

Scoring the Mood Screener and the CES-D

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The *Mood Screener* is sometimes referred to as the “MDE Screener,” which stands for “Major Depressive Episode Screener.” Its questions were adapted by Ricardo Muñoz (1998) from the Diagnostic Interview Schedule, which is in the public domain (Robins, Helzer, Croughan, & Ratcliff, 1981). The CES-D is called the Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale and is also in the public domain (Radloff, 1977). Both can be reproduced without permission of the authors.

A Note on Screening Instruments

Before you score these questionnaires, it's important to understand two things about screening instruments:

1. Screening instruments are not intended to yield a diagnosis. When well constructed, screening instruments inquire about the presence of symptoms that are considered to be part of the condition being assessed. For example, the Mood Screener inquires about the symptoms that a professional looks for to decide whether a person is suffering from major depression. If you gave accurate answers, and your score shows that you are not experiencing the symptoms of major depression, it is very unlikely that you have this condition. If you are experiencing the symptoms, it is possible that you are suffering from major depression, but, of course, these symptoms could be caused by a number of other conditions. This is why it is important that a professional trained to recognize and diagnose depression conduct a formal assessment. Only a trained

professional is qualified to render a diagnosis. The questionnaire is only a tool to determine whether you have the symptoms of major depression, and, if you believe depression might be affecting your life, you should seek further evaluation.

2. Screening instruments do not rule out the possibility that you have some other problem. If your score indicates that you do not have the symptoms of depression, you might still be suffering from another problem. Diagnostic categories are merely tools to help professionals decide what type of treatment is most appropriate. If you're experiencing serious emotional pain or if your problems are interfering with your life or activities a lot, seeking help is the most reasonable step to take, no matter how you score on these two tests.

The Mood Screener

We developed the Mood Screener because major depression is one of the most common emotional problems and causes the greatest amount of disability worldwide. Health care professionals usually inquire about nine symptoms that are considered in determining whether a person is suffering from major depression. The Mood Screener asks questions about these particular nine symptoms. The first two columns ask if you have ever had the major depression symptoms. The last two columns refer to whether you are having the symptoms now (within the last two weeks).

*Scoring the **Mood Screener**: If, for any of the 9 numbered rows under "Lifetime" you have answered at least one "yes", you can fill in the box in the second column. Then add up the number of boxes from 1 to 9 and enter that number on the bottom row. Do the same for the last two columns, under the word "Current."*

If you marked 5 or more of the nine boxes in the Current columns, including either symptom 1 (feeling depressed) or symptom 2 (losing interest or pleasure), and marked “yes” to the question “Did these problems interfere with your life or activities a lot?” it is possible that you are having a period of major depression currently. If that is the case, we recommend that you see your primary care physician, show her or him the list of symptoms you're having, and ask her or him whether your feelings of depression warrant either treatment or a referral to a specialist on depression. Your primary care physician can prescribe antidepressant medication, or she can refer you to a psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, or other mental health specialist.

If you marked 5 or more of the nine boxes in the Lifetime columns, and you also answered “yes” to the question “Did these problems interfere with your life or activities a lot?” you may have had a period of major depression sometime in the past. However, if you don't have these symptoms currently, you probably are not in the middle of a major depressive episode at this time. In that case, we recommend that you be attentive to your mood levels. People who have had a major depressive episode in the past are more likely than others to have another one. If you notice depressive symptoms increasing, go through out the Mood Screener again, and, if you are experiencing 5 or more symptoms, seek help earlier rather than later. The longer a depressive episode lasts, the more it can affect your personal relationships, your work productivity (and reputation), and your overall ability to enjoy life. The earlier you begin to treat it, the easier it is to get back to normal quickly.

The Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale (CES-D)

What if you have not had five or more of these symptoms, but you are still feeling down? Are your negative moods within the average range of mood for adults in the U.S.? The second questionnaire provides some guidance here. The CES-D is the Center for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale. It has been used in many large-scale community studies, and therefore there is a fair amount of information about what the scores mean. The CES-D scores are not a screener for major depression. They represent a range of depressed mood, from average mood levels to high levels of depressed mood. If your mood score is high, you are more likely to have trouble controlling other aspects of your life. For example, you may be at risk of abusing alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs excessively. Therefore, your score can serve as a reminder that you need to learn to control your mood in other ways if you want to be successful in living a healthier life.

To score the CES-D, make sure you have answered every one of the 20 items and that you have circled only one number in each row. Then add up all the numbers you circled. Your score should be somewhere between zero and 60. The higher the score, the stronger your feelings of depression.

Interpretation of scores:

Less than 16: clearly within the average range of scores for adults in the United States.

16 to 24: borderline elevation of depressed symptoms, compared to other adults

24 and above: significant elevation of depressed symptoms, compared to others.

If you scored less than 16, depressed mood does not seem to be a current issue for you.

If you scored 16 to 24, depressed mood may be a source of concern for you, and it may be worthwhile for you to learn methods to manage your mood to prevent the level of depression from getting worse (Lewinsohn, Muñoz, Youngren, & Zeiss, 1992; Muñoz, 1996).

If you scored 24 or above, you should definitely attempt to bring your level of depression down. If you did not currently have the five symptoms of major depression in the Mood Screener, it's possible that your score on the CES-D reflects a temporary period of stress. However, if this continues for long, it could eventually develop into a major depressive episode or another form of serious depression.

You should note, however, that these scores vary widely depending on your condition in society. For example, although the average score on the CES-D is 8.7 for people aged 25 to 74, women do tend to score higher than men. Moreover, among individuals living alone, men's average score is 8.5, women's 10.8, whereas for people living with others, men's average score is 6.8, women's average score is 9.3, and the average for women who are heads of households is 12.5. People with less education and lower income tend to score higher.

References

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