

HOW IS IT THAT MEN FIND THEMSELVES IN CRISIS?

By Valerie Pelissero, MSW. RSW

Focusing on mental health illness and specifically male depression that is unidentified, undiagnosed and ultimately untreated, can assist many men who now find themselves in crisis. There are gender differences with respect to depression. Generally, women are over-represented in diagnosis and treatment, while men are under-diagnosed and subsequently untreated.

Authors studying male depression believe that the reason for the low prevalence of Major Depressive Disorder diagnoses among men is that male depression is not identified and therefore is ultimately untreated for many men. Men generally believe they have to be strong, successful, in control, capable of handling problems without help and should not show emotions, except for anger. However, because of the developing crisis for men and their psychological well-being termed “the silent crisis”, it is critical to examine depression from a masculine perspective.

Depression in men is serious, and if untreated, potentially fatal condition. For example, there are 4.2 male completions of suicide for each female completion and young white males (age 15 – 24) are five to eight times more likely to complete suicide than females. Older males (age 85 and over) are ten times more likely to commit suicide than elderly females. The correlation between male suicide and depression provides considerable support for the hidden epidemic of depression in men.

Incorporating gender specific aspects into the assessment of male depression is vital to an accurate diagnosis because it can result in the identification of such symptomology with men. Defenses such as masking, submerging, camouflaging and externalizing behaviours contribute to the complexities of such assessments. However, there are masculine specific assessment criteria available. Using both traditional criteria for depressive disorder (DSM-IV-TR) and gender specific assessment tools, the accurate diagnosis of male depression can lead to and support appropriate treatment and interventions.

It is this perspective that can usefully guide mental health treatment toward becoming more effective in the detection of men suffering from depression. Developing more relevant, appropriate and efficacious treatment strategies will lead to a reduction in the burden of this illness for both the individual and society in general.

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