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## Abstract

- Population estimates suggest that approximately 1 in 10 adolescents have experienced a major depressive episode in the last year (SAMHSA, 2014).
- Adolescent girls are nearly twice as likely to experience depression as adolescent boys (Merikangas et al., 2010).
- Subclinical levels of depressive symptoms have also been shown to negatively impact adolescents lives (Bertha & Balázs, 2013).
- Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine trends in adolescent depressive symptoms from early adolescence to emerging adulthood for girls and boys.

## Method

- Sample**
  - Data drawn from the Adolescent Adjustment Project
    - Adolescents from Mid-Atlantic States
    - Self-report surveys annually from 2006-2009 (Time 1-4) and again in 2014 (Time 5)
    - Time 1  $M_{age} = 15.05$  ( $SD = .78$ ; 58.4% female)
    - Racial/ethnic groups: European American (40.4%), African American (22.8%), Hispanic (26.6%), Asian (5.1%), and Other (7.2%)
- Measures: Depression**
  - Time 1-4: Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC)
  - Time 5: CES-D adult version
  - For both scales, participants answered 20 questions about their feelings during the past week (e.g., "I felt sad" and "I could not get 'going'", respectively)
  - Response scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot)
  - Cronbach alpha ranged from .90 to .92

## Results

To explore trends in depression from early adolescence to emerging adulthood, average scores were calculated across waves. Trends in depression over time for girls, boys, and the entire sample are displayed in Figure 1 and descriptive statistics in Table 1. Generally, results suggest that average depression scores are fairly stable for girls and boys, with a slight decline in emerging adulthood. Across all five waves, girls reported higher levels of depression than boys. However, independent samples t-tests suggest these differences were only statically significant at Time 1 ( $t(939) = 18.15, p < .001$ ) and Time 2 ( $t(366) = 5.58, p < .05$ ). Finally, this results suggest great variability in reports of depression among adolescent and emerging adults.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Depressive Symptoms by Gender Over Time

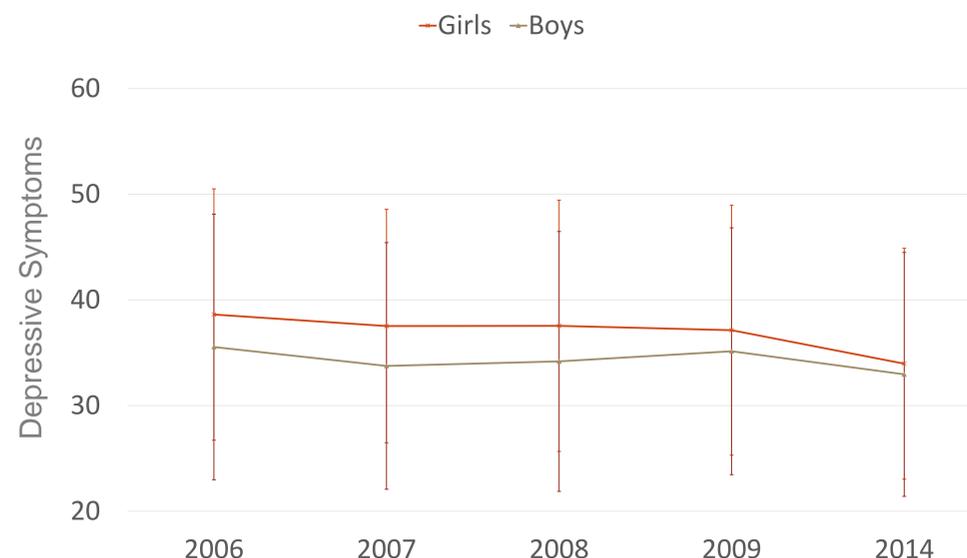
	Age	Total	Girls	Boys
Time	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
1	15.05(.78)	38.07(11.89)	38.61(12.57)***	35.54(10.32)***
2	16.15(.75)	35.75(11.05)	37.52(11.67)*	33.75(9.97)*
3	17.18(1.16)	36.55(11.89)	37.55(12.30)	34.18(10.54)
4	17.96(.73)	36.79(11.82)	37.13(11.68)	35.14(11.65)
5	22.96	32.94(10.92)	32.96(11.54)	32.95(9.55)

Note. Emerging adults age was not measured in 2014. The above value was extrapolated based on time between measurements. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

- Results from this exploratory study illustrate the general trends in adolescent and emerging adult experiences of depressive symptoms for girls and boys.
- Depressive symptoms averages were stable across time, with a slight decrease as individuals enter into emerging adulthood.
- In line with previous research, results also suggest that girls experience greater levels of depressive symptoms than boys across time.
- Importantly, this study highlights the variability in experiences of depression for girls and boys.
- It is important for future studies to explore potential sources of influence on different trajectories of depressive symptomatology, such as individual, family and parental, sibling, and peer factors (Harper, Padilla-Walker, & Jensen, 2014).

Adolescent Depressive Symptoms by Gender Over Time



Note. Error bars were produced based on standard deviations for each group.

