Depression in Congenital Heart Disease; a forgotten issue.

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INTRODUCTION:
Treatment of childhood congenital heart disease (CHD) may be extremely stressful, resulting in psychological sequelae that may be present years later during adult life. Purpose of this study was to examine the presence of depressive symptoms in adolescents and adults with CHD and the association of functional status and disease severity with the presence of depression.

METHODS:
Sixty patients (mean age 28.89±11.41 years, 53.3% men), with CHD were recruited for the study as outpatients (stable patients) of a territory center between July 2007 and December 2010. All patients were asked to complete scales screening depressive symptoms (BDI, Zung SDS). Functional status was assessed using the New York Heart Association (NYHA) classification.

RESULTS:
Twenty-nine patients (48%) of the population study had severe forms of CHD (repaired Tetralogy of Fallot, univentricular anatomy (Fontan circulation), repaired transposition of great arteries), twenty-four (40%) had Eisenmenger syndrome and seven (12%) had moderate severity defects (aortic valve disease, atrioventricular canal defects). Fifteen percent (15%) received scores indicative of moderate to severe depressive symptomatology (scores of 20 and above) according to BDI and sixteen (16%) according to Zung SDS. The vast majority was classified as NYHA II and III (86.7%). The effect of NYHA functional status on BDI and ZUNG scores was proved significant. Both BDI score and ZUNG score were positively associated with NYHA (b=0.311, p<0.001, CI95% 0.143 – 0.478 and b=7.054, p<0.001, CI95% 3.252 – 10.856 respectively). Cardiac defect severity did not emerge as significant predictor of depression (p>0.05).

CONCLUSIONS:
This study confirms that patients with CHD and limited functional status, even stable ones, are depressed and underlines the need for the development and evaluation of psychosocial interventions targeted specifically to this group. Altering the psychological burden of these patients may have a positive impact in their functional status and quality of life.