

Theories and types of depression



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FV17-002 - Depression: Seeing the Different Shades of the Blues Between Men and Women

Depression comes in many shades of blue. Children and teens act out. Women feel miserable. Men may get angry and reckless. The elderly often feel hopeless. And a lot of people - regardless of gender - may feel "in-between," or "all of the above."

Erica Westly of *Scientific American* writes, "To Emily Dickinson, it was 'fixed melancholy.' To essayist George Santayana, it was 'rage spread thin.'" The phrases are describing the same emotion: depression. As these famous writers illustrate, depression and its manifestations vary from individual to individual. The symptoms can be generalized, but the variations make it difficult to discern for anyone with an untrained eye.

"Figuring" Depression

There are over 150 million people around the world who are saddled with depression, says the World Health Organization, representing about four percent of the adult population. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), however, the prevalence of adult depression (aged 40 to 59) in the United States is roughly 10 percent. Whether the higher figure is due to higher prevalence or because more Americans are aware of it and seeking treatment, one thing is obvious-the alarming statistics deserve attention.

There are many other interesting figures about depression. According to Healthline, the incidence and prevalence rates vary by gender, age, and

ethnicity. In particular, it says, "*Women are twice as likely to have depression, and symptoms of depression, as men of the same age.*" This is confirmed by other sources, including the CDC. These figures prove that indeed, depression has different shades or hues.

Depressive Differences between Men and Women

Aside from the fact that women are more susceptible to depression, there is growing evidence that they may also experience its symptoms differently from men. Recognizing these differences in the depressive symptoms between men and women is important for their successful diagnosis and treatment. According to the *Scientific American* article, "*For women, the primary emotion of depression is usually sadness. For men, it is more typically anger or irritability, often coupled with recklessness.*" Consequently, the chance of men ignoring the symptoms and going untreated is higher.

What could be causing these differences? According to Mental Health America, the contributing influences to the vulnerability of women to depression include biological and social or cultural factors.

The biological factors include "*developmental, reproductive, hormonal, genetic and other biological differences (e. g. premenstrual syndrome, childbirth, infertility and menopause).*" PMS (premenstrual syndrome) and PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder) aren't really unusual among women. About 20 to 40 percent experience PMS, and 3 to 5 percent are estimated to experience PMDD. The symptoms include depressive symptoms the week before their monthly period.

The social factors, on the other hand, include " *stress from work, family responsibilities, the roles and expectations of women and increased rates of sexual abuse and poverty.*"

Cultural vs. Biological: The Science behind the Differences

Could it be biological that depressed women are more vulnerable and sad and that men have the tendency to be angry and rash? Or is it cultural?

Some experts believe that there should be no significant differences in symptoms between the genders, because the brain chemistry of depression is basically the same for both. They believe that social norms and expectations influence how the symptoms are expressed . This could be why depressed men are likely to be frustrated about not getting their work done or be angry and vent it on another person. Conversely, women are more likely to feel sad, so they avoid people and experience problems with eating and sleeping.

These " cultural believers," however, may be becoming a minority. *More experts today support the idea that biology plays an important role in depression. There is growing evidence that the different sex hormones influence both vulnerability to depression and its symptoms . This isn't surprising, considering that these are the chemicals that define the basic sexual differences. The evidence that sex hormones affect brain chemistry is undeniable, from the womb and throughout life. Though the brain chemistry is basically the same for the two genders, the interactions of the male and female sex hormones (and their varying levels) with the neurotransmitters could be different, explaining the vulnerability and symptom differences.*

Seeking Help from Someone Who Understands the Different Hues of Depression

When men manifest recklessness and irritability for no apparent reason, it could be a sign of depression, even when they aren't sad. When overwhelmed by responsibilities, women may feel sad, and it could be a depressive symptom. An independent therapist contracted with Carolina Counseling Services in Fuquay-Varina, NC, can help you make the distinction and help you sort out what your specific symptoms mean.

Whether the varying shades of depression between genders are related to biology or culture is immaterial. Everyone needs help when depressive symptoms grip them. Seeking help from an expert is a good first step: look for a therapist who understands depression and its varying hues.