Institutet, noted, 'As many as nearly 30 per cent of the adolescents clustered in the 'invisible' group that had a high level of psychopathological symptoms. While the 'high' risk group is easily identified by behaviour such as alcohol and drug use, parents and teachers are probably not aware of that adolescents in the 'invisible' risk group are at risk'.

The study is the first to estimate the overall prevalence of a wider range of risk behaviours and lifestyles and their association with symptoms of mental ill-health among European adolescents. Its findings, which were published in the February 2014 issue of World Psychiatry, contribute to the work of SEYLE to promote health among adolescents through the prevention of risk-taking and self-destructive behaviours. The SEYLE project has also succeeded in developing and implementing interventions

in the field of child psychiatry, anthropology and suicidology in eight countries and produced baseline data on nearly 9 000 school-based [adolescents](#).

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