

THE HIDDEN FACE OF MALE DEPRESSION

Spotting male depression within the office

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WHEN SOMEONE IS depressed it's obvious surely. When you are depressed it's obvious, surely. The simple answer is no, not always and when it comes to men then the answer is no, not very often.

You will have come across the hidden face of male depression at home, in your relationship, in your family and at work but you may not know it. Depression in men is hidden because depression presents in men differently to women in most cases. Often men are unaware they are depressed and may even exhibit destructive behaviours. There is a reason for this.

Our focus on male depression doesn't take anything away from issues women have. It's important to recognise that depression manifests differently between the sexes and it

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is important for health professionals, families, HR teams, leaders and work colleagues to understand the secret suffering someone you love, are friends with or work with is experiencing.

1 in 3 of us will have a mental health issue in our lives. Only 25% of people who seek help for depression in the UK are men and yet recent studies conclude that the actual number of depressed men is nearer 50%. Why the discrepancy?

The DSM IV diagnostic criteria for a major depressive disorder is:

Five (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2 week period and represent a change from previous functioning ►



1. Depressed mood – most of the day, nearly every day
2. Markedly diminished interest and pleasure in all or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day
3. Significant weight loss or gain
4. Insomnia
5. Agitation nearly every day
6. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day
8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate or indecisiveness, nearly every day
9. Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying) with or without a specific plan

If a doctor was assessing someone against this criteria, he or she would depend mainly on self disclosure which raises 2 key problems for men with depression - the first is they are less likely to go to a doctor and secondly their upbringing and the shame associated with talking about or expressing feelings means that they may not talk about it even if they go.

Many boys are raised to be tough, remember 'big boys don't cry'? It's OK for boys to be assertive, strong, rough and tumble. It's not OK for boys to be vulnerable, show signs of apparent weakness or not being able to cope. This, John says, is often the behaviour he witnessed in his business world. Men were expected to "suck it up, get on with it

or deal with it" which is nonsense, unproductive for a business profitability perspective and from a health perspective damaging. You only have to watch a playground reaction to a boy bursting into tears to see this in evidence even today, or the reaction to the President of the United States shedding a tear for gun victims. Be a hollywood hero is the message, you may be riddled with bullet holes and have one arm hanging off - but whatever you do don't show you are hurting and do not slow down for a second. We may be exaggerating and yet in the business world, only a little.

The drive to be 'more than human' is a problem for both men and women, but it shows up differently. Generally in women it is seen in an obsession with being perfect, slim, looking good, being helpful and nice. Men often experience a strong drive to be strong, the protector, tough. Both of these 'more than human' states are unhealthy, not to mention, impossible. But sadly society still covets them to some degree, and this has to change.

Often the shame of expressing emotion is so deep seated that many men, and we see this a lot in men aged 40-60 in senior positions in organisations, repress their feelings so much that even with the best will in the world, they would be unable to answer a doctors questions related to the DSM criteria above. This is the reason why suicide is the number one cause of death in men under 50, it's a sad state of affairs that some men



chose this course of action rather than face the apparent shame and get help.

Men who are depressed are more likely to behave in the following ways when depressed:

Addictive behaviour - alcohol problems, affairs, gambling, eating, not eating and similar and more obvious things. Less obvious and equally important are the addictive behaviours that are all too often viewed as acceptable like excessive exercise or working very long hours. When these become obsessions it can be an indication of a deeper problem.

'leaking' of inappropriate behaviour - This could be sexually inappropriate behaviour, inappropriate banter, teasing or bullying, outbursts, even stealing or criminal behaviour. The key difference between an indication of depressive tendencies and other issues is that a depressed man will feel bad about them afterwards, and it will just add to his feelings of worthlessness. They may go to some lengths to cover this up so that their behaviour stays hidden.

Both of us have seen these behaviours in the organisations we have worked in and worked for and yet all too often it is suppressed or worse still, tolerated.

These behaviours not only impact the men themselves, they impact their family, loved ones and work colleagues. You can see how this all links together from a workplace, societal and

relationship perspective? We should add that these behaviours are not always a sign of depression and they could also be symptomatic of other issues but if we add them to the DSM list we get a better overall picture. If we can help men to be more open about how they feel, reduce the shame they feel and stop labelling them weak or demonising them, the positive impact on business, relationships and the world could be huge.

Only when they are ready, counsellors can be found at bacp.co.uk or ukcp.org. If they do go and see a professional respect their privacy and don't expect them to disclose what they have been talking about in sessions, do make it clear though that you are ready to listen if they want to speak. ■

About the Authors:

John and Karen are the authors of the highly acclaimed book *Real Leaders for the Real World*, and founders of Monkey Puzzle Training and Consultancy, a leading UK training company in NLP. (www.monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk). Karen is a UKCP registered Psychotherapist and John is a Clinical Hypnotherapist.