Talking About Men's Mental Health – Depression

An Advice Guide for Usdaw Members

USDAW EQUALITIES

Men and Depression...

Although depression can affect anyone at any time, not everyone experiences it in the same way.

Men and women with depression will share many of the same symptoms and concerns but they will also have separate and distinct concerns. For example, whilst women are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression than men, men are less likely to seek help and receive the appropriate treatment and support. This leaflet is aimed specifically at men, but the information in it may be useful to anyone experiencing depression.

Depression is a serious condition that can have a profound effect on the everyday lives of those who experience it. Therefore, it is likely that men experiencing depression will need the support of both their Usdaw rep and employer. Depression may impact on attendance and performance, which can lead to problems in the workplace. The leaflet therefore also gives advice for reps on supporting members with depression at work.

What is Depression?

Depression is more than feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days.

We all go through spells of feeling down, but people with depression feel persistently sad for weeks or months, rather than just a few days.

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in Britain. It is a serious illness with real symptoms; it's not a sign of weakness or something you can 'snap out of' by 'pulling yourself together'.

Without appropriate treatment, depression can impact on every aspect of a person's life, and at its most severe it can be life threatening.

Who Experiences Depression?

Anyone can experience depression and it is relatively common. It appears to be more common in women than in men. The reasons for this are unclear as the causes for depression are complex. However, women's continuing unequal position in society is thought to play a significant role. It has also been suggested that depression in men may have been under-diagnosed because they experience different symptoms, or don't seek medical help at all.

Although men are less likely to be diagnosed as depressed, they are three times more likely than women to take their own lives as a result of untreated depression. About 75% of people who die from suicide are men, and suicide is the biggest killer of men aged between 20 and 50.

Men are far less likely than women to use primary healthcare services when they have an illness, including depression. Therefore, this leaflet is aimed specifically at men, but the information may be useful to anyone experiencing depression.

What Causes Depression?

While there isn't one single cause, some factors may increase the risk of developing depression:

- Stressful events.
- Illness, especially chronic/prolonged conditions.
- Family history of depression.
- Loneliness.
- Alcohol and some drugs.
- Childhood trauma.

Symptoms

Doctors describe depression by how serious it is:

- Mild depression – has some impact on daily life.
- Moderate depression – has a significant impact on daily life.
- Severe depression – makes it almost impossible to get through daily life.

The symptoms of depression can be complex and vary widely between people. Symptoms can be physical, psychological and social. The symptoms can persist for weeks or months, and interfere with work, social life and family life.

Physical symptoms may include:

- Lack of energy/always feeling tired.
- Change in appetite or weight.
- Unexplained aches and pains.
- Disturbed sleep.
- Loss of interest in sex.

Psychological symptoms may include:

- Continuous low mood/lack of motivation.
- Feelings of hopelessness and low self-esteem.
- Feeling irritable and intolerant of others.
- Finding it difficult to make decisions.
- Feeling anxious or worried.
- Suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self-harm.

Social symptoms may include:

- Problems at work.
- Avoiding friends and social activities.
- Neglecting hobbies and interests.
- Having difficulties in home and family life.

Do Men Have Different Symptoms?

Some symptoms are more common in men than in women:

- Irritability/sudden anger/aggression.
- Increased loss of control.
- Greater risk-taking.

Male depression also often goes undiagnosed for a number of reasons, which may include:

- Failure to recognise the symptoms.
- Downplaying the signs and symptoms.
- Reluctance to discuss feelings or seek help.

Treatment

Many men find it difficult to ask for help when they are depressed. However, with the right support and treatment, most people make a full recovery from depression. It is therefore very important that you speak to your GP if you think you may be depressed.

Treatment will depend on the severity of the depression, and may include a combination of:

- Support and advice about self-help.
- Talking therapies.
- Anti-depressants for severe depression.

Self-help will often form part of a treatment programme, and some of the following activities have been shown to help with depression:

- Talk to someone – don't bottle things up.
- Keep active – exercise has been shown to help.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Take some regular time to do something you enjoy.
- Take a break.
- Try to avoid or reduce things that make you stressed, both at work and at home.
- Join a support group.

Depression is a Workplace Issue

Depression impacts on every aspect of a person's life, including their work life. Therefore, it is important that reps are aware of the signs and symptoms of depression, sources of help, and rights at work.

Depression may impact on someone's performance, their timekeeping, their conduct or lead to absence from work. All of which could potentially result in disciplinary action.

It is important that reps and managers act sensitively when a member with depression has problems at work. The focus should be on supporting them to seek medical help and through any treatment programme, rather than instigating disciplinary procedures.

Members with depression may also have legal rights at work under the Equality Act.

The Equality Act and Depression

Not everyone with depression will be covered by the Equality Act (Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland). However, depression can be covered by the Act and this can help members get the right support at work.

Depression isn't automatically covered by the Act.

A person will fit the definition of disability, as outlined in the Act (or DDA in Northern Ireland), if they can show that their depression:

- Has lasted or is likely to last for more than 12 months; and
- That it has a substantial (meaning more than minor) effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The Equality Act (DDA in Northern Ireland) offers important protections at work and places employers under a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments, not only to the physical workplace environment but also to a person's job duties, their working hours and the company's policies and procedures. In practice this means they may be required to be more flexible about start and finish times, offer additional breaks, or adjust performance targets or absence procedures.

For more information on the Equality Act, see Usdaw leaflets *Supporting Disabled Members* **www.usdaw.org.uk/383** and *Mental Health Issues – Where to go for help and support at work* **www.usdaw.org.uk/400**

Help and Support

There are many sources of help, and it is important to speak to your GP if you think you may be depressed. Usdaw reps are a key source of help if you are having problems in the workplace as a result of being depressed.

The following organisations can offer support and someone to speak to about how you are feeling:

Mind

Tel: **0300 123 3393**
email: **info@mind.org.uk**
Web: **www.mind.org.uk**

CALM

Tel: **0800 58 58 58**
Web: **www.thecalmzone.net**

The Samaritans

Tel: **116 123**
email: **jo@samaritans.org**
Web: **www.samaritans.org**

The Social vs the Medical Model of Disability

For some time now, disabled people have emphasised that it is not so much their disability that prevents them from fully participating in society, but instead it is the way in which society fails to make adjustments for their disability that excludes them.

This emphasis on changing the barriers put up by society, rather than seeing the disabled person as the 'problem', is known as the 'social model of disability'. In other words, disabled people are people with impairments/ health conditions who are disabled by discrimination, exclusion, prejudice and negative attitudes towards disability. Their impairment is not the problem.

The 'medical model' attributes the problems resulting from a disability to medical conditions alone. It concentrates on a person's impairment. Rather than focusing on the barriers society throws up that prevent disabled people from participating equally, the 'medical model' focuses on what disabled people should do to adapt to fit into the world as it is. If they are unable to adapt, the medical model accepts their exclusion.

For example, while a mobility difficulty can have an adverse effect on a person's ability to walk, the fact that the transport system is inaccessible to them has a far greater effect on their ability to get around.

Unfortunately, the law is rooted in the medical model. It has been rightly criticised for focusing on an individual's impairments and their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, rather than on getting rid of the barriers society puts in the way of disabled people.

This leaflet is designed to help understand how the law can support disabled members in the workplace, and therefore tends to focus on the medical model.

More Information

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively, you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk**
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

Mental Health Campaign

Usdaw takes both the physical and mental wellbeing of its members very seriously. To learn more about Usdaw's Mental Health Campaign – including online courses for members and reps – visit: **www.usdaw.org.uk/MHC**

Scan to learn more about the campaign

Join Usdaw

You can join online at: **www.usdaw.org.uk/JoinUs**

Scan to join today

What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

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Stock photography, posed by models

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