

# depressive symptoms among adolescents in Nairobi public secondary schools: association with perceived maladaptive parental behaviour

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## Abstract:

**OBJECTIVE:** Depression in adolescents is a matter of concern because of its high prevalence, potential recurrence and impairment of functioning in the affected individual. The study sought to determine the prevalence of depressive symptoms among adolescents in Nairobi (Kenya) public secondary schools; make a comparison between day and boarding students; and identify associated factors in this population. **METHOD:** A random sample of school going adolescents was taken from a stratified sample of 17 secondary schools out of the 49 public secondary schools in Nairobi province. The sample was stratified to take into account geographical distribution, day and boarding schools, boys only, girls only and mixed (co-education) schools in the capital city of Kenya. Self administered instruments (EMBU and CDI) were used to measure perceived parental behaviour and levels of depression in a total of 1,276 students excluding those who had no living parent. **RESULTS:** The prevalence of clinically significant depressive symptoms was 26.4%. The occurrence was higher in girls than it was in boys  $p < 0.001$ . Students in boarding schools had more clinically significant depressive symptoms compared to day students ( $p = 0.01$ ). More girls exhibited suicidal behaviour than boys ( $p < 0.001$ ). There was a significant correlation between depressive symptoms and suicidal behaviour ( $p < 0.001$ ). CDI scores correlated positively with age ( $p < 0.001$ ) with an increase in CDI score with unit increase in age among students 14-17 years old, perceived rejecting maternal parenting behaviour ( $p < 0.001$ ), perceived no emotional attachment paternal behaviour ( $p < 0.001$ ), perceived no emotional attachment maternal behaviour ( $p < 0.001$ ), and perceived under protective paternal behaviour ( $p = 0.005$ ). **CONCLUSION:** Perceived maladaptive parental behaviours are substantially associated with the development of depressive symptoms and suicidal behaviour in children