

A double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial of fluoxetine in children and adolescents with depression

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BACKGROUND: Depression is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in children and adolescents. To date, randomized, controlled, double-blind trials of antidepressants (largely tricyclic agents) have yet to reveal that any antidepressant is more effective than placebo. This article is of a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial of fluoxetine in children and adolescents with depression. **METHODS:** Ninety-six child and adolescent outpatients (aged 7-17 years) with nonpsychotic major depressive disorder were randomized (stratified for age and sex) to 20 mg of fluoxetine or placebo and seen weekly for 8 consecutive weeks. Randomization was preceded by 3 evaluation visits that included structured diagnostic interviews during 2 weeks, followed 1 week later by a 1-week, single-blind placebo run-in. Primary outcome measurements were the global improvement of the Clinical Global Impressions scale and the Children's Depression Rating Scale--Revised, a measure of the severity depressive symptoms. **RESULTS:** Of the 96 patients, 48 were randomized to fluoxetine treatment and 48 to placebo. Using the intent to treat sample, 27 (56%) of those receiving fluoxetine and 16 (33%) receiving placebo were rated "much" or "very much" improved on the Clinical Global Impressions scale at study exit ($\chi^2 = 5.1$, $df = 1$, $P = .02$). Significant differences were also noted in weekly ratings of the Children's Depression Rating Scale--Revised after 5 weeks of treatment (using last observation carried forward). Equivalent response rates were found for patients aged 12 years and younger ($n = 48$) and those aged 13 years and older ($n = 48$). **However, complete symptom remission (Children's Depression Rating Scale--Revised \leq or = 28) occurred in only 31% of the fluoxetine-treated patients and 23% of the placebo patients.** **CONCLUSION:** Fluoxetine was superior to placebo in the acute phase treatment of major depressive disorder in child and adolescent outpatients with severe, persistent depression. Complete remission of symptoms was rare.