

**Prevalence of emotional disorders and their correlates among 15-19 year old students in the MOH area of Dankotuwa**

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The objective of the study was to modify, adapt and validate an instrument for detection of emotional disorders as well as to estimate the prevalence of such illness in a school going community. Factors associated with emotional disorders in this population were also studied. An important finding of the study was the high prevalence (16.6 per cent) of the feeling that " life is not worth living" among the study population irrespective of their emotional health status. Furthermore, 4 per cent of this total population expressed suicidal ideas. Both these are confirmed by the current high suicide rates observed nationally and highlight the importance of instituting preventive action. The key source of emotional distress in adolescents was identified as relationship with the family. This is related to the findings of the study that corporal punishment and strictness of parents were important risk factors for emotional disorders in the population studied. Part time employment of school going adolescents was the other important risk factor. This needs further explorative study. Another key finding of the present study was the association of emotional disorders with the ability to grasp information. Participation in extra curricular activities was shown to have an inverse relationship with emotional health. These findings highlight the need for institutionalizing a screening program for this age group within the school setting. This has to be preceded by extensive validation studies as well as assessment of acceptability and economic feasibility. An important area of intervention would be the creation of increased awareness in the community in general as well as programs directed towards improving parenting practices. Education of teachers towards better understanding of emotional changes associated with adolescence also appears very important.