



Wellbeing  
& Recovery  
College

Midlands Partnership  
NHS Foundation Trust



*A Keele University Teaching Trust*

# Understanding Depression Week 3

## 1.0 The Impact of Stigma

Beliefs and attitudes influence how people are treated within society. Mental illness stigma is defined as the “devaluing, disgracing, and disfavouing by the general public of individuals with mental illnesses” (Abdullah and Brown 2011). These attitudes can lead to discrimination, unequal treatment or worse and it’s a key reason to why people feel the need to disguise depression and other mental health challenges.

Looking back on the history of mental health, there were times where mental health conditions were feared and misunderstood. Societal attitudes to mental health have an enormous impact. In the example below, there are two cultures that have been created by combining collective experiences of students from the world of work

Stigma can be split into two types; stigma within society that forms a negative view towards others and self- perceived stigma, which results in a negative self-image<sup>1</sup>. The impact of stigma is directly related to health outcomes

## Why Is Tackling Stigma an Important Issue?

### Impact and Statistics

Depression is a condition that affects many areas of a person’s life; it affects individuals, families, communities and economies. At worst, depression causes death by suicide. More information can be found on how to support someone with depression or where to seek help on pages: 19-21.



Jenev Caddell, PsyD; ‘Understanding the Stigma Around Mental Illness’, Updated June 21, 2019, viewed at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/mental-illness-and-stigma-2337677>

## Hidden Depression

The term 'smiling depression', although not a clinical term, has been used in social media to describe hidden depression. There are many reasons why people hide depression. In societies where stigma and discrimination are present, people may mask their depression for fear of being negatively judged, losing friends or loved ones or shame for example. However, there are cases where people are unaware, they have depression or have become so well-practised at concealing it that these defence mechanisms become habitual.

### Examples of Characteristics of Hidden Depression:

**1) Perfectionism** can be a way to hide depression; "if everything looks perfect on the outside then nobody can see my struggles". Perfectionism can also be a way of managing a highly critical and shaming inner voice. - being perfect can compensate inner feelings of inadequacy. However, the pursuit of perfectionism will leave a person in an exhausting cycle of depression- try again- attempt perfection- insatiable drive-burn out/ perceived failure- depression.

**2) Being 'The Rescuer'** looks after everyone else's needs and focuses less time on their own wellbeing. There can be various reasons for this such as distraction, wanting to feel useful, helping others as a way of communicating indirectly that this is how they wish to be treated.

**3) Denial-** in some cases, the reality of a situation may be too painful to handle so a person may refuse to accept reality. An example may be that a person may go out partying every night to pretend everything is ok or to suppress feelings that are too hard to face.



YOU SEE RUDNESS  
THEY FEEL ANXIETY  
YOU SEE LAZINESS  
THEY FEEL DEPRESSION

Other strategies people may use consciously or unconsciously to hide depression can consist of; humour, control, avoidance and aggression. There are many defence mechanisms that have been well documented within psychology, for suggested further reading on this topic, please turn to pg. 21.

### Sources:

Dr M. Rutherford; 'The 10 Characteristics of Perfectly Hidden Depression', May 11<sup>th</sup> 2019

Linda Goodall; 'Concealed Depression; What does Depression Really Look Like?' Jan. 24<sup>th</sup> 2015



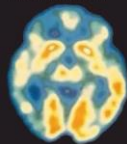
## Statistics:

- More than 300 million people are now living with depression; an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015.
- Depression and anxiety lead to a net global economic loss of US\$1 trillion /year. (World Health Organisation 2017 Campaign 'Let's Talk').
- More than 90% of suicides and suicide attempts having been found to be associated with a psychiatric disorder.
- Across the globe, the highest rates of suicide were associated with depressive disorders. (World Health Organisation (2017). Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders).

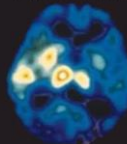
No one wishes to have dark days, sleepless nights, grumpy mornings and this endless dark tunnel with no sign that it ever ends. Depression is not a choice.



Normal brain



Depressed brain



"Get over it lots of people have it worse"

Depression isn't a choice, but stigma and ignorance are.

-Matt Haig