

Abstract

Background: Bipolar disorder is a global health problem with poor clinical outcomes. However, its recognition has been unsatisfactory. Many people suffering from bipolar disorders were misdiagnosed as major depressive disorders, leading to delay in treatment and worsening of outcomes. Furthermore, people suffering from major depressive disorders can present with sub-threshold hypomanic symptoms, which have been shown to have poorer clinical parameters and response towards antidepressants than people with pure major depressive disorder without sub-threshold hypomanic symptoms. The current study tried to investigate the prevalence rates of bipolar disorders among community-dwelling people screened to have depressive disorders. The current study also studied the prevalence rates of sub-threshold hypomania among people with a definitive diagnosis of major depressive disorder in Hong Kong.

Methods: All participants screened to have depressive disorders from Phase I study of Hong Kong Mental Morbidity Survey (HKMMS) were invited to participate in the current study. Participants were arranged to have face-to-face clinical interviews using Chinese-Bilingual Version of Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Diagnosis (CB-SCID). Bipolar disorders were diagnosed according to DSM-IV-TR criteria from CB-SCID. Participants confirmed by CB-SCID to have major depressive disorder were further split into pure major depressive disorder and major depressive disorder with sub-threshold hypomania according to internationally recognized operational criteria. A set of psychometric instruments, including Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition, Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck Scale of Suicidal Ideation, Social and Occupational Functioning Assessment Scale, and Hypomania Checklist-32 were also completed by

each of the participants.

Results: 87 participants screened to have depressive disorders in Phase I study of HKMMS were successfully interviewed. 16.1% of participants were found to have bipolar spectrum symptoms. Among those participants diagnosed to have major depressive disorders by CB-SCID, 17.2% of participants were found to have a past history of sub-threshold hypomania. Compared with pure major depressive disorder, major depressive disorder with sub-threshold hypomania had an earlier age of first onset of depression, more lifetime prior episodes of depression, greater number of psychiatric co-morbidities, more severe depressive symptoms and lower levels of psychosocial functioning.

Conclusion: The current study is the first local study in Hong Kong that investigated the prevalence rate of sub-threshold hypomania among community-dwelling participants with major depressive disorder using standardized diagnostic procedures. Consistent with other epidemiological studies, the current study has shown that there were a substantial proportion of individuals with major depression suffering from undetected bipolar spectrum disorders. It is crucial to have a careful evaluation of bipolar spectrum symptoms for every individual presenting with mood problems in the community.