



## Unipolar depression: genetic evidence

### Module 4 13.7.1 mood disorders

#### This activity will help you to...

- Understand evidence for the role of genetics in unipolar depression
- Interpret and comment on genetic evidence
- Evaluate genetic explanations of unipolar depression

Below are some summaries of investigations into the role of genetics in mood disorders. For each investigation, write a short, note-form commentary. Your comments...

- **Must**...explain the extent to which the evidence supports or challenges the genetic hypothesis;
- **Should**...explain why the findings support/challenge the genetic hypothesis;
- **Could**...highlight methodological issues that strengthen or weaken your conclusions.

#### McGuffin et al (1996)

- Major depression. Twin study. Blind.
- Concordances: MZ 46% (n=68) DZ 20% (n=109)
- In cases where depression was endogenous and with multiple episodes, MZ:DZ ratio was substantially higher.

#### Fahim et al (1998)

- Unipolar & bipolar disorders, dementia, Alzheimer's & Parkinson's diseases.
- Family history study. (n=6596).
- Family history of psychiatric illness significantly increased risk for unipolar (n=303) and bipolar (n=27) depression. Risk of unipolar disorder was particularly high when two or more first-degree relatives had dementia.

#### Zubenko et al (2001)

- Recurrent, early onset major depression (REMDD). Family history study (81 families; 407 first degree relatives; 835 second degree relatives).
- 50% of first degree relatives of REMDD sufferers and 25% of second degree relatives suffered from a mood disorder. Relatives of REMDD sufferers were at a substantially higher risk of death from suicide, homicide and liver disease.

#### Kendler & Karkowski-Shuman (1997)

- Major depression & exposure to stressful life events. Retrospective study (n=2164, female).
- Close relatives of depressed patients ran an inflated risk of exposure to stressful life events including assault, divorce, job loss and major financial problems.

- **What general conclusions could be drawn from this evidence as a whole?**
- **Which model or models could be used to account for these findings?**