

SHORT COMMUNICATION

## Acne Vulgaris: More Than Skin Deep

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### ABSTRACT

Acne vulgaris is one of the recognized skin issues among adolescents, though occasionally it may persist through adulthood. Though being popularly known to the communities, its impact on the patients is often less recognized, minimized or worse neglected. Acne vulgaris can cause an ample amount of psychological stress among the affected individuals which may increase the likelihood of psychiatric comorbidity. Depression is one of the psychiatric burdens associated with acne vulgaris. Therefore, it is considered more than a skin disorder. Instead of perceiving it as normal, it should be recognized as one of the most prevalent skin disorders which need early treatment to prevent exacerbation and also avoid permanent scarring.

### INTRODUCTION

Affecting approximately 9.4% of the world's population (Yosipovitch et al., 2007), acne vulgaris is one of the recognized skin issues among adolescents, though sometimes may persist through adulthood. In Malaysia, there are a few cross-sectional studies that investigated the prevalence of acne vulgaris. A study on adolescents and that on medical students in Universiti Malaysia Kebangsaan (Hanisah et al., 2009; Muthupalaniappen et al., 2014) showed that the prevalence of acne vulgaris is 67.5% and 68.1%, respectively. Though being popularly known to the communities, its impact on the patients are often less recognized minimized or worse-

neglected. In fact, not only does it carry a visible scar on the most prominent part of the body, the face, but it also imparts mental debilitation among the patients. Though deemed harmless and indeed they are not life-threatening in most situations, the adverse psychological effects are nonetheless overwhelming.

Acne vulgaris can result in an ample amount of psychological stress among the affected individuals in which they have an increased likelihood of psychiatric comorbidity. Depression is one of the psychiatric burdens associated with acne vulgaris (Bologna et al., 2014). Other than depression, another cross-sectional study found that the prevalence of anxiety is higher among patients with acne vulgaris than among the normal population (Golchai et al., 2010). Though acne vulgaris is less likely to result in pain as conspicuous as other medical disorders, the psychiatric impact is so severe that it is found that it can cause increased suicidal ideation among the affected population (Bologna et al., 2014).

Gallitano and Berson (2017) stated that another important psychological side effect of acne vulgaris is low self-esteem, which is critical in the affected population — the young adults who are developing their own identities. They experience problems with self-image, which inevitably affect their confidence. It is reasonable to foresee an undesirable consequence when there is long-standing negative self-evaluation or feelings about self and own capacity in growth, which is evident by the lower employment rate among individuals with acne relative to the normal population (Cunliffe, 1986). Other than that, they have disrupted interpersonal relationships due to this skin disorder. Though the affected individuals do not speak aloud of their worries and anxiety, very often than not, they are afraid of having their faces being observed by others. This leads to their general avoidance of activities that draw attention to their skin condition (Loney et al., 2008), preventing them from engaging in meaningful social activities.

On top of that, acne vulgaris also incurs economic cost not only on its high prevalence, but also the direct and indirect cost lost. The direct cost comprises drug and consultation fees whereas the indirect cost includes the cost of travel and off workdays. In the United States, more than 3 billion dollars per year is lost in the direct and indirect costs of treatment of acne and loss of productivity (Bhate & Williams, 2013). Another study found that the general cost of acne treatment in Germany exceeds over 400 million euros per year (Radtke et al., 2010). It is undeniable that acne vulgaris has resulted in a substantial economic burden not only to an individual but also to the whole country.

## CONCLUSION

Acne vulgaris is more than a skin disorder. The acne bearers experience an eminent psychological impact and yet they often suffer in silence. Acne vulgaris is sometimes perceived in the community as a common and 'normal' response during growth, with little or nil acknowledgement towards its ugly cost of psychological effects. Instead of perceiving it as normal, it should be recognized as one of the most prevalent skin disorders which urge treatment to prevent the exacerbation of the condition and also avoid permanent scarring, both of which can impart significant adverse effects psychologically and financially.

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