

Mental Depression: The Silent Killer

Sibnath Deb and Anjana Bhattacharjee, 2009, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, ISBN 13: 9788180695766, hard cover, pp.216, price: 650

The book, *Mental Depression: The Silent Killer*, authored by Sibnath Deb and Anjana Bhattacharjee, is based on both secondary data drawn from the review of existing literature and primary data obtained from an empirical study undertaken by them. Chapterisation of the book is in the conventional style of presenting academic research studies. The first chapter introduces the concept of depression, and highlights the causal factors of depression in daily life, our reaction to the situation of depression and its implications to public health. The authors present the concept of depression in relation to other mood disorders, followed by a brief history of the study of depression, underlying psychopathology and its clinical manifestations. In doing so, the authors have detailed various dimensions of depression, such as affective, cognitive, behavioural and somatic symptoms, and its typologies as per the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" in the context of major depressive and dysthymic disorders. Each of these categories of disorder is discussed with the clinical features, epidemiological data pertaining to the incidence of depression disorders and related medical services. The introductory chapter also discusses the influence of gender and age dimensions of depression disorder, its prognostic indicators and psychosocial management.

The authors have undertaken a detailed review of the existing literature on mood disorders. The aspects of mood disorders covered in the review include: (i) genetic factors of mood disorders based on the empirical findings from studies of family, adoption and twins, (ii) biochemical factors focusing on neurotransmitters and neuroendocrine functions, (iii) link between mood disorders and sleep disorders, (iv) psychosocial factors with specific focus on interpersonal behaviours, such as pre-morbid personality factors, early child experiences, marital problems and role of cognition, and (v) clinical and psychosocial management of patients with specific attention on

pharmacotherapy, electro convulsive therapy and psychotherapy (which included cognitive behaviour therapy, interpersonal therapy, behavioural therapy and family and marital therapy) in mood disorders. A sixth aspect covered in the literature review is on depression with reference to its symptoms, general physical conditions, epidemiology, psychosocial characteristics, critical developmental stages (such as adolescence and old age), gender, interpersonal relationships and addiction behaviours. Finally, the authors have identified knowledge gaps in the areas of personality dispositions, self-esteem, emotional control, and suicidal tendency among depressed patients in empirical research literature where the present study is situated.

The third chapter of the book describes the methodology followed in the empirical study conducted by the authors. The study had two categories of respondents: (i) a sample of 118 depressive patients drawn from four mental health centres in Calcutta and (ii) 118 members of the family of the selected patients. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for selecting the sample of patients and their families. However, the selection of family members was followed by the rationale of convenience. Data collection was done with the help of an interview schedule that contained a standardised measurement for depression. The standardised measurements, adapted and used for the present study, were the Multi-dimensional Personality Inventory by Manju Agarwal (1988), Self-esteem Inventory by M.S. Prasad and G. P. Thakur (1989), Emotional Control Inventory by Samuel E. Krug (1989) and Suicidal Tendencies Inventory by Samuel E. Krug (1989). The statistics used in the analysis of the data were percentage, measures of central tendencies, and 't' test. The authors have not mentioned when their study was conducted.

Chapter four of the book discusses the findings of the empirical study. Following are the major findings presented in the book. (i) Patients under depression had higher scores, in comparison to general population, on personality measurement in terms of being introverted, possessing low self-esteem, showing dependency on others, being short tempered, having low adjustment capacity and proneness to anxiety. (ii) Chronicity (or duration) of depression disorder is a significant factor that affected the personality variables; longer duration of depression had more adverse impact on

personality characteristics. (iii) The depressive patients had a significantly lower level of emotional control than the normal population. (iv) Female patients had a significantly lower level of emotional control than the male patients. (v) Depressive patients showed a significantly greater suicidal tendency than the general population. (vi) A significant association was found between chronicity of disorder and suicidal tendency, in the sense that longer the duration of disorder, higher would be the suicidal tendency.

The fifth and last chapter of the book critically discusses the research findings in the light of existing empirical evidence and theoretical formulation in the area of depression. The authors have tried to link the results of their study to a series of theoretical models, such as the psychodynamic theory, social learning theory, Bowlby's attachment theory and Beck's cognitive model of depression. They have attempted explanations for the results of their study that do not go along with, or are not found in the existing empirical evidence. For example, their finding that men are more likely to seek mental health care services (which is reported to be contrary to the existing empirical evidences from the West) is explained by the gender based power structure in patriarchal Indian society that favours the male. Similarly, the presence of a larger number of men among the depressed in their study is explained by work pressure, unsatisfactory salary and poor interpersonal relationships. But a more reliable explanation seems to be the fact that majority (53.4%) of the respondents of the study were men. There are other explanations of findings that are not conclusive or in conformity with the existing theories. For example, the authors seem to build a linear causation of depression in the explanation that an individual's failure to complete graduation might result in her/his inability to earn better income which in turn may cause depression. It is, however, equally possible that depression may be antecedent to academic failure and subsequent dropout. Majority of the respondents of the study were suffering from dysthymic disorder and the causes attributed by the authors were stress in daily life and poor interpersonal relationship, and early disruptive childhood experience in the family environment. All these explanations given by the authors are hypothetical in the sense that they have not been drawn either from their own study or from the existing theories on depression.

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In this work, the authors provided a reasonably good theoretical discussion on mood disorders with special reference to depression, followed by a detailed review of both theoretical and empirical literature on depression. Closely examining the mental disposition, the authors have well detailed the concept of personality disposition, its core elements such as introversion/extroversion, self-concept, independence/dependence, temperament, adjustment and anxiety, and devoted space for discussing the critical roles of each element in determining healthy personality disposition in the background of depression. However, the problem formulation of the research study undertaken by the authors was not explicitly guided by any existing theoretical framework. This has led to certain conceptual limitations in the formulation of hypotheses and data analysis. For instance, the book is not clear about the theoretical background of the hypothesised relationships between depression disorder on the one hand, and the personality dispositions, self-esteem, emotional control, and suicidal tendency, age, gender and chronicity of disorder, on the other. While the research objectives have been appreciably pursued, especially in testing about twelve hypotheses, there was enough scope to use statistical tests beyond percentage and 't' test, such as correlation and regression which would have further explored the predictive properties of depression in the context of the variables studied. Despite these limitations, the overall findings of the study presented in the book make their contribution to development of the knowledge base in the service sector of mental health care in India. The work also provides useful recommendations for professional practice in mental health care.

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