

Men Get Depression

A One Hour Documentary Coming
to Public Television in May, 2008

Program Description

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Men Get Depression is a one hour documentary in High Definition video that portrays the corrosive effect of depression on the self, relationships and careers through intimate profiles including three recent immigrants, a former NFL Quarterback, a Fortune 500 CEO, an Iraq War veteran, a university professor, a pastor, and others. The profiles show that this insidious and potentially lethal disease knows no racial, socio-economic or age-related boundaries.

The program is dramatically structured in four acts: 1) Putting a name on it - men awakening to awareness that something is gravely wrong that they can't control. 2) Not just me, but also those around me – an exploration of depression's collateral damage, pain and injury to relationships. 3) I need help and it's okay to ask for it - acceptance that help is available and personal accounts of experiences with both medication and psychotherapy. 4) Therapy can work, but requires discipline - how therapy has changed men's lives and relationships.

Each act is composed of emotionally compelling scenes in which men, family members and therapists relate personal struggles with depression that in some cases had brought men to the brink of suicide. Former CEO of CNN, Tom Johnson relates how, at his lowest point, he seriously considered "checking out". Former NFL quarterback Eric Hipple explains why he no longer owns a gun. Others from an ethnically diverse (Latino, Asian, African American) cross-section of contemporary America describe risky and rash behaviors that put themselves and others in danger and how this was related to emotional pain and a pervasive sense of worthlessness. Throughout the four acts, a sustained and palpable sense of men at risk that naturally emerges from each of their profiles.

"Life seemed to rush by out of control. We were headed for the airport and I just wrote a quick little note to Shelly, handed it to her and I jumped out of the car into oncoming traffic ... it's really hard to explain to Shelly what it's like to feel this desperate." - Eric Hipple, former NFL Quarterback

The documentary focuses on three stages of men's lives, representing a unique set of challenges and potential triggers of depression:

- ages 18-30 - the beginning of work life and college years
- ages 30-55 - the middle years of career and family life
- ages 55+ - retirement and later life.

"I'm in the height of my career. Things ought to be great and yet, I'm miserable. I went through that beat-up period, you know, hated myself. And so you try and fight through it. But then by sometimes by doing that, you just end up getting like deeper and deeper down. Then you almost give up." - Eric Hipple, former NFL Quarterback

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This program creates a personal view of depression with two facets: first men with the illness and second those most prone to being its “collateral casualties”--wives, children and friends. They are included because depression destroys relationships and because of the critical role others can play in recognizing symptoms, encouraging treatment and providing emotional support, not to mention their need to take care of themselves, children as well as spouses.

“I didn’t see him as a father because he just was totally hopelessness, withdrawn. He was physically a person that was in the room, but there was no conversation there; there was no involvement. I really thought he didn’t care or he just didn’t love us or didn’t love us enough.”

-Diana, daughter of 65-year-old Moises, a Guatemalan immigrant

“I’d always felt like I was walking on eggshells. Was he going to be Mr. Wonderful? Or was he going to be a bear? You know, saying: “I’m out of here. I can’t take it anymore. You’re driving me crazy.” In desperation, I was saying, David, we’ve got to do something. This is just out of control.”

- Anne, wife of Korean American David

“She actually told me the truth, that I’d been miserable to live with and that she had actually thought about leaving with the kids.”

- David, Korean American university professor

Also featured are revealing, normally confidential scenes of psychotherapy and interviews with therapists focusing on their patients’ responses to treatment. Compelling patient profiles portray both recovery and continued struggle with depression.

“You know that when you go to a doctor they ask you what your symptoms are and why you are going there. It was hard for me to tell, I was ashamed, so ashamed.”

- Javier, 35 year old Puerto Rican American

“How does one express psychological pain and how does one express emotional pain? That is not an easy thing to do to begin with. We can always very easily answer how we are thinking. It’s not always as easy to talk about how we are feeling. And I think that even becomes more difficult for an Hispanic man.”

- Francisco Fernandez, MD, University of South Florida

Interspersed among the men’s profiles are comments from such mental health experts as Dr. Francisco Fernandez of University of South Florida, who reflects on his experience providing care to his Latino patients in Tampa; Dr. John Greden, Director of the University of Michigan’s

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Depression Center, who gives a perspective on recent neuroscience research findings on the relationship of stress and depression; Dr. Michael Addis, Professor of Psychology at Clark College who has studied attitudes towards depression in ethnic minority communities; and author John Head, who has written about the relationship of racism and depression from his own personal experience with the disease.

“I see it as sort of a tragedy when you have someone, especially a man, get to the point where they finally say, ‘okay, I need help. I need to do something about this’ and they try to do it and there are these obstacles in their way.

- John Head, African American author

“The reason they don’t want to go to the doctor is they don’t want to find out that something is really wrong. And we’ve heard this in our research as well, ‘the reason I don’t want to talk to a mental health professional is, what if I found out I’m really wacko.’”

- Michael Addis, PhD, Clark University

Also, explored is the relationship between depression and substance abuse as a form of self-medication to alleviate emotional stress and pain.

“It got to the point where I would look for different substances that would take me away from the depression.”

- Stephen, 20 year-old college student

The relationship between depression and suicide is explored through both personal accounts of suicide attempts and suicidal ideation and experts’ commentary.

“My son was not under treatment for depression and he had not been diagnosed with depression. But he did leave a suicide note and in his note he talked about not being happy. And we were not aware that he was that unhappy. I guess any death is painful but to see this kind of death is just something I see over and over again in my mind. Because my daughter and my wife and I found my son and he had shot himself. And that’s a scene that just won’t go away.”

- Father in suicide survivor support group

Men often feel weak or ashamed, that it’s not manly to feel sad. This program shows men that they are not alone and that treatment can make a big difference in their lives and in the lives of the people who love them.