

**DEPRESSION IN MAN:  
THE FATHER, HUSBAND AND WORKER.**

Depression causes a huge amount of suffering. It is a major reason for people taking time off work, causes great problems in peoples' home lives too, and can lead to death from suicide or from self-neglect (American Psychiatric Association, 1998). At any one time, about 15-30% of people have some kind of depression (American Psychiatric Association, 1998 and National Health Services-UK, 2000). Over a lifetime, there is a 60-70% chance that a person will suffer from some kind of depression or worry bad enough to affect his or her daily living (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Culbertson, 1997; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990 & 1995; Regier et al., 1993; World Health Organization, 2005; Weissman, Blond, Canino et al., 1996).

Currently, depression is the fourth most common cause of disability worldwide. As medical advances and improvements in living standards start to reduce the impact of physical illnesses such as pneumonia, the relative impact of depression is rising. It is estimated that by the year 2020, depression will be the second most common cause of disability in the developed world, and the number one cause in the developing world (World Health Organization, 1994, 1995 & 2005).

Historically, clinicians as well as scientists have believed that men, in contrast to women, are protected from depression (Baxter et al., 1987; Brown et al., 1994; Weiss et al., 1999) and the rates of mental disorders from hospital and outpatient census figures (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Robins & Reiger, 1991; Stoppard,

2000) have tended to support this viewpoint. However, psychologists increasingly recognise depression as a serious and under-diagnosed condition in men (e.g. Batty, 2007; Cochran, 2001; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999; Pollack, 1998; Real, 1997). Men are thought to hide or “mask” their feelings of depression (Batty, 2007; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Real, 1997) and not to seek professional help because of their socialisation to fear feminine emotionality, to conceal vulnerability and be independent, and the perceived stigma of mental illness (e. g. Batty, 2007; Cochran, 2001; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999; Pollack, 1998; Real, 1997). Over the last three decades, many studies have examined differences in the frequency with which men and women seek help for medical, mental health, and substance abuse problems. The findings have consistently shown that, as a group, men are on average, less willing than women to seek professional help for psychological problems (Cochran, 2001; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Gove, 1984; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Pollack, 1998; Vessey & Howard, 1993), and they are more reluctant to seek help in the case of depression, (Blazer et al., 1994; Kessler et al., 1994; McKay et al., 1996, Thom, 1986; Robins & Reiger, 1991) even casually from friends. Actually, undiagnosed and untreated depression in men may be one reason why large numbers of men, more than women, suffer from problems closely related to depression, such as alcohol and drug abuse (Blazer et al., 1994; Kessler et al., 1994; Real, 1997; Robins & Reiger, 1991; Schutte, Brennan, & Moos, 1998), and why men are four times more likely to commit suicide than women(Anderson, Kochanek & Murphy, 1997; Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000; Heifner, 1997; Moscicki, 1997; Whitaker, 1987; World Health Organization ,1993, 1994 & 1995).

Most of the research that has been conducted supports the fact that men are psychologically affected by almost the same events and conditions that influence women's emotional well being, such as infertility, loss of the fetus through miscarriage, past sexual abuse and physical abuse (Finkelhor et al., 1990; Russell, 1984; Weiss et al., 1999), crime victimisation and peer bullying, poor social support systems, financial hardship and lack of insurance (Bierut et al., 1999; Miranda & Green, 1999). Men suffer from depression like anybody else, and certain roles that men play in life, as a father, husband and/or worker can have more impact on men's depression.

### **Depression and Fatherhood**

Several studies have reported that the most common cause, and the cause most similar to that of depression in women, is following the birth of a child. For years it has been known that some mothers feel severely depressed after having a child, but it is only recently that researchers have realised that more than 1 in 10 fathers also suffer psychological problems during this time (Areias et al., 1996; Ballard et al., 1994; Barnett & Morgan, 1996; Leathers, Kelley & Richman, 1997; Post and Antenatal Depression Association Inc. (PANDA), 2005; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998; Soliday, McCluskey, Fawcett & O'Brien, 1999). Research on postnatal depression has identified that a depressed mood in the new mother induces the same mood in the new father. Not getting on with each other at this time also causes male depression (Post and Antenatal Depression Association Inc. PANDA, 2005; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998; Small et al., 1994). On an intimate level, new mothers tend to be less interested in sex for a number of months or years. Simple tiredness is often the main problem, although a

woman's partner may take it personally and feel that he is being rejected. The perception of rejection can shake the man's self-esteem and confidence, which usually preserves an individual from depression (Stice et al., 2004). He may have to adjust, perhaps for the first time, to taking second place in his partner's affections. He will also probably find that he is unable to spend as much time at work and he needs to spend more money and more of his time looking after his partner, and the children. According to various research studies (Good and Wood, 1995; O'Neil et al., 1986; Shepard, 2002) the conflict between work and family is highly correlated with stress and depression.

Another explanation for postnatal depression in men lies in the discovery of researchers at Memorial Hospital in St John's, Newfoundland. The researchers found that men's levels of testosterone decreases by over 30% after the birth of their children. Lower levels of testosterone were related to the men becoming more affective and parental (Francis-Cheung and Grey, 2002). This affectivity related to the drop in testosterone levels could be another reason related to postnatal depression (an affective disorder by definition) in men.

Though men suffer from depression for the same reasons that make women depressed, sometimes certain reasons are more critical risk factors for the development of depression in men than in women, especially in the case where man's sense of worth and self-esteem is involved, such as in the case of marriage troubles, unemployment or retirement (Caplan et al., 1989; Francis-Cheung and Grey, 2002; Kendler, Thornton & Prescott, 2001; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998; Vinokur et al., 1991).

## **Depression and Marriage**

For married men, research has shown that trouble or non-satisfaction in a marriage is the most common single problem connected with depression (Merikangas et al., 1985; Beach, Sandeen, & O'Leary, 1990; Haas, Clarkin, & Glick, 1985). Kendler, Thornton and Prescott (2001) have found that primary relationships are often more depressogenic for men. Men try to avoid arguments or difficult discussions. This often leads to the situation where a man's partner will want to talk about a problem, but he will not and will do his best to avoid talking about it. The partner feels that she/he is being ignored and tries to talk about it more, which makes the man feel he is being nagged. So, he withdraws even more, which makes his partner feel even more ignored and so on. This vicious circle can quite easily destroy a relationship (Gray, 1992; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998).

Conversely, marriage or a close interpersonal relationship often provides some protection against depression (Ali & Toner, 1996; Di Matteo, 2004; Goodenow et al., 1990; Shumaker & Hill, 1991; Wu & DeMaris, 1996). Men were found to be much more likely to suffer depression if they were single and childless (Francis-Cheung and Grey, 2002), or after the death of a spouse (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Of all men, those who are divorced are most likely to kill themselves, probably because depression is more common and more severe in this group (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

This may be because, as well as losing their main relationship, men often lose contact with their children, may have to move to live in a different place, and can find themselves hard-up for money. These are stressful events in themselves, quite apart from the stress of

the break-up, and are likely to bring on depression (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998). This is especially true when the loss is not acknowledged and not addressed in supportive psychotherapy (Stroebe, 1998).

### **Depression and Unemployment**

Another important factor in men's depression is employment. Unemployment or leaving work, for any reason, is a very common problem, which might also be stressful for men. A research has shown that 14.28% of men who become unemployed will develop a depressive illness in the next 6 months (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998). This is much more than would be expected in employed men. In fact, after relationship difficulties, unemployment is the most likely event to precipitate severe depression in men (Caplan et al., 1989; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998; Vinokur et al., 1991). A job provides a person with a lot of resources. Such resources include time, money, a social network of friends as well as more individualised and psychological resources. When a man loses his job, he loses with it the structure of his day, leaving him with a lot of time on his hands, which if not used efficiently can result in him feeling bored and more depressed. Furthermore, he will lose his income and financial resources, which gives him and the family a sense of security. With losing his job, a man, as well as a woman, might lose his work social network; and if a man does not have other forms of social networks, like friends and family, the man can fall into more stress and depression. Recent study findings indicated that social support decreased the number of depressive symptoms, but did not mitigate the effects of stress, and was reduced in response to unemployment and financial strain (Lincoln et al., 2005). The study found that financial

strain as a result of unemployment, and traumatic events are associated with increased negative interaction with relatives and depressive symptoms. Social support networks provide information, which enables individuals to appraise situations effectively and provide concrete and emotional assistance during times of stress (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Thoits, 1986). Although all of those resources are important, for men the most important ones are the psychological resources. Work is often the main thing that gives a man his sense of worth and self-esteem (Francis-Cheung and Grey, 2002), and if a man gets depressed, he may well find it harder to get another job, which may make his depression worse (Caplan, 1989; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998). Hobfoll (1989) found that people who lose their jobs and are without financial resources, without a support network, and with little time to find another job, were less able or less likely to exert proactive efforts in looking for work than their more resource-wealthy counterparts.

Retiring from paid employment can also be difficult for many men, especially if their partner continues to work. It may take some time to get used to losing the structure of their day and contact with workmates (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998).

In short, many men also suffer from depression, some for the same reasons that make women depressed (eg: post-natal depression). Sometimes certain reasons make men more depressed than women especially in the case where a man's sense of worth and self-esteem is involved (eg: unemployment, retirement), and in particular when the man is a father and husband.

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