

[Intro music]

Zina Peters: Welcome to *On the Couch With Kiwi*, a podcast series at FIU CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services). I'm your host Zina Peters and I am pleased to introduce to you today Doctor Nathasha Hahn, University Psychologist at CAPS. She will talk to us today about depression, welcome Dr. Hahn.

Dr. Hahn: Hi Zina, thank you so much for having me; I'm really glad to be here.

Peters: We're so happy to have you here. So let's jump right in, can you tell us what is depression and what are some of the symptoms of a depressive episode?

Dr. Hahn: Yeah, so a lot of people when they think of depression they think it's just sadness but it's really so much more than that. In addition to having a low mood or a period of sadness, there's also a loss of interest in things that people used to find pleasurable. There's an experience of fatigue, low motivation, and difficulty concentrating; you'll definitely see those three symptoms definitely impact college students a lot. In regards to, their homework, their ability to get out of bed to get to class, or to make it through all their responsibilities for the day. You'll also notice Isolation and the desire to withdraw. Also, a period of just worthlessness or not feeling of value, and that is something that can really impact students as well. You'll see disturbances in sleep, this can look a variety of different ways; from sleeping too much, sleeping too little, having difficulty falling asleep, or staying asleep. You'll see changes in appetite that can be reflected in weight loss or weight gain. This can even be having no appetite, a shift in appetite from what the person is used to, or they noticed that there is great reduction in the amount of meals that they consume throughout the day. All of those things are important to pay attention to. Lesser known symptoms are thoughts of death or suicidal ideation; which is a really common depression symptom. Sometimes people are really puzzled as to why they're having these recurring thoughts of death or maybe harming themselves, but know that they maybe don't want to do that. But, sometimes maybe for the people we work with at CAPS it becomes a warning sign for them to realize, "Well maybe I am experiencing a depressive episode right now". It's really important to talk to a mental health professional to see what type of depression someone may have; because there are so many types of depression. The symptoms I just described to you are common in depressive episodes where typically a person experiences these symptoms for most of the day, nearly every day, for nearly two weeks. But, that's just one type of depression, there are others consulting with someone who is familiar with the different types is really important to know more about what's going on with you.

Peters: So how common is depression among college students?

Dr. Hahn: Well that's a great question! So there's a lot of data that's collected around the nation at college counseling centers that point to at least $\frac{1}{3}$; typically 30 to 40

percent of students coming in to concerns at college counseling centers are reporting depressive episodes. So, the number is pretty high.

Peters: What are some of the ways depression is impacted by gender?

Dr. Hahn: That's another really good question, for those who are transgender or gender nonconforming you will definitely see that those students will experience higher symptoms of depression. A lot of that comes from societal treatment and just all the challenges that come with exploring their own identity; and just embracing who they are. Also, the conflicts that come around that transition at times. For those who identify as cis female you will see a lot of anxiety and physical symptoms; perhaps some eating related disorders that come up. A lot of times people think that women will experience depression more than men. Even though, there is a lot of data that indicates that; women are more socialized to share their distress so they're more likely to report. As opposed to those who identify as cis male they are typically more socialized to underreport, have greater sense of shame even acknowledging they are in distress. How some of that may manifest is that you will see more anger, irritability, more aggression, maybe more substance use. And those are different ways that when you think about the spectrum of gender how depression can intertwine or be impacted.

Peters: What about in respect to culture? Is there a difference in the expression of depression among cultures?

Dr. Hahn: Especially when we're working in a university like FIU where the population is so diverse, we see a lot of cultural manifestation of depression that can be different from some of the symptoms that I shared with you earlier. Often times those who have identification with eastern Asian cultures or cultures where there is an African background. You'll see a more physical manifestation of the symptoms such as headaches, stomach-aches, and muscle aches are really common. And you'll see less of a connection with emotional states that come with depression such as sadness. Typically, those who have very culturally diverse backgrounds there may not be as much validation around the existence of mental health or around the existence of depression. So oftentimes, people are so invalidated by family, friends, or partners their depression symptoms will tend to manifest differently as well. This is because there's a lot of ignoring and avoiding of what they're experiencing, so really paying attention to the way their culture impacts depression is important.

Peters: So what are some of the risks that can come out of unmanaged depression?

Dr. Hahn: A part of what makes depression a disorder is particularly if it's disrupting one's normal daily functioning. And so, this could be difficulty in academic performance, school work, in relationships, and partnerships. Essentially, difficulty meeting overall responsibilities that a person may have. If someone does have any sort of physical consequences from their depression that can be resulting out of eating related concerns.

That is something that can be really challenging when someone is depressed and not really consuming the resources that they need just to keep themselves going from day to day. Also, substance use and abuse has physical consequences as well, so there are a lot of different consequences that can come out of untreated and unmanaged depression.

Peters: You mentioned resources, I'm curious what should a student do if they feel they need help managing their depression?

Dr. Hahn: Students have access to CAPS as a resource on campus and so we offer a variety of different services we have groups that are dedicated to helping students with depression in their semester long groups. We also have workshops that are much more brief in nature that are a couple weeks long and their very instructional in regards to different things students can do on their own to try to manage. We can also offer individual counseling and we can also offer an opportunity to meet with a psychiatrist for psychiatric evaluation and see if medication can potentially help students. There are a lot of different resources; and collaborating with a professional mental health clinician is something that is very much recommended if a person is concerned about their depression. It's important to keep in mind that a part of depression includes feelings of worthlessness and oftentimes you'll have students who won't want to come in because they feel like when they are experiencing depression and they're asking for help that that's a sign of weakness. Actually, it is a sign of strength to be able to ask for help and to be vulnerable in that way and to really just take care of yourself the way that you need. And so, you know, that's something that's so important to be aware of, if you are experiencing depression and having challenges in coming in for services that is a part of the presentation of depression. Some of that self-doubt and worthlessness feeling but it's actually a lot of strength to come in and we certainly encourage and applaud students whenever they are able to make that decision for themselves.

Peters: I would really like to take this time and thank Dr. Hahn for joining us today, and sharing all this information with us. If you would like to learn more about CAPS please visit us at caps.fiu.edu, to listen to more podcast and learn more about caps services. Thank you for joining us today.

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