

**Gender Differences in Teenage Depression and the Role of Educational Institutions in
Fighting it**

Nargiz Mammadova

Business Administration, ADA University

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The Impact of Gender Differences in Teenage Depression and the Role of Educational

Institutions in the Fight against This Illness

Adolescence is not only a period of rapid growth but also a period for the onset of many severe mental disorders. One of them is a teenage depression. Depression, with extreme mood disorders such as hopelessness, worthlessness, and helplessness, disrupts teenagers' lifestyles and causes negative changes in their sleeping routines, eating habits, and thinking patterns. Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) or clinical depression refers to the continuous sad or irritable mood which is accompanied by anhedonia, lack of pleasure and interest in all activities (Cash, 2010). Recent researches suggest that one of every five teenagers experience at least one episode of major depression during teen years (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016). Therefore, it is the most common cause of teenage disability especially in the United States and Canada (Cash, 2010). Due to its rapid increase, depression is a serious psychological disease for teenagers.

Although extensive research has been conducted on the types of teenage depression and the effects of this mental disorder in teenagers' both educational and personal life, the number of researches focusing on the role of gender differences in teenage depression is quite small. Since teenage depression is on the rise and often misdiagnosed, it is necessary for both parents and professionals to carefully pay attention to gender differences that have a great role in depression (Kouros & Garber, 2014). The impact of gender differences in teenage depression has been examined by many scientists and most of them came to the conclusion that gender is actually a risk factor in depression and it should be taken into consideration by professionals, parents, and educational institutions to prevent the spread of this mental illness (Moreh & O'Lawrence, 2016, Essau et al., 2017). Basically, being informed about the role of gender differences in depression can result in a better understanding of people that this illness carries various levels of severity between teenage boys and girls.

So, the main purpose of this research paper is to examine to what extent gender is a serious factor to consider in teenage depression and what can be done by schools and colleges to prevent this disease among teenagers. This study tries to answer the following questions by referring to several recent studies on this area:

What is the role of gender differences in depression rates among teenagers?

How can we identify early signs of depression among teenage boys and girls?

What can educational institutions (schools and universities) and parents do to help teenagers deal with depression?

Literature Review

The role of gender differences on the rate of teenage depression

The relationship between the gender factor and depression rate is one of the popular topics studied by many scientists. The question of whether gender is a risk factor for depression among teenagers or not is answered with the data from the 2005-2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. According to the survey, there is a higher likelihood for teenage girls to become depressed than boys, and this important result should be considered by professionals for intervention and prevention (Moreh & O'Lawrence, 2016). Another study in this area was conducted by Essau et al. (2017). The data collected from 773 adolescents reveal that teenage girls compared to boys have significantly higher incidence rates of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) or basically depression and longer duration of depressive episodes. As a result, depression becomes a more dangerous mental disorder for girls than boys.

Gender differences in symptoms of teenage depression

When it comes to symptoms of teenage depression, the impact of gender differences should be taken into consideration as a major determinant. The study done by Shokrgozar et al. (2017) on this issue indicates that gender has a significant role in symptoms of depression among teenagers. Data based on a cross-sectional study collected from 191 depressed teenagers reveal that while self-blame, dissatisfaction with body image and feelings of failure are the main symptoms of depression among girls, depressed boys experience loss of pleasure, irritability, and fatigue. Additionally, during the depression, teenage girls show more rapid increases in sad mood and feeling of worthlessness than boys. However, poor decision-making and concentration are more problematic for boys than girls (Kouros & Garber, 2014).

The effects of gender differences in social support acquired by teenagers to deal with depression

Various studies on the relationship between gender differences and social support are considered important findings for the treatment of teenage depression. According to the research conducted among 1674 high school students, the mediating roles of family and others' support have more influence on the depression among boys than girls. When it comes to friend support, it plays a more important role in girls' mental health than boys (Zhang et al., 2015). Moreover, in 2016 another study conducted from 105 teenagers revealed that male teenagers prefer social support that helps them to achieve self-control rather than awareness of the problem. However, females prioritize the kind of social support that helps them achieve awareness of the problem. Therefore, compared to teenage girls, teenage boys are more likely to consume drugs or other psychoactive substances in times of depression to achieve self-control (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016).

The role of educational institutions in dealing with teenage depression

As teenage depression has broad negative effects on students' healthy educational life, it should be taken seriously into account by educational institutions. Due to the increasing number of depressed teenagers, schools should serve as mental health support systems rather than as institutions that focus solely on students' grades. To achieve this purpose, they should have a depression prevention and intervention plan. Training staff members about this issue, creating a friendly and supportive environment, providing preventive programs, evidence-based interventions, screenings for early identification, and referral services are the main parts of this plan (Cash, 2010). When it comes to colleges, they should also improve the well-being of their students' mental health. The implementation of face to face orientation sessions and free accessible screenings in colleges will be helpful to learn about the well-being of students' mental health and assess their depression level beforehand to treat them well. Instructors should also contribute to this purpose by acting as mental health advocates and listening to students' needs (Eva, 2019).

Discussion

The analysis of different studies on the role of gender differences in depression resulted in the impact of gender differences in severity, symptoms of depression, and type of social support preferred by teenagers in the fight against this mental disorder.

Depression is a mental crisis for both male and female adolescents. However, the rate of this mental crisis varies between genders. It basically means that teenage boys and girls experience depression with various severity levels. According to recent researches on this area, female teenagers are more likely to be depressed than males (Moreh & O'Lawrence, 2016), and their depression episodes are much longer and more severe (Essau et al., 2017). I think that these facts are highly associated with hormonal changes in female teenagers' developmental and reproductive processes. Especially, girls who enter puberty earlier than

their friends experience additional pressure. Why? Simply because of their friends' reactions. So, when a boy enters puberty, he can proudly share changes in his body with his friends. However, this is different in girls. In their cases, it is considered shameful to share changes in their bodies with friends. This peer pressure triggers depression among girls. Even research proves this idea that an early onset of puberty causes problematic depressive conditions for girls, but not for boys (Essau et al., 2017).

Another factor affected by the role of gender differences is symptoms of depression. Identifying these gender differences in symptoms of teenage depression can broaden our understanding of the mechanism that increases the possible risks of this mental disorder in girls. Feeling of guilt, worthlessness, failure, and dissatisfaction with body image are more likely to be experienced by girls rather than boys (Shokrgozar et al., 2017). Particularly, the feeling of guilt that triggers suicides among depressed girls should be taken seriously into account by parents for early identification and prevention of this disease. When it comes to boys, during the period of depression they are exposed to several concentration and decision-making problems that lead to huge failures in their educational lives (Kouros & Garber, 2014). From my perspective, in the case of boys, the role of early identification of depression should fall more on teachers and instructors when they observe a decrease in their male students' academic performance due to concentration problems.

To fight against teenage depression social support is considered as an effective treatment method because there is a negative relationship between social support and depression level. The more teenagers acquire social support from their parents and friends, the fewer episodes of depression they experience. However, the type of social support preferred by teenagers to cope with depression varies due to gender differences. For example, according to the research, boys take more advantage of family support than girls to decrease the negative effects of depression on their mental health. Therefore, during the period of depression boys

are more dependent on their personal relationships with family members than girls, whereas for girls friend support plays a significant role in improving the well-being of their mental health. Girls with a sufficient level of friend support are less imposed on the harmful effects of depressive syndromes (Zhang et al., 2015). From my perspective, girls' tendency toward friend support is highly associated with their main symptom of depression – dissatisfaction with body image. During adolescence, girls become more sensitive and vulnerable to the comments of their peers, as they are more concerned about changes in their bodies. Even a simple compliment from their peers about their appearance makes them very happy and leads to a positive effect on their mental health. Additionally, it is an obvious fact that boys compared to girls consume more drugs and other psychoactive substances in the period of depression. This fact is also related to gender differences in teenagers' preference for social support. The current research proves that while girls choose the social support that raises their awareness of the problem such as psychological support, boys tend to prefer the kind of social support that gives them social control over the problem such as drugs (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016). These important gender differences in social support should be considered by parents to provide the most suitable support for their depressed kids.

The well-being of students' mental health should also be taken into account by educational institutions since depression is a big challenge for teenagers in their educational life. Today most schools and universities organize events or workshops to inform teenagers about the negative effects of drug or alcohol use, sexual violence, racism and etc. Why not organize such kinds of events about teenagers' mental health problems, especially about depression? To do this, educational institutions should have depression intervention and prevention plans. They should start by educating students, parents, and staff members about this illness, what kind of risks it carries, and which factors (age, gender) affect it negatively. After that, the next step is to create a friendly, supportive, and caring environment on campus

for teenagers struggling with depression to share their experiences comfortably (Cash, 2010). At the end, universities or schools should provide free screenings, face to face orientation sessions, and referral services. For example, Drexel University uses free screenings kiosks where students can approach and get a checkup about their mental health. The process is very simple. They are just asked several questions on a private screen and at the end, they are provided with the results of these questions in terms of the level of the well-being of their mental health and they get information about what kind of mental health supports or treatments they need (Eva, 2019). With the implementation of these preventive programs, both schools and universities can prevent the spread of this mental disorder among teenagers.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that depression is a serious mental disorder among teenagers, this paper attempted to analyze the impact of gender differences as a risk factor in depression. The main result is that gender differences actually affect the depression rate negatively among teenage girls, and due to several hormonal changes and various symptoms such as a feeling of guilt, worthlessness, and failure, girls experience depression much more severely compared to boys. Additionally, social support which is an important solution to depression also varies among female and male teenagers. Thus, girls prefer social support from their friends and professionals that helps them achieve awareness of the problem. However, boys choose family support and other social supports that give them a sense of control over the depression. Both families and professionals should take into consideration these important facts while trying to help teenagers to cope with depression effectively. When it comes to the role of educational institutions, they should follow the exact steps of the depression intervention/prevention plan mentioned above to stop the spread of this illness among their teenage students and to guarantee a healthier and much brighter future for them.

This research paper mainly focuses on the idea of the role of gender differences in teenage depression by using studies mainly conducted in the USA and other well-developed countries. However, further research can be done by conducting quantitative research among teenagers in Azerbaijan or other developing countries.

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