

Living with Depression: Illness, Identity and Life Changes

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Abstract: Depression is the most common form of mental illness that affects around one in ten people. It is a feeling of sadness and hopelessness that inhibits the individual to adjust in life circumstances. It can range from mild to moderate state depending on the biological, psychological and social factors of the person experiencing depression. Stressful events, traumatic brain injury and genetic predisposition often are associated with high level of depression faced by an individual. Living with depression is often a challenge as it obstructs the normal functioning of the brain at times. A depressed person may show different symptoms depending on the level of severity of the mental illness. At times, the signs of depression are masked by atypical symptoms. For example, people who are depressed may show it by acting disgruntled or irritable or they might show aggression. However, the good news is that who seek treatment will find significant relief from talk therapy, medication and lifestyle changes.

Key Words: *Dysthemia, Insomnia, Depression, Anhedonia, hypersomnia, Psychomotor agitation, Postpartum, Peripartum, Atypical, Affective, Dysphoric, Neuro-modulation, trans- cranial, psychotic, maniac, Serotonin, Electro convulsive, Meditation, Melatonin, Dysregulation.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Case-I:

Ms. Shaw is a 27 years smart and professional journalist who is to be promoted as an assistant editor at her workplace. She is a workaholic and very punctual. She has high aspirations and wants to be successful in life as early as possible. But, from past 6 weeks she is experiencing sad mood every day, and feels hopeless at times. She is losing interest in the work that she enjoyed doing earlier and is constantly feeling fatigue, insomnia and loss of appetite.

Case-II:

Sam is a very intelligent student who achieves A+ grade in all the subjects. He is appearing for high school examination and had been devoting 8-10 hours daily for studies. However, he could not attain A+ grade in preliminary examinations. He suddenly lost interest in studies and started avoiding his friends. He would often sit alone and stayed away from family gatherings too. His parents were under the impression that he is busy in his academic pursuits. Just a day before his final examinations, he committed suicide.

Case-III:

Vito is a handsome young man and is soon to propose the love of his life Tia. He is an executive in marketing firm and earns pretty good. Both the lovers know each other from past 5 years. Vito started noticing some changes in Tia. She would neglect him at times and made excuses to meet at weekends, which they usually liked spending with each other. Vito loved her dearly so ignored the thoughts of her betrayal. When he proposed to her on her birthday, she refused and bluntly told him that she has some other plans. Vito could not take the sudden stressful impact and started withdrawing from his daily routine. One morning his friend found him alone in his apartment. He was in a drunken state with cut marks on his wrist. He was immediately rushed to the hospital and given medical aid.

All the cases point towards one mental condition and that is depression. Seeing someone near or dear to us having a sad and long face is something that we all have experienced at some point of our life. We often perceive that condition as a common term- **stress**. However, the prolonged stress along with sadness, feeling to isolate oneself from society and losing interest in favorite activities are few signs of depression. The term 'Depression' can be confusing because it is often used to describe normal emotional reactions. At the same time, the illness may be hard to recognize because its

symptoms may be attributed so easily to other causes. Globally, it is estimated that 5% of adults suffer from the disorder. It is a leading cause of disability around the world and contributes greatly to be global burden of disease. The effects of depression can be long lasting or recurrent and can dramatically affect a person's ability to function well. The causes of depression include complex interactions between social, psychological and biological factors.

According to the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5)**, the diagnosis of a Major Depression Episode (MDE) requires five or more symptoms to be present within a 2 – week period. The symptoms are as follows:

- Depressed mood (DM)
- Anhedonia (Loss of interest or pleasure)

The secondary symptoms are:

- Appetite or weight changes (AW)
- Sleep difficulties (insomnia or hypersomnia)
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation (PAR)
- Fatigue or loss of energy (FE)
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate (C)
- Feeling of worthlessness or excessive guilt (FW)
- Suicidal Thoughts (ST)

These symptoms can vary from mild to severe. Some medical conditions (Thyroid problems, a brain tumor or vitamin deficiency) can mimic symptoms of depression so it is important to rule out general medical causes.

Depression can affect any one even a person who appears to live in relatively ideal circumstances might experience depression at some time in their life.

2. Several factors can play a role in depression:

- Biochemistry: Imbalance in certain chemicals in the brain.
- Genetics: It can run in the family in generations.
- Personality: People with type a personality or who have low self-esteem and are easily overwhelmed by stress appear to be more likely to experience depression.
- Environmental facts: Continuous exposure to violence, neglect, abuse or poverty makes some people more vulnerable to depression.

Many different types of depression are caused by the above-mentioned factors. Gaining a deeper understanding of the different types of depression can help in diagnosis and recovery. The 5-Edition of DSM mentions the following types of depression:

- **Major Depression also known as Clinical Depression.**

It is persistent depressive mood and lack of interest in work for more than two weeks. It is sometimes incurable but with anti-depressant CBT or ECT, some improvement is seen.

- **Dysthymia (Persistent Depressive Disorder)**

It is a long-term of depression. It usually lasts for years and can interfere with daily life. People do not usually feel joyous on happy occasions. The symptoms can change over time by do not disappear mostly. It is also termed as high functioning depression. Where the person effected shows depressive symptoms in a robotic way.

- **Manic Depression (Bipolar Disorder)**

A mental condition causes extreme fluctuations in mood and changes in energy, thinking, behavior and sleep. This depressive stage may lead to suicidal thoughts that change over to feelings of euphoria and endless energy. There are constant mood swings and mood stabilizers are given to control such fluctuations. Scientists believe that this could by 60-80% caused by genetic factors (risk factor). Bipolar disorder cannot be cured but it can be managed successfully with combination of psychotherapy and medication.

- **Postpartum Depression (Peripartum Depression)**

Due to dramatic hormonal changes that follow childbirth, the females experience this kind of depression. Sad feeling or crying bouts are the symptoms of postpartum depression. Women who have given birth struggle with sadness, anxiety or worry for several days. These kinds of episodes may come, go, and have potential for future episodes as well.

- **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**

This is related to the change of season. The symptoms starts with the onset of a particular season and progress to be severe as the weeks go on. Some people might experience somatic symptoms too like heaviness in arms or legs, oversleeping, craving for carbohydrates or relationship problems. This could be due to disrupted body clock, low serotonin levels, high melatonin level, PTSD etc.

- **Psychotic Depression**

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, around 20% of people with depression have so severe episodes that they develop psychotic symptoms. Some of the early signs of psychosis is suspicion of others withdrawing society, intense and inappropriate emotions, trouble thinking clearly, a decline in personal hygiene and drop in work performance. The person having psychotic depression experiences delusions and hallucinations. However, the symptom of psychotic depression and schizophrenia is psychoses but there are very less chances of depression leading schizophrenia. Nevertheless, a schizophrenic might get depression in the presence of social stigma.

- **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)**

It is a hormonal based mood disorder commonly known severe form of PMS (premenstrual syndrome) 85% of women experience PMS but 5% of women are diagnosed with PMDD. The symptoms are almost similar with an adverse effect on work or social functioning in PMDD. In PMDD the symptoms are in more intensity as compared to PMS.

- **Atypical Depression**

This is one of the most prominent types of depression. Atypical depression is serious mental health condition and is associated with an increased risk of suicide and anxiety disorders. It is usually a long-term chronic course.

- **Situational Depression (Reactive Depression/ Adjustment Disorder)**

In short term, it is stress related type of depression. It is a type of adjustment disorder, as it stems from a person's struggle to come to terms with life changes like divorce, retirement, loss someone, illness or relationship problems.

- **Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD)**

Is a recent diagnosis appearing first time in DSM-5 in 2013 The DSM-5 clarifies DMDD as a depressive disorder in children. They are not able to regulate their moods and emotions in age-appropriate way. Children with DMDD exhibit temper outburst in response to frustration and chronic severe irritable mood.

It is important to know that due to physical illness also, there is an increased risk of developing severe depressive illness. Some medical conditions that affect the body or ongoing pain can be a contributory factor for depressive state. Research shows that people who have chronic medical condition also experience depression eventually. It is common among those who have the following illness:

- Cancer
- Coronary heart disease
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Multiple sclerosis
- Stroke
- Alzheimer's disease
- HIV/AIDS
- Parkinson's disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Physical disability (lost limbs)

Depression drains your energy, hope and drive, making it difficult to take steps that will help you feel better. Cure for depression is generally dependent on your mental condition and qualified mental health profession. Treatment of depression may take six months to years. The mainstay of treatment is usually medication, therapies and medical procedure.

Medicines include SSR's that is selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors that cause fewer side effects and helps ease the symptoms of depressed mood and anxiety. Anti depressants, usually take time to show results hence it is advisable to follow instruction of the Psychiatrists in order to overcome the side effects of the prescribed medicines. In recent studies,

it has been found that Electro convulsive therapy has proved to show promising results in patients with severe major depression or bipolar disorder that has not respond well to other treatments. ECT involves a brief electrical stimulation of the brain while the patient is under anesthesia. In a study conducted at the Stanford University School of Medicine, **Stanford Neuro Modulation Therapy** is introduced. It is an intensive, individualized form of **Trans cranial magnetic stimulation**. According to *Nolan Williams*, MD, and assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, this treatment works well with the long-term depression patients and the results lasted months. Twenty- nine people with treatment- resistant depression participated in the study; about half received the above-mentioned therapy. The above-mentioned therapy (SAINT) and rest underwent placebo procedure that mimicked the real treatment. After five days of treatment, 78.6% of the participants in the treatment group were no longer depressed according to several standard methods of evaluation. The only side effects of Stanford accelerated intelligent neuro-modulation therapy (SAINT) were temporary fatigue and headaches. Besides this, psychotherapy is also found to be effective along with medication. Psychotherapy is the use of psychological methods and is known as talk therapy. There are three common methods used in depression treatment in psychotherapy that are cognitive in psychotherapy that are cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), inter personal therapy and psychodynamic therapy. Despite medication and therapies, one has to do things that relax and energize. Overcoming depression is an ongoing process that needs regular boost. Even if the depression does not lift immediately, following a healthy lifestyle and scheduling fun activities gradually uplifts mood and overcomes depression substantially. Mental health advocates defends the effects of depression as a burden. Rather reaching out is not a burden but a blessing. A depressed person often feels guilty for neglecting certain relationships. Reach out to people who care for you and if you do not have anyone to turn to, then it's never too late to build new friendships and improve support network. Focus on self-compassion. Do not be hard on yourself. Do what you enjoying doing. Have a positive outlook and fewer physical responses during stressful events. It improves your mood and ability to manage intense emotions. Depression is a black cloud that may cause chaos in your life but this dark could have a silver lining ad that is living with intent. This may help you maintain cognitive function like memory and decision-making. It gives you a sense of direction and may help you stay emotionally balanced. While reconciling from depression is not quick or easy and living with depression is equally substantial. Do the things that make you feel good. Challenge negative thinking; take care of your health with proper exercise nutrition and a daily dose of light. Practice relaxation techniques and meditation to help relieve symptoms of depression and boost feelings of joy and well-being. Appreciating every notable thing in life and practicing gratitude helps in uplifting mood helps in uplifting mood and impacts stress levels. Research shows that effectiveness of life skills intervention has a positive impact on depression. Life skills education programmes could make the depressed person independent in coping with life's demands, which can transform the challenges and obstacles into opportunities. Life skills like effective communication, building healthy relationships, empathizing with others and thinking critically and creatively improves the mental health in a productive manner.

3. CONCLUSION:

Living with Depression is not easy. However, the good news is that the people who experience depression episodes and people who love them need to know that there is hope for recovery. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was raised awareness about how many of us struggle with our mental health. Since then various organizations and mental health professionals are engaged in work on mental illness and its coping mechanisms to help the stigmatized people. Supportive family and workplace and even financial resources are still challenging areas that need to be addressed. Nevertheless, the role of supportive relationships had always been a boon for the depressed person. Meditation and certain lifestyle changes reduce the complicities and help to live successfully with depression.

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