

Community support may make biggest difference in men's mental health

WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, UNITED STATES, January 21, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The COVID-19 pandemic has created a wave of mental health issues in people who never had them before, and mental health authorities fear the worst is yet to come.

That's on top of an already shocking crisis in suicide rates for men in the USA. Since approximately 2018, the greatest increase in suicides has occurred in males aged 25 to 45 and suicide is most prevalent in white males. Some 83 percent of suicide victims had no diagnosed mental health condition.

Job loss and financial stresses exacerbate many psychological problems including anxiety and OCD disorders, aggravate PTSD symptoms and many other mental health issues. Isolation worsens depression and feelings of failure. It's important to understand that men manifest their mental health challenges differently than women do, to learn to recognize those differences as symptoms, and to use positive ways to assist men in crisis.

Maryanne J. Legato, MD, professor of clinical medicine at Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons and founder and director of the Partnership for Women's Health at Columbia University, believes that we don't know how to read the signs for men as well as we do for women.

According to Legato, women are more likely to talk with friends, family and co-workers about their unhappiness, at least in the earlier stages of depression, then are men. Most women engage their peer networks for help early on by calling their friends, asking for advice, researching what medications might help them, and going to their health care professionals.

Yet, says Dr. Sal Giorgianni, Senior Science Advisor for Men's Health Network, men tend to keep



these difficult feelings to themselves and many begin to slowly retreat from their world. Or they exhibit changes in behavior, socialization or isolation and often reach a boiling point before they discuss their problems, he says.

Jed Diamond, MA, LCSW, PhD, has been providing clinical therapy for more than 40 years. He notes that some symptoms of male responses to mental health challenges are irritability; become unforgiving; become overtly or covertly hostile; loss of anger control; emotional blunting or numbness; and pushing others away. Just at the time that they need love the most, men with depression are at their most unloveable. Mental health problems resolve for men with these challenges when others treat them better.

The role of community involvement in behavioral health management of boys and men was examined in a conference of experts convened by Men's Health Network and funded in part by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to continue the dialogue started at a similar meeting held in May 2019. The most recent conference expanded on two of the key panel recommendations from the earlier meeting to advance the care of boys and men: involvement of the community and the need for male-specific tools and approaches to identifying boys and men at risk for behavioral health issues and potential suicide.

The first line of identification, management and triage to help those with mental health issues or at the cusp of a crisis is most effective at the community level. Co-workers, educators, coaches, neighbors, friends and family – all have an important role to play.

At the community level, whether it's in the workplace, an educational environment, civic or community volunteer organizations, men generally do not engage in health-related programs unless they are very specifically designed to capture their attention. So the solution doesn't always lie in health fairs or other similar outreach efforts. Instead, one-on-one support for men in crisis may be more effective.

As workplace managers, supervisors and educators become more knowledgeable and engaged in the community to identify boys and men at risk of emotional issues, they should receive some level of training to recognize both behavioral and physical pointers to a potential problem. In addition, and perhaps more relevant to recognizing emotional stress, depression, anxiety or potential suicide at the community level, is understanding how males show signs of these conditions.

Peer-to-peer structures take advantage of a powerful technique of using "Trusted Messengers" to deliver important messages and to serve as role-models for individuals from within a community or sociocultural sector. Such trusted messengers help keep the focus on providing solutions and a sense of achievability, particularly for those who have had little to give them confidence in their ability to achieve control over a downwardly spiraling emotional situation.

The Hope Squad is a school-based peer-to-peer support program started in 1997 in Provo, UT, by

Dr. Gregory A. Hudnall. Since its start at one school, Hope Squads are now in more than 950 schools across 30 states and Canada. More than 30,000 student squad members work to assist their peers.

The Hope Squad selects students who are trustworthy and caring, and who are then trained to watch for at-risk students, provide friendship, identify warning signs and seek help from adults. They are not trained as counselors, but to report their concerns to an adult.

Several national labor unions have instituted peer-to-peer support programs. These include the Sheet Metal Union for Air, Rail and Transportation (SMART Union), the International Union of Operating Engineers, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. Others are also developing support programs and training their memberships on how to put them to use.

Faith communities can also provide opportunities for developing positive relationships with others and can be an important source of support during difficult times. Faith-based organizations perform many important functions, often have close ties to families and anchor communities. Counseling related to suicide fits with the general role of faith community leaders, but congregants can benefit from training in how to recognize signs of mental health issues.

Among the programs that are being used more and more broadly are those that look to train community members in techniques of what has come to be called "Emotional First-Aid" (EFA). It is a derivative of Psychological First-Aid (PFA) programs applied to non-mental health/non-medical persons in the community and workplace. The purpose of PFA, according to the American Psychological Association, is to assess the immediate concerns and needs of an individual, and not to provide on-site therapy.

Men's Health Network

Men's Health Network (MHN) is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to reach men, boys, and their families where they live, work, play, and pray with health awareness messages and tools, screening programs, educational materials, advocacy opportunities, and patient navigation. Learn more about MHN at www.menshealthnetwork.org and follow them on Twitter @MensHlthNetwork and Facebook at www.facebook.com/menshealthnetwork. Consider donating to MHN at www.menshealthnetwork.org/donate.

By Robin Mather
For Men's Health Network

Brandon Ross
Men's Health Network
+1 202-543-6461
communications@menshealthnetwork.org

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/534869536>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2021 IPD Group, Inc. All Right Reserved.