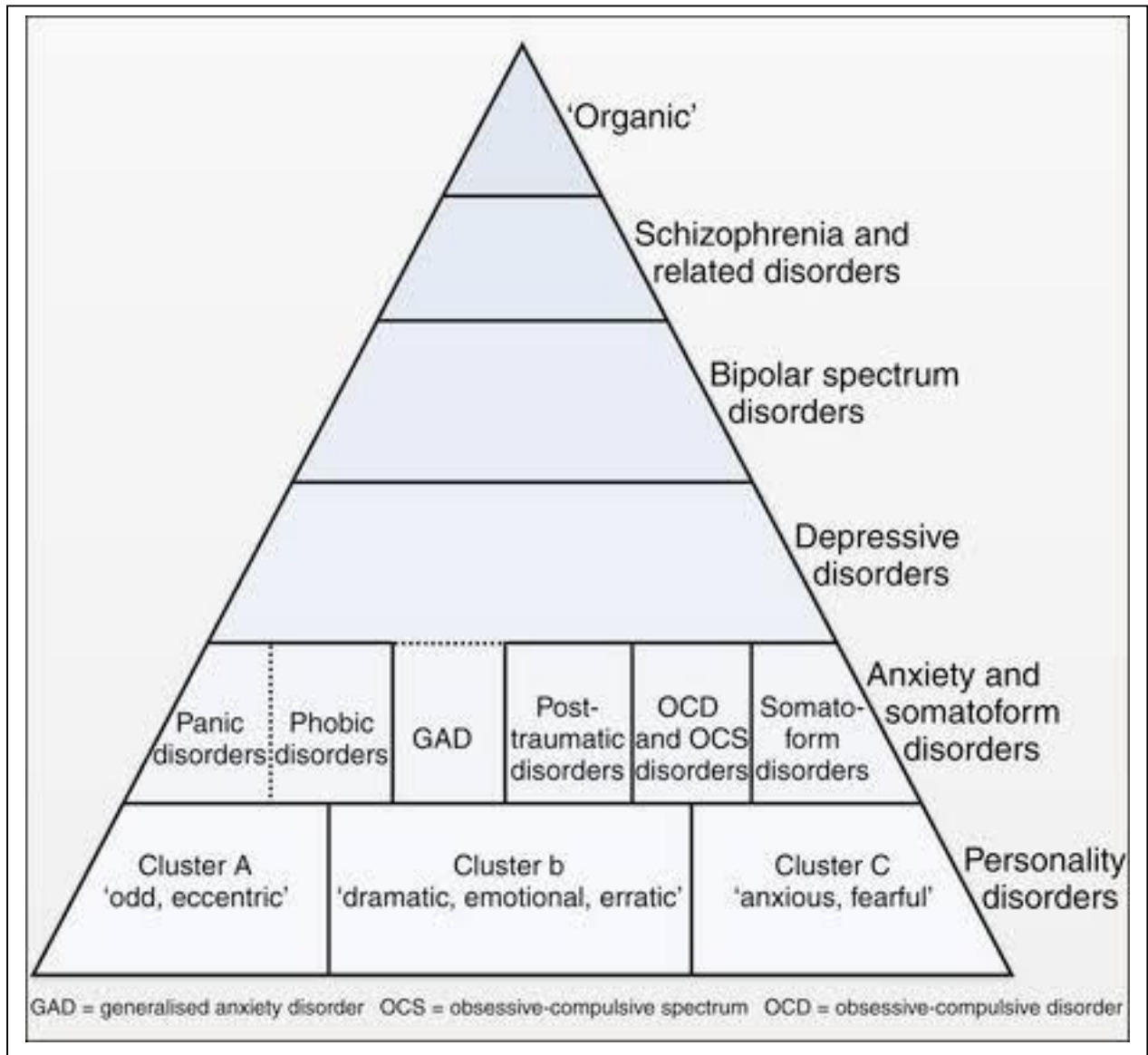


## DEPRESSION ON THE METAL HEALTH LADDER

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## MENTAL WEALTH LADDER

Depression can occur at any stair of the mental health ladder, but it is most common at the lower stairs. When someone is experiencing depression, they may chronically feel sad, hopeless, including irritability, restlessness, chronic pain, headaches, and digestive issues, emptiness and worthless; loss of joy in life; many times for no identifiable reason. He/she may lose interest in activities they used to enjoy, and they may have trouble sleeping or concentrating.

Depression is distinct from grief and other emotions. It is known to be the leading cause of disability worldwide, according to WHO. It affects adults, adolescent s and children.

Depression can undermine a person's relationships, make working and maintaining good health very difficult, and in severe cases, may lead to **suicide**. In fact, depression contributes to nearly 40,000 suicides in the US. In Uganda, we do not know!!

But depression is distinct from the negative feelings a person may temporarily have in response to a difficult life event. It often persists in spite of a change of circumstances and causes feelings that are intense, chronic, and not proportional to a person's circumstances.

It consists of episodes during which the symptoms last for at least two weeks

### Here is depression seen/visualised on the mental health ladder

- **Ladder Level 4: Optimal mental health**

At the highest point of the mental health ladder, people are living their best lives. They are able to achieve their goals, they are connected to others, and they feel a sense of purpose in life.

- **Ladder Level 3: Mental wellness**

With treatment, it is possible to recover from depression and move up to the third level of the mental health ladder. This is where people feel good about themselves and their lives. They are able to cope with stress and challenges, and they have a positive outlook on the future.

- **Ladder level 2: Mental distress (Psychological distress)**

If someone is experiencing depression but does not meet the criteria for a mental disorder, they would fall on the third level of the mental health ladder. This is where people experience emotional or psychological pain, but they do not meet the criteria for a mental disorder.

- **Ladder level 1: Mental illness**

As a mental illness, **depression** falls on the lowest level of the mental health ladder. This is where people experience symptoms of the disorder including;

- ⇒ persistent depressed mood (persistent sadness or loss of interest in activities once enjoyed)
- ⇒ loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- ⇒ changes in appetite and body weight (weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting)
- ⇒ unusually slow or agitated movements
- ⇒ loss of energy and increases fatigue
- ⇒ difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- ⇒ excessive feelings of guilt or worthlessness (negative thoughts about themselves or the world, or withdrawing from social activities)
- ⇒ difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- ⇒ thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- ⇒ Changes in physical appearance – appetite (increased or decreased) or weight (loss or gain)
- ⇒ Changes in concentration and focus. People with depression may experience changes in their concentration and focus, such as having trouble paying attention or making decisions

If you have any of these symptoms, it is important to see a doctor or mental health professional.

- ⇒ Depression is a treatable illness, and there are many effective treatments available.
- ⇒ It is also important to remember that you are not alone. Depression is a common illness, and millions of people around the world suffer from it. With treatment, you can recover and live a happy and fulfilling life.

## Depression across gender and age

It is important to remember that the mental health ladder is not a linear journey. People can move up and down the stairs depending on their circumstances. However, with treatment and support, it is possible to climb up the mental health ladder and achieve optimal mental health.

Researchers do not know why depression appears to be more common in females (**reason not clear but could be related to their reproductive roles** (e.g. premenstrual dysphoric disorder). Treatment usually involves medication and psychotherapy.

Males with depression are more likely than females to drink alcohol in excess, display anger, and engage in risk-taking as a result of the disorder.

Other symptoms of depression in males may include:

- avoiding family and social situations
- working without a break
- having difficulty keeping up with work and family responsibilities
- displaying abusive or controlling behaviour in relationships

## Depression Across School-going Children and Adolescents

Time in school can be stressful, and a person may be dealing with other lifestyles, cultures, and experiences for the first time. Some students have difficulty coping with these changes, and they may develop depression, anxiety, or both as a result.

Symptoms of depression in **students** may include:

- difficulty concentrating on schoolwork
- insomnia
- sleeping too much
- a decrease or increase in appetite
- avoiding social situations and activities that they used to enjoy

### In teens

Physical changes, peer pressure, and other factors can contribute to depression in teenagers. They may experience some of the following symptoms:

- feeling irritable
- restlessness, such as an inability to sit still
- withdrawing from friends and family
- difficulty concentrating on schoolwork
- feeling guilty, helpless, or worthless

### In children

Children and teenagers aged 3–17 have a diagnosis of depression. Depression in children can make schoolwork and social activities challenging. They may experience symptoms such as:

- crying
- low energy

- clinginess
- defiant behaviour
- vocal outbursts

Younger children may have difficulty expressing how they feel in words. This can make it harder for them to explain their feelings of sadness.

Depression is also higher in historically marginalized groups

## Types of Depression

- Persistent depressive disorder also known as **dysthymia** (persistent depressive disorder causing symptoms that last for at least 2 years).  
⇒ A person living with this disorder may have episodes of major depression as well as milder symptoms that do not meet the criteria for major depressive disorder.
- **Postpartum depression**
  - After giving birth, some people women experience a brief period of sadness or heightened emotions that some people call the “**baby blues/maternal.**” This usually goes away in a few days to a few weeks.
  - **Postpartum depression**, or postnatal depression, is more severe.
  - Major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern previously known as **seasonal affective disorder (SAD)**: - this type of depression usually occurs during the winter and fall months (temperate countries), when there is less daylight.

## Factors/Triggers of depression

Triggers are emotional, psychological, or physical events or circumstances that can cause depression symptoms to appear or return.

- changes in the brain's neurotransmitter levels (serotonin, dopamine, etc)
- environmental factors such as exposure to trauma or lack of social support
- additional conditions, such as **as bipolar disorder**
- incomplete recovery after having stopped depression treatment too soon
- medical conditions, especially a medical crisis such as a new **diagnosis** or a **chronic illness such as heart disease or diabetes**
- experiencing certain life events, such as bereavement, work issues, loss, changes in relationships e.g. family conflicts, financial problems, and medical concerns
- experiencing acute stress
- lack of successful coping strategies or poor coping strategies
- genetic factors; - having a close relative with depression
- using some prescription drugs, e.g. to induce sleep e.g. valium
- using recreational drugs, such as alcohol or amphetamines
- having or getting a head injury
- having a neurodegenerative disease such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's
- having had a previous episode of major depression
- having a chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney diseases
- living with chronic pain
- lacking social support

Interactions between various factors do increase the risk of depression e.g. a person with a family history or a genetic risk of depression has a higher risk of experiencing symptoms of depression following a traumatic event.

The symptoms of depression can include:

- a depressed mood
- reduced interest or pleasure in activities that a person previously enjoyed
- a loss of sexual desire
- changes in appetite
- unintentional weight loss or gain
- sleeping too much or too little
- agitation, restlessness, and pacing up and down
- slowed movement and speech
- fatigue or loss of energy
- feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions
- recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, or an attempt at suicide

### What to do when feeling depressed?

If you are experiencing depression, it is important to seek help. There are many effective treatments available (**psycho-therapy and medication**). With treatment, you can recover and move up the mental health ladder.

#### Some tips for climbing the mental health ladder:

- **Take care of yourself**; including eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly.
- **Connect with others**. Spend time with friends and family, or join a support group.
- **Do things you enjoy**. This could be anything from reading to playing sports to spending time in nature.
- **Seek professional help**. If you are struggling to cope with depression, talk to a therapist or counsellor.

**Remember, you are not alone. There are many people who understand what you are going through, and there is help available. With treatment, you can recover and live a happy and fulfilling life.**

#### Here are some tips for coping with depression:

- ⇒ Talk to someone you trust. Talking to a friend, family member, therapist, or counsellor can help you to feel less alone and to get support.
- ⇒ Take care of yourself. This includes eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly.
- ⇒ Do things you enjoy. This can help to improve your mood and to give you a sense of purpose.
- ⇒ Set realistic goals. Don't try to do too much too soon. Start with small goals that you can achieve, and then gradually increase your challenges.
- ⇒ Seek professional help. If you are struggling to cope with depression, talk to a doctor or mental health professional. There are many effective treatments available, such as therapy and medication.

Remember, if depressed; you are not alone. There are many people who understand what you are going through, and there is help available. With treatment, you can recover and live a happy and fulfilling life.

While there is no cure for depression, there are effective treatments that help with recovery and restoration of functioning

The earlier that treatment starts, the more successful it may be.

Some people may never experience depression again after a single period of it. Others will continue to have relapses.

Many people experiencing depression recover after a treatment plan. Even with effective treatment, however, a relapse may occur

It is essential for a person to speak with a doctor before using any type of herbal remedy or supplement to treat depression. Some herbs can interfere with the action of drugs or otherwise make symptoms worse.

## Good News

Depression is a treatable illness, and there are many effective treatments available.



**MENTAL WEALTH LADDER**