

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF  
ADOLESCENT DEPRESSION**

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## ABSTRACT

This research examined the longitudinal development of depressive symptoms among young adolescents (mean age 12 years). The first model examined depressive symptoms across 6 months in 315 young adolescents and their mothers, considering the mediation of perceived parenting and its influence on adolescent self-worth. Although parent-reported parental depression was not linked with child-reported perceived parenting, the child's perception of his or her mother as rejecting or less caring was associated with a lower sense of self-worth, which in turn predicted depressive symptoms 6 months later, controlling for initial depression. In the second model, tested across 12 months with 896 young adolescent girls, neuroticism served as a distal vulnerability for depression, conferring a risk of experiencing dependent stressors and negative automatic thoughts which fully mediated the effect of neuroticism on later depression. Initial depressive symptoms also followed this mediational pathway, in a possible maintenance and risk pathway for adolescent depression. Unexpectedly, independent stressors were also predicted by initial depressive symptoms, suggesting possible shared method or genuine environmental factors. Finally, it was proposed that young adolescents at risk of depression will not only display cognitive vulnerabilities contributing to increased depressive symptoms following stressors (cognitive diathesis-stress theory), but also be *more likely* to experience stressors at least partly dependent on their own behaviour (stress-generation theory). This model was supported with a large (N=756) sample of young adolescents across 6 months, controlling for initial depression. Taken together, this thesis extends previous theories about the aetiology of depression, providing evidence from family, personality and cognitive risk factors to better explain the development of depressive symptoms in early adolescence, with significant implications for intervention and treatment.

## STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “The development and maintenance of adolescent depression” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree at any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. The additional authors included in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 were involved in the research at a supervisory level.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: HE24MAR2006-D04582 on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 2006.

Amy Kercher (Student ID 30601630)

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