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DEPRESSION
IN MEN

Q&A
DISORDER
BIPOLAR

A health
practitioners guide
to child sexual
abuse and its
psychological /
emotional effects
later in life

CARING FOR
OUR CARERS
HOW TO
HANDLE TEENS
WITH ADHD

Living with...
Doctors, burnout
and their own
mental health

WHEN HAIR-
PULLING
BECOMES A
PROBLEM

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

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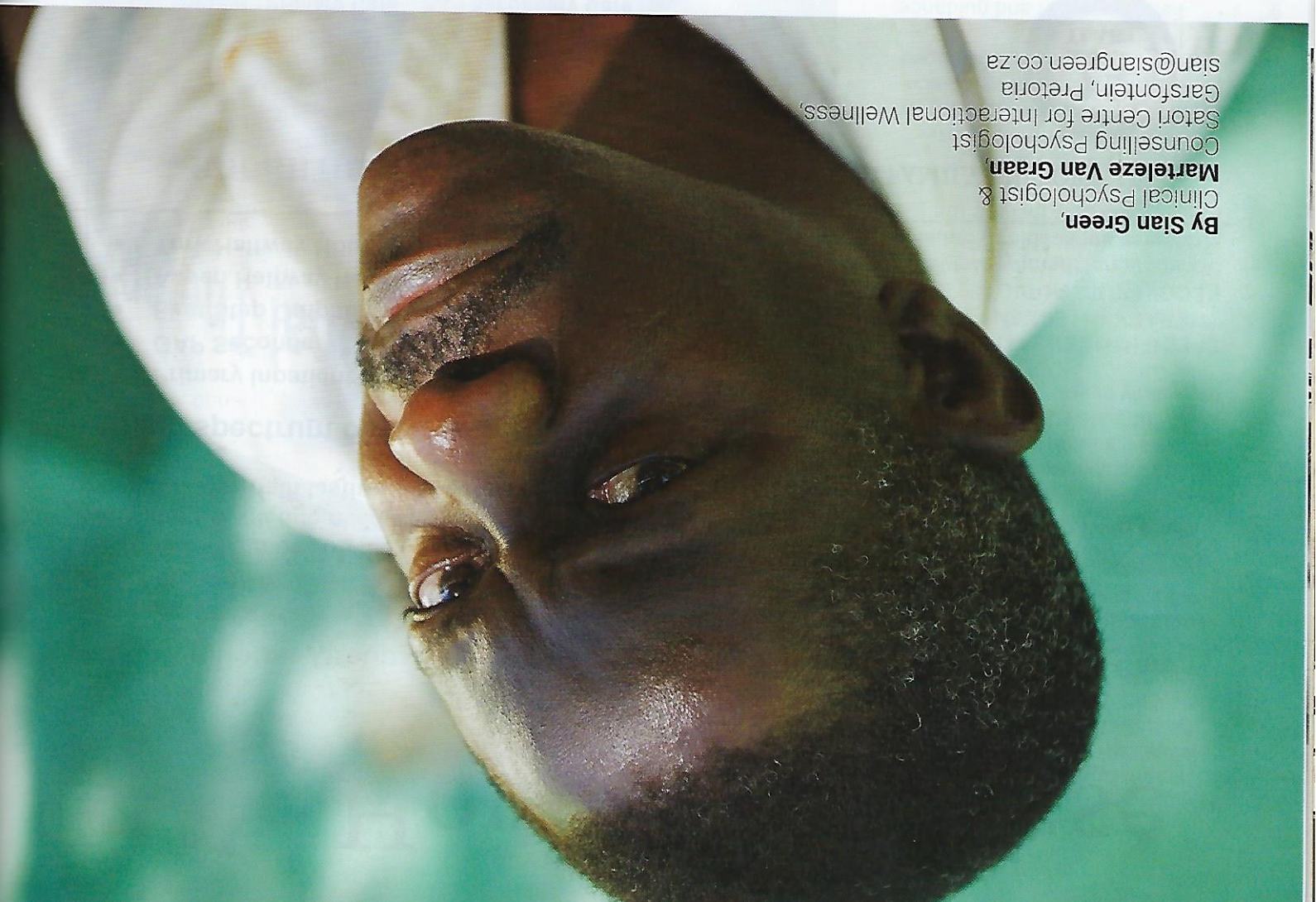
one is immune to depression; everyone has the potential for this taxing and often debilitating mental health condition to rear its ugly head. Although the underlying pillars (isolation, suppressed anger and powerlessness) remain consistent, the symptoms expressed often differ between women and men. Depression is a common term used far beyond the medical world. The deep sense of dissatisfaction, as though there's a gap in someone's life, is all too well known leading to a feeling of despair, a sense of hopelessness, worthlessness or emotional numbing. Many in society have experienced depression, some taking steps to pull themselves out or seek assistance and some from expressing their emotional symptoms of depression. Research on covert depression points mainly to this as an expression in men. What the research points out is that patriarchal systems which we frequently observe, limit men from expressing their emotional experiences in the ways that women are afforded the freedom too. For instance, the saying "cowboys don't cry", "are you a man or a mouse" or "don't be a girl", give the direct message to boys and men that showing emotion is 'bad' or a 'weakness'. As American based clinical social worker and expert in male depression, Terry Real, indicates 'men are as relational and as emotional as women, they are simply trained to disconnect'. A masterful, yet unhealthy skill learned largely through masculinisation. This leads us to covert expressions of depression. Looking more closely at covert depression gives light to the

getting deeply stuck in the trenches of this way of being. It's also a diagnosis that receives little sympathy and support - with many feeling it's a cop-out telling the person affected they should "just grow a pair", "this is life, deal with it". This societal response combined with attempting to remain a functioning member of day-to-day life contributes to covert (hidden) symptoms of depression, often seen in men, rather than the more commonly understood overt symptoms of depression. Research on covert depression points mainly to this as an expression in men. What the research points out is that patriarchal systems which we frequently observe, limit men from expressing their emotional experiences in the ways that women are afforded the freedom too. For instance, the saying "cowboys don't cry", "are you a man or a mouse" or "don't be a girl", give the direct message to boys and men that showing emotion is 'bad' or a 'weakness'. As American based clinical social worker and expert in male depression, Terry Real, indicates 'men are as relational and as emotional as women, they are simply trained to disconnect'. A masterful, yet unhealthy skill learned largely through masculinisation. This leads us to covert expressions of depression. Looking more closely at covert depression gives light to the

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"Depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. More than 300 million people are now living with depression - an increase of more than 18% since 2005".

DEPRESSION IN MEN



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TABLE 1. SYMPTOMS OF COVERT DEPRESSION

Category	Description	Examples
Self-medication	Self-medication is an attempt at continued escapism. Some men are quite comfortable with their developed tactics; it enables them to cope and maintain the outward facade without feeling exposed and vulnerable.	Drinking, drugging, womanising, spending, workaholism, eating (bingeing or food avoidance), excessive exercise, risky behaviours.
Isolation	Withdrawal from interpersonal relationships and activities previously enjoyed. This isolation limits feedback, so no checking this out, leaving a reliance on assumptions and our own distorted feedback. The more isolated and lonely, the more depressed one feels.	Difficulties in relationships, affairs, emotional withdrawal (from partners and family), divorce. Withdrawal from social relationships and situations.
Anger and irritability or lashing out	This is often an expression of other, more vulnerable emotions such as sadness, shame, or helplessness. It's not that everyone is irritating or doing things to directly create frustration, rather that there is unfinished business reducing the depressed person's frustration tolerance.	Shouting, picking fights, kicking or punching objects, people or things.
Physical or bodily symptoms	These symptoms are often a somatic representation of the emotional experience. Avoiding emotional health often creates a psychosomatic representation thereof.	Backaches or muscle tension, headaches, chronic fatigue, changes in sleep patterns, memory or concentration difficulties (often linked to ruminating thoughts) and changes in sexual desire and needs.
Meeting work and daily demands	Within depression meeting daily demands is impacted, this is consistent with overt depression, although the individual is likely to still attend work and demands, just not productively so.	This is seen in a decrease in motivation, concentration and energy.
Subjective experiences	This is the personal experience of the depression, often with covert expressions we do not feel the hopelessness and despair that accompanies overt depression. Nonetheless, some subjective emotional experiences consistent with depression remain.	Change in self-esteem, fear of failure, self-blame, judgement, shame, and excessive guilt for no apparent wrong doing. This can also be an emotional numbness, even in relation to happy or exciting events.

strategies, behaviours and additions used to hide the more emotive stuff closely linked with depression. In other words, in the way of handling the emotional experience of depression, the symptoms are a desperate avoidance of dealing with discomfort, emotions and problematic relationships.

SYMPTOMS OF COVERT DEPRESSION

In identifying covert depression as a different externalised expression of similar emotions that accompany depression, you can also outline some of the common symptoms observed in covert depression. Below is a table categorising and describing the symptoms of covert depression. This is an amalgamation of a number of literature studies and other resources consulted (all of which are referenced in the reference list of the article).

The symptoms and strategies to hide the emotional vulnerability are usually ineffective and only serve to maintain the underlying depression. For some men, it may be far easier to be angry or hurtful than to show emotional vulnerability because those symptoms are considered more in line with gender norms and are often socially appropriate. Masculine socialisation, stigma, lack of monetary means and work obligations often contribute to men not seeking help and so the depression becomes increasingly problematic.

It's of great concern that fewer than one in five men ever receive treatment. Depression is a treatable disorder and appropriate treatment with psychotherapy can bring great resolve and lead to a happier, healthier, more fulfilled life. **MHM**