



Asian Journal of Scientific Research

ISSN 1992-1454

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Treatment for Depression Is a Long-Term Solution, Study Suggests

Ian Colman, an epidemiologist in the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta, recently completed a study that suggests that treatment of depression may have long-term benefits.

The data Colman reviewed came from the National Population Health Survey, a longitudinal Canadian study and showed depressed adults who use antidepressants are three times less likely to be depressed eight years later, compared to depressed adults who don't use antidepressants.

To date, research into the effects of antidepressant treatments for individuals with major depression has only concentrated on short-term outcomes says Colman, and that there is limited knowledge about long-term results.

However, it's important to note that it's unlikely that the effects are just the result of ongoing treatment; Colman says, "It's more likely that results from the study speak to the importance of getting evidence-based treatment, drugs or other therapies, in the first place and treatments that ensure that all of your symptoms are resolved."

Colman also stresses that, while proper treatment is vital, he also points the importance of treatment that continues until an individual's symptoms have completely ceased.

"It's common that depressed individuals will have a partial remission of symptoms where they feel better but some symptoms remain; those people have poor long-term outcomes," he says. "It's important to have successful treatment that deals with all of your symptoms."

The study, Colman hopes, will shed even more light on a complex issue. While depression can be a difficult topic to discuss in everyday conversation, recent research has shown more than 50 percent of people who are depressed are not receiving treatment, possibly because, Colman says, they don't recognize symptoms, don't want treatment, or are not getting appropriate treatment due to stigma around mental illness.

Colman offers several options in order for treatment to be successful. Psychotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy, which focuses on problem solving and skills building, help the patient deal with stressful situations for example, and have proved to have long-term beneficial outcomes.

"Evidence suggests that cognitive behavioural therapies are as effective as anti-depressants, and the two treatments together is even more effective," he says.

Colman's study was recently published in the Journal of Psychiatric Research.

Journal Reference: 1. Ian Colman, Yiye Zeng, Anushka Ataullahjan, Ambikaipakan Senthilselvan, Scott B. Patten. The association between antidepressant use and depression eight years later: A national cohort study. Journal of Psychiatric Research, 2011; DOI: 10.1016/j.jpsychires.2011.02.001