

# Early Onset Depression in Children

## TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF EARLY ONSET DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN

### **WHAT IS EARLY ONSET DEPRESSION?**

Children, adolescents and adults can feel low or 'blue' occasionally and this may be a normal reaction to experiences that are stressful or upsetting. However, when these feelings persist, cause changes in oneself and interfere with functioning, that it is termed 'depression'

Early Onset Depression (EOD) can occur in children as young as 3 years of age. It is associated with depression in the young person's parents. Despite this, little is known about how common the disorder is in young people under the age of 13 years presenting to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in the UK.

It is also known that those developing the EOD are four times more likely to be at risk of attempting suicide than those who develop depression in later life.

### **THE EARLY ONSET DEPRESSION STUDY**

The low number of cases of EOD means a national system for data collection has to be used. A study has been designed to gain information about those young people under 13 years who develop EOD.

The aim of this study is to improve understanding of the scale of the problem in this age group, who might be most at risk and what treatments are being routinely offered to young people and families.

Increased and more accurate knowledge about the number of cases and presentation of these children is of critical importance in recognition of the condition and developing management approaches for children with this treatable illness.

### **HOW LONG WILL IT GO ON FOR?**

The study will collect information on new cases of EOD for 13 months with some information requested at one and two-year follow-up. Thus, the study will last 37 months in total.

### **WHO SHOULD BE CONTACTED IF I HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

Please contact CAPSS:

CAPSS, Royal College of Psychiatrists,  
21 Prescot Street, London, E1 8BB,

020 3701 2649

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/ccqi/research-and-evaluation/current-research/studies-relating-to-capss>

## CASE DEFINITION

Please report any child aged between the ages of 3 years and less than 13 years seen and diagnosed with depression for the first time. If there have been previous undiagnosed episodes of depression please still report the case. There must be at least a 2 week duration of pervasive change in mood (dysphoria or irritability), and/or loss of previously enjoyable interest and pleasure. The symptoms must have been severe enough to impair relationships or activities and not be attributable to substance or medication use, other psychiatric disturbances, or to the direct physiological effects of a medical illness.

**NB:** This methodology will identify all cases of depression both primary and secondary.

### This includes:

Any child between the ages of 3 - 13 years old seen and diagnosed with depression in the previous month with at least a 2 week duration of pervasive change in mood (dysphoria or irritability), and/or loss of previously enjoyable interest and pleasure. The symptoms must have been severe enough to impair relationships or activities and not be attributable to substance or medication use, other psychiatric disturbances, or medical illness.

### Exclusion criteria:

A previous diagnosis of manic/hypomanic/mixed episode or bipolar disorder.

### Duration

January 2019 to January 2023

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