



“serving those who serve us”

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The Secret Men Won't Admit

Sadness isn't macho – this Eric Weaver knew. When depression engulfed this veteran police sergeant, it took a different guise: *anger*. To the former SWAT team leader, it was manly and easy to be mad.

The father of three, then in his early 40s, stewed in a near-constant state of anger. “One minute I'd be okay and the next minute I'd be screaming at my kids and punching the wall.” My kids would ask, “What's wrong with daddy? Why is he so mad all the time?” As he revealed to author Susan Freinkel in the January, 2007 issue of *Reader's Digest*, the possibility that he was depressed never occurred to him until the angry façade began to crumble, leaving him with no feelings except utter despair. The tears finally came one night when he admitted to his wife the painful truth: “I've thought about committing suicide just about every day lately.”

Sgt. Weaver's confusion about what affected him was not unusual. Roughly one third of the 18 million Americans who suffer depression each year are men. Yet all too often, men fail to recognize the symptoms and get the treatment they need. “Men don't find it easy to ask for help when they desperately need it,” says Dr. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health. In an effort to redress that masculine blind spot, NIMH has launched an educational campaign featuring real men talking about their depression. Their stories are markedly different from women's.

For years, studies from around the world routinely concluded that twice as many women as men suffered from depression. In fact, depression was frequently considered a “woman's disease.” But practitioners such as psychologist William Pollack, Director of the Center for Men at McLean Hospital in Belmont, MA, are leading the charge against this well-entrenched gender gap. In fact, Dr. Pollack argues that just as many men suffer from depression as women – it's just that depression simply “looks different” in men. Indeed, University of Iowa psychologist Dr. Sam Cochran concedes that “Men don't come in talking about feeling sad like women do. Rather, they come in complaining about problems at work or their performance on the job.” Instead of being weepy, men are more apt to be irritable and angry – moods that aren't included in the classic diagnostic assessments. But organizations such as the Mental Health Association of Greater St. Louis (info@mhagstl.org) have recently issued symptomatic guidelines that now include different criteria for diagnosing depression in men. These include:

- Increasing feelings of irritability, anger and frustration
- Gradual loss of interest in family, friends and hobbies
- Noticeable changes in weight or appetite
- Pronounced changes in sleeping habits – sleeping too much or inability to achieve restful sleep
- Inability to concentrate, remember or make decisions
- Constant fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of guilt or hopelessness
- Recurrent thoughts of suicide or death

If you are experiencing any of these classic symptoms, please consider contacting your Employee Assistance Program at once. The good news is that depression is very amenable to treatment and the first step toward “getting your life back” is opening up and talking about your particular situation.

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