

# More screening, or more married parents?

## The News Story: New Recommendations for Depression Screening in Primary Care

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) is considering a new standard recommending that all adults be routinely screened for depression during visits to their primary care provider, according to a story released by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

According to the AAFP, the need for such routine screening is severe, as “one out of about every dozen people age 12 or older has experienced symptoms of depression in the past two weeks.” Detecting and treating depression early, the story continues, are obvious public health goals. But in spite of what one might suppose from the recommendation that *all adults* be regularly screened, all adults are not equally at risk for becoming depressed. Groups of concern are “women, younger and middle-aged adults, and nonwhite individuals,” as well as “people who are undereducated, *previously married* or unemployed.”

These particular standards are aimed at adults only, but the USPSTF is drafting another set of recommendations for adolescents. As usual, policymakers would do well to take family background into account, as research suggests that all teens are not equally vulnerable to depression.

(Source: [“USPSTF Proposes Screening All Adults for Depression,”](#) AAFP, July 29, 2015. Emphasis added.)

## The New Research: In the Slough in Sweden

Children will flourish regardless of family structure so long as government provides sufficient support to single-parent

families. So progressive theorists have argued for decades. Unfortunately, evidence to the contrary continues to accumulate. The latest indication that family structure powerfully affects children's well-being *regardless* of government policy comes from Sweden, widely regarded as the land of heart's desire by progressives.

Completed by a team of public-health officials in Stockholm, this new study analyzes the prevalence of depression among Swedish adolescents. The researchers begin their inquiry conscious that "mental ill-health is the largest public health problem in high-income countries, the second largest contributor to years lived with disabilities (DLL) in the world and the number one problem among 10–14 year olds in Canada and the US." What is more, concerns about mental health have grown more acute as "self-reported depressive symptoms have increased among young people of both genders in the past two decades." The authors of the new study regard this surge in mental-health problems among young people as "especially worrisome given that depression in adolescence, including subclinical depression, is a risk factor for a clinical depression later in life as well as for other types of mental ill-health, substance abuse, suicide and low educational attainment and unemployment."

To assess the psychological distress of young Swedes, the researchers parse data from 3,020 adolescents tracked from 1998 to 2010. These data highlight the psychological vulnerability of Swedish adolescents living with a single adult (typically, a single mother) instead of two adults (usually, their parents). "Living exclusively with one adult almost tripled the risk of depressive symptoms [Odds Ratio of 2.8]," the researchers report. "Moreover, it was found that girls were particularly vulnerable to depressive symptoms when . . . living exclusively with one adult."

The authors of this new study interpret their findings against the backdrop of earlier research suggesting that "children

growing up in two-parent families suffer less frequently from cognitive, emotional and social problems” than do peers in single-parent families, peers who “appear to be at increased risk of psychiatric disease and suicide.” The researchers also cite earlier studies concluding that “witnessing family changes, e.g. separation or divorce,” constitutes “a stressful life event that . . . is a risk factor for depression” and that “paternal absence . . . [may] explain higher risks of depressive symptoms.”

The researchers recognize that their findings underscore the vulnerability of children living in single-parent homes even when those homes are found in a “welfare system . . . built on efforts to achieve full employment, relatively generous benefit levels, high-quality public care services, and relatively small inequalities between genders as well as between different socioeconomic groups.” In other words, “living in a single-parent home . . . [is] likely to increase the risk of depressive symptoms among adolescents even in societies with a strong welfare system.”

Progressives will no doubt persist in their advocacy for an agenda that undermines marriage and family life, while continuing to assure skeptics that generous government programs will ensure the well-being of the children affected by marital and family breakdown. As a matter of feminist principle, progressives give particularly strong assurances for the well-being of young women. The latest report from Stockholm renders these progressive assurances bitterly risible.

(Source: Bryce J. Christensen and Nicole M. King, “New Research,” *The Family in America*, Winter 2015, Vol. 29 Number 1. Study: Therese Wirback et al., “Social Factors in Childhood and Risk of Depressive Symptoms Among Adolescents—a Longitudinal Study in Stockholm, Sweden,” *International Journal for Equity in Health* 13.1 [2014]: 96. Web)

### [Image Credit](#)

*This [article](#) by Nicole M. King was originally published on MercatorNet.com under a Creative Commons License. If you enjoyed this article, visit MercatorNet.com for more. ?The views expressed by the author and MercatorNet.com are not necessarily endorsed by this organization and are simply provided as food for thought from Intellectual Takeout.??*