

# Depression: The Importance Of Mental Health Awareness

Mental health problem, as its name implies, is a condition where someone's emotional and mental wellbeing is affected. Mental health problems and the factors contributing to this problem vary and can affect anyone regardless of age, race, and socioeconomic status. Although the type and degree of severity varies, some of the main types of Mental health problems are depression and anxiety. According to studies of various US organizations, 19.1% of U.S. adults experienced mental illness in 2018 (47.6 million people). This represents 1 in 5 adults with developmental, emotional, or behavioral problems (Mental Health by The Numbers). The numbers and statistics show how devastating effects mental health has in the US. Due to various reasons like fear of being discriminated, culture and lack of insurance or health facilities, many patients with mental problems do not seek help for medical intervention. However, it is possible to recover from a mental health problem and live a productive and fulfilling life. Reducing the stigma and increasing awareness can have a long-lasting effect toward reducing mental illnesses and building a better-equipped community.

## Types of Depression

There are happy and also difficult moments in Life. We express both happiness and difficult times with distinct reactions. Difficult times are expressed with sadness but most of the time it doesn't last long. However, when this feeling controls someone for a prolonged time, and interferes with their daily activity, and causes pain in their life then it is depression. In general, all depression disorders might share similar nature with diverse characters. However, based on the causation of the disorder we classify depression into main types below and more:

### Major depression

A mental disorder where it interferes with the daily life of someone like the ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and so on. People with Major depression feel depressed throughout the day and every day for at least two weeks, especially in the mornings. This can happen once in a lifetime or in several episodes. Some of the symptoms of this disorder are fatigue, worthlessness, lack of concentration, restlessness, being suicidal, and weight loss. This disorder affects all ages but it is mainly among adults. Some causes of this disorder are abuse, the death of a loved one, divorce, and unemployment.

### Persistent depressive disorder (Dysthymia)

A less severe mental disorder than major depression that lasts most of the time two years. This order is mainly known for constant complaints or being hard to cheer for even during the happiest occasions of life. Even if the cause of this disorder is not yet clear to researchers, they lean into chronic illness, genes, medication, and problems in relationships as the main causes. The symptoms are more or less the same as major depression but not as strong and frequent as major depression. This disorder affects mainly adults but can start in childhood.

There are also depressions like Postpartum depressions and Bipolar disorder that develop under unique circumstances. Postpartum depression is a form of major depression associated with women giving birth to a baby. It starts about four weeks

after delivery and can be treated with medication and therapy. This disorder is linked with the change in the level of reproductive hormones. These hormones are high during pregnancy and the abrupt drop after giving birth plus the physical and psychological changes might result in Postpartum depression. Symptoms of Postpartum depression include lack of appetite, fatigue, not being able to sleep, mood changes, worthlessness, restlessness, and being suicidal. It is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of women experience postpartum depression after giving birth (National Institute of Mental Health).

## Diagnosis of Depression

The diagnosis of depression in various ages vary but it is summarized mainly on two general symptoms that are seen for a period of two weeks. The two symptoms that could help diagnose depression are feelings and physical changes. Out of which, the main symptom in both young and adults is the feeling of sadness. Both groups might express it in different ways but it ties into being worthless or helpless. The physical change symptoms are more related to the changes they exhibit or show in their body like having no appetite or difficulty breathing. The physical change symptoms work well in diagnosing depression among young people but in adults, it is hard to differentiate it from age-related physical changes. It is hard to label someone as depressed based on the above two groups of symptoms as these symptoms might be related to other health problems, substance abuse, or others. The main thing that needs to be put into consideration is doing the symptoms affect the individual from doing their daily life. If so, the individual needs to seek medical attention.

## Causes of Depression

Many researchers agree on the complexity of the causes of depression but most agree on two broad causes: biological and psychosocial. Biological causes are the imbalance of some chemicals in the brain like serotonin. Brain chemical imbalance is mainly seen in adults and can cause severe depression by impairing the function of the brain. Psychosocial factors are mainly associated with the loss of a beloved once, business, job, and others.

## Treatment of Depression

Nowadays, unlike the old times, there are many depression treatment options available. The treatment options might work individually or in combination with others depending on how severe the depression and type it is. Some of the available treatment options are Psychotherapy, Medications, Brain Stimulation Therapies (BST), and Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). The latter two are not common. In most cases, psychotherapy in combination with medicines is the most effective treatment for depression.

## Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is a general term for treating mental health problems by talking with a psychiatrist, psychologist, or another mental health provider ('Psychotherapy' 2016). There are many types of psychotherapy treatments with the main forms of psychotherapy being behavior and cognitive therapy. The core belief in behavior therapy is that all behaviors are learned and these destructive and unneeded behaviors can be changed. The approach of this treatment involves rewarding positive and punishing the negative behaviors. Cognitive therapy focuses on present thinking, behavior, and communication rather than on past experiences and is oriented toward problem-solving ('Definition of Cognitive therapy' 2017). It is a therapy that guides depressed individuals with the way they think and act rather than dragged by past experience. Cognitive therapy is action-oriented where it helps depressed individuals teach how to challenge their issues. Cognitive therapy helps patients view themselves as worthy and is more effective with older adults. Both behavior and cognitive therapies are used in treating a

variety of mental disorders or illnesses and so far they are the most effective therapy. Psychotherapy might not be effective as standalone but in a combination with medicines.

## Medications

Depression medications are called antidepressants and can be used to treat a variety of mental disorders in the combination with Psychotherapy. Finding the right depression medication is so complex. A medication that worked for someone might not work for the other. Depending on the health situation or the severity of the depression, patients might be prescribed different dosages of the same medication. As a result, their recovery rate would be different. Those taking high dosages for a longer period have a higher probability of getting better faster. There are various classes of antidepressants with the common one being Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). SSRI plays with the level of serotonin in our brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that controls our mood. In general, SSRI has mild side effects compared with other classes of antidepressants on the market. There other common antidepressants are Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), Tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), and Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs). Most antidepressants medications have side effects like increased suicidal thinking, dizziness, sexual problems, nausea, and fatigue. Due to the effectiveness of the medication, there might be certain food or drinks that need to be avoided during treatment. Antidepressants only work while the patient is taking them. Taking the medication without proper therapy might lead to an increased thought of suicide.

## Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

Complementary and Alternative Medicines are alternative medicines and practices that are not part of the standard in treating mental disorders. Even if they are not as effective as depression therapies and medications, CAM such as diet and regular exercise help patients relieve their stress levels. This treatment along with the other methods works better.

Personal viewpoint and Conclusion:

Many serious illnesses coexist with depression but suicide is the number one cause of death among depressed patients. According to the American Academy of Suicidology, about two-thirds of people who commit suicide are depressed at the time of their death (Matthews 2014). As someone who has lost a close family member who had been depressed for years and took their own life, I always regret not equipping myself with the knowledge to help them. When I see it now, she has been taking all the burden on her own till it was no more to carry. Should she had support from the community who alienated her, she would still be enjoying life with her kids. The most important thing everyone needs to be aware of is mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety can be treated similar to all other illnesses and patients can be back to their routine normal life and be productive. Medication and therapy might be effective in dealing with depression but the community and families of patients need to be sensitized making sure they are compassionate to reduce the stigma experienced by the patients.