

Depression: The Mask of Sorrow

To the outside world, Sgt. Eric Weaver seemed like a model police officer. He always signed up for new projects and volunteered as a training coordinator for the SWAT team in Rochester, N.Y.

Inside, however, Weaver saw himself as a failure.

"I hated who I was," says the 40-year-old. "My depression was so severe and my suicidal ideations were so severe that I decided to create a person who does so much work, is so proactive, and so diligent in everything he does."

In the tough, male-dominated environment where he worked, Weaver put on a show of confidence. But when he got home, he would yell at his wife and kids, and cry for hours with a gun in his hand.

After months of contemplating suicide, Weaver turned to his wife for help. With her support, he was treated with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT, more commonly known as "shock treatment"), antidepressant and antipsychotic medications, psychologist and psychiatrist visits, and hospitalization.

Now, Weaver feels better about himself and runs his own program to educate police officers about depression, stress, and suicide prevention.

He shares his own experiences with fellow officers, letting them know that if they feel depressed and/or suicidal, they are not alone. He says two to three times more officers commit suicide than are killed on the job by criminals.

Law enforcement is also reportedly one of the top ranking professions in the country for suicide, alcoholism, and divorce.

"So many officers and so many men in different occupations cannot feel that it would be appropriate to tell people how they feel," says Weaver. "It gets to be so bad that the only recourse that they feel they have is suicide."

Depression can affect people in all walks of life. According to the American Psychiatric Association, symptoms of the illness could include:

- Changes in appetite that result in weight loss or gain not related to dieting
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue

- Restlessness or irritability
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or attempts of suicide

At work, the symptoms could translate into problems with attendance and punctuality, less job satisfaction, lack of performance, sleepiness, and withdrawal from coworkers, says Rudy Nydegger, PhD, professor of psychology at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y.

For people who think they might be depressed, Nydegger suggests the following first steps of action:

- Consult with your primary health care provider. Symptoms of depression are similar to signs of other ailments, such as thyroid problems and low blood sugar
- Get a referral or refer yourself to a mental health professional.
- Check with your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). "They can be a very good resource, especially for referrals," says Nydegger.
- Work on a healthier lifestyle, including a balanced diet and regular exercise.
- Make sure your physical and social activity is up to normal levels, even if you don't feel up to it. If you force yourself to get out there, you'll get better faster.

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SOURCES: World Health Organization. American Psychiatric Association. John Weaver, PsyD, owner of Psychology for Business, a workplace consulting firm. National Sleep Foundation. Meir Kryger, MD, professor of medicine, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. Mark Rosekind, PhD, president and chief scientist, Alertness Solutions. Anxiety Disorders Association of America. Jeffrey P. Kahn, MD, clinical psychiatrist, author, *Mental Health and Productivity in the Workplace*. Rudy Nydegger, PhD, professor of psychology, Union College, Schenectady, N.Y. Lawrence S. Brown, Jr. MD, MPH, president, American Society of Addiction Medicine. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. WebMD Feature: "Internet to Sex: Defining Addiction." Angie Moore, licensed counselor in the treatment of alcohol, drug, and gambling addiction; spokeswoman, Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery. Russell Barkley, PhD, professor of psychiatry for the Medical University of South Carolina. Children and Adults With Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. WebMD Feature: "Adult ADHD: More Controversy, Treatments."