

# The psychological health of the secondary schools students in ahvaz, iran 2010

## Abstract

**Background:** Psychological health of children and adolescents is an issue that requires special attention. Nowadays using various programs such as life skills education, mental health education, school-based health interventions and specific treatments can help children to have a useful life. The purpose of this study was to assess of psychological health of the students of secondary schools in Ahvaz-Iran during 2010-2011.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional descriptive study has been done by cluster sampling of 1000 students (girls and boys, secondary school), selected from four different areas, identified by Ministry of Education, in Ahvaz. The instruments used in this study, demographic data questionnaire and psychological symptoms questionnaire (SCL-90-R). In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistical tests (mean and standard deviation), and inferential statistical tests (t-test and Kruscal-Wallis) were utilized.

**Results:** Based on results obtained, 31.5% of participants carried psychological illness symptoms, 62.1% girls and 37.9% boys. The prevalence of symptoms was phobia (49%), paranoid ideation (35.6%), psychosis (32.5%), interpersonal sensitivity (30.7%), obsession (29.6%), depression (44.6%), anxiety (44.8%), aggression (28.6%), and somatization (21.7%). The obtained results showed a significant difference between mental health and gender variable (among male participants). However, there was no significant difference between mental health with parents' level of education and mothers' jobs.

**Conclusion:** According to the results, it's necessary that authorities about the psychological problems of students and to provide and promote of mental health and prevention and helping to solve these problems, apply special strategies for these students.

**Keywords:** psychological health, students, secondary level

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## Introduction

Children and teenagers spend many years of their life at school. These years play an important role in their psychological health. Any negligence and lack of attention in these ages can burden families and societies with irreversible risks in the future. Emotional and behavioral disorders can cause several educational problems in students. The prevalence of 6 to 10 percentage of such disorders amongst school-age children in different countries supports this claim.<sup>1</sup> Several studies on anti-social adults reveal that most of them had behavioral disorders in their childhood and in their teens.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers have shown that depression in children and adults is similar, and the disorder can occur at any age. There is a slight difference between girls and boys in terms of prevalence of depression. However, reaching 13 to 15 years, girls are more prone to depression than boys.<sup>3</sup> In Iran, as well as other countries, various studies on students' mental health have been done, which some of them are presented in following lines:

A study, in 2007, on mental health of teenage boys and girls performed in Tehran, Iran showed that 34% of boys and 23.7% of girls were suspected of disorder.<sup>4</sup> This study was based on GHQ-12 questionnaire. In another study conducted on high school girls in Yazd, it was revealed that there is 19.01% prevalence rate for anxiety disorder.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Sawyer et al.,<sup>6</sup> reported that 40% of 4 to 7 years old children and teenagers have mental health problems and that only 25% of them visited specialists for treatment. There are very few studies on incidence of psychological disorders among secondary school students worldwide. Occasional studies available

looked at incidence of single, specific disorder such as depression, OCD, anxiety, PDD etc. Studies on incidence of psychological disorders among secondary school students are very few in Middle East countries. Although incidence studies are more difficult, more expensive, less feasible and more time consuming, but these are more valuable as these provide the possibility of studying the risk factors and understanding the context of development of disorders; and knowledge of early manifestations of illness, indicating intervention opportunities for primary prevention. Most psychological disorders have typical ages for development and presentation, these tend to continue into adulthood, and further several adult mental disorders have their antecedents in childhood.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore, extremely important that the incidence and context of occurrence of psychological disorders are studied to identify and to undertake preventive intervention early in the course of illness. Regarding the above mentioned statistical information on psychological disorders in schools, which imply the problem during the human development process of growing to maturity per se, researchers decided to conduct a study to investigate the psychological health of the students of secondary schools in Ahvaz during 2010-2011.

## Methods

This cross-sectional descriptive study has been done by cluster sampling of 1000 students (girls and boys, secondary school), selected from four different areas, identified by Ministry of Education, in Ahvaz. Individual questionnaire and psychological symptom questionnaire (SCL-90-R) were instruments used to determine the mental problems of students. The SCL-90-R comprised of 90 questions including nine criteria: somatization, obsession-compulsion, interpersonal

sensitivity, depression, anxiety, aggression, phobia, paranoid ideations, and psychosis. For each criterion, the number of questions divided total score of relevant questions. Considering that the minimum and maximum scores of each participant are 0 and 4 respectively, the scores higher than 2 are taken for vulnerable individuals, according to test instruction. In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistical tests (mean and standard deviation), and inferential statistical tests (t-test and Kruscal-Wallis) were utilized.

## Results

Based on results obtained, the average age of teenage participants was  $13 \pm 1/8$ . Amongst them, 53% (530 participants) were boys and 47% (470 participants) were girls. Respectively, 73% and 15% of participants had average and good economic situations. Generally, 31.5% of participants carried psychological illness symptoms, 62.1% girls and 37.9% boys. The prevalence of symptoms was phobia (49%), paranoid ideation (35.6%), psychosis (32.5%), interpersonal sensitivity (30.7%), obsession (29.6%), depression (44.6%), anxiety (44.8%), aggression (28.6%), and somatization (21.7%). The obtained results showed a significant difference between mental health and gender variable (among male participants). However, there was no significant difference between mental health with parents' level of education and mothers' jobs.

## Discussion

In this study, 31.5% of students showed psychological symptoms. Amongst them, 62.1% were girls and 37.9% were boys. However, the findings are higher than and do not correspond to the outputs of other researches.<sup>8-10</sup> The teenage participants showed the highest mean rates in phobia, anxiety, and depression (Table 1). These findings correspond to those of Sepehrmanesh et al.,<sup>1</sup> Depression in teenage participants indicated a significant distribution, which is in accordance with Kim's<sup>3</sup> study. The other factor underwent this study was the relationship between mental health and mothers' level of education. The outputs showed that the mean of different psychological aspects in students with illiterate and primary education-level mothers was higher, which is not statistically significant and do not correspond to Farsi and Amirian,<sup>11</sup> Masoudzadeh et al.,<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1** Mean±SD of different aspects of SCL-90 test based on gender in adolescents

Gender Dimensions SCL-90-R	Girl Mean±SD	Boy Mean±SD	P-Value
Phobia	1/15±0/47	1/02±0/51	0/041
Aggression	0/29±0/43	0/34±0/42	0/055
Anxiety	0/97±0/55	0/92±0/54	0/061
Obsession	0/36±0/26	0/39±0/87	0/074
Interpersonal sensitivity	0/45±0/78	0/41±0/54	0/084
somatization	0/21±0/64	0/18±0/37	0/068
Psychosis	0/49±0/85	0/52±0/77	0/067
Paranoia	0/55±0/69	0/50±0/71	0/094
Depression	0/78±0/41	0/71±0/57	0/031

Those teenagers that did not have economically secure families showed more mental vulnerability than others did. In addition, the study done by Toumbourou et al.,<sup>2</sup> showed that low economic-social condition is highly correlated with growth of violence and crime, and also drug abuse.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study provide us with significant information about mental health of teenagers. Considering the increasing tendency

towards teenagers' mental health in Iran, maintaining teenagers' psychological health would ensure the mental health of next generation. Moreover, regarding the onset of many disorders in this period and that the failure in diagnosing, and treating them will bear severe consequences such as drug abuse and delinquency, this study highlights the need for devoting more attention to teenagers' mental health. This can be done especially by setting up student-counseling centers, and conducting comprehensive planning to provide relevant health care and counseling services. On the other hand, to be able to generalize the results, it is suggested to perform more relevant researches considering the mentioned variables and mental health factors.

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## Conflicts of interest

Author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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