

[Intro music]

**Zina Peters:** Welcome to On the Couch with Kiwi a podcast series at FIU CAPS, I'm your host Zina Peters. I am pleased to introduce to you today Dr. Matthew Woodfork, University Psychologist at CAPS. He will talk to us today about men in therapy. Welcome, Dr. Woodfork!

**Dr. Woodfork:** Thank you for having me, Zina!

**Peters:** Happy to have you here. So let's jump right in, what are some of the common mental health concerns that impact men?

**Dr. Woodfork:** So I think there are a few things men deal with admittedly as well as others but they may look a little bit differently amongst men. So depression, anxiety, substance use issues, even suicide can be concerns either expressed or at least experienced by a number of men. Depression, though, may look a little bit differently than what we may imagine kind of classically so to speak. So as opposed to maybe a man coming in expressing low mood, a lot of sadness, they may instead seem a lot more irritable speaking about a lot more kind of aggressive acts or intentionality. Substance use, because there is not often this encouragement of emotional expression then it finds its way out in other ways as far as how men try to cope with their distress. Alcohol misuse, drug abuse or misuse may lead to issues that men may experience at higher levels than women, for example. In order to cope with their distress or just how their distress may manifest. Suicide unfortunately, the rates of suicide are rising amongst a number of groups and demographics, men included. Even particularly men who identify as LGBTQ, gay or bisexual men in particular have higher rates of suicide than most of the population. Even those under age twenty five are having higher rates as well. Men are dealing with expressing their mental health in a number of ways that we need to be mindful of as providers or even those who care about the loved ones in our lives.

**Peters:** So when do men typically seek mental health support?

**Dr. Woodfork:** So unfortunately they wait until it's pretty late in the game, when things have gotten pretty bad. There are some things we can do to change that pattern. Some research suggest that if we keep in mind these ideas about masculinity and not necessarily only pathologize certain masculine ideologies but perhaps think about them as more kind of complete concepts. Then we can capitalize on some of the more strength based qualities of these ideas. So there was a study that talked about marketing materials to a student population and they were a lot more interest or at

least willingness to seek help amongst men who received materials that were emphasizing achievement or self-help. These are some things that men are often promoted to exhibit amongst other people kind of being on their own or self-sufficient, being very goal or success oriented. But this is just an opportunity now just to find a way to blend that into the framework of mental health to make it a bit more palpable.

**Peters:** Yeah almost like more attractive to that group. So are men less likely to seek therapy than women?

**Dr. Woodfork:** Yeah I think very much so and I think it go across a number of groups when it comes to even kind of age, nationality, race/ethnicity. Oftentimes men are a lot slower to reach out and that can be for a couple of reasons; in particular, women are more socialized, in a number of societies or cultural context, to be expressive. Some more than others but generally speaking women are given that leeway to talk and to be vulnerable to show vulnerability. Whereas a lot of times men are not, men are supposed to be to themselves, this lone wolf. You're not allowed to be sad, you're not allowed to be nervous, insecure, or unsure of yourself; and so for that reason men aren't often reaching out for help at the same rates as women are. So I think it's important to consider how, again, we can encourage men and ourselves in general to open up our views what manhood can look like and what's acceptable ways of being a man in this world.

**Peters:** For males, what are some of the benefits of going to therapy?

**Dr. Woodfork:** So I think the benefits mirror a lot of the benefits that anyone would experience this opportunity to be affirmed, to find a community, to find support. Something that can be especially important amongst different cultural groups, like Latino coming from a more collectivist backgrounds. So therapy can offer someone to feel heard and cared for, then again, affirmed and given some options when we are too restrictive to the idea of what a man is or what masculinity should look like, then it very much limits our options to support ourselves and get help when we need it.

**Peters:** What are the benefits of seeking support early?

**Dr. Woodfork:** So I think the earlier you ask for help the better chance you have of kind of mitigating some of the overall stress one may experience. So, unfortunately, a lot of times men are waiting until it's very late in the game to ask for help. In those cases we want to ensure that we are giving permission to or encouraging and letting men know

that it is okay and it doesn't jeopardize who you are as a man to ask for help when you start to feel a little overwhelmed or as though you're not functioning in the way you should be functioning. I think it can be helpful in those circumstances to be more open minded and I think for those reasons men would benefit and not progress into some of those more severe and problematic behaviors like alcohol abuse or drug misuse to cope with their distress.

**Peters:** What are some of the myths about men who go to therapy?

**Dr. Woodfork:** So I think some myths are that, "you're crazy", "you're weak minded", or culturally speaking that it's "only for white folks", "it's only for the rich" and ultimately that you're less of a man for not knowing what to do or not knowing how to work through an issue. So I think that those are some areas that we as providers need to be really mindful of, we as family members you know, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, friends, partners, we need to be very mindful of not to unintentionally perpetuate those stigmas because we can unintentionally be causing some harm to the ones that we love or other men who may need some help, but are perhaps suffering in silence for that reason.

**Peters:** Thanks for addressing some of those myths. If a man is listening to this podcast right now and maybe they're contemplating or seeking therapy, what would you say to them to help alleviate their concerns and worries about therapy?

**Dr. Woodfork:** Well I'd say by asking for help that does not make you less of a man, it does not jeopardize or should not jeopardize who you are as an individual and your own competence. It does not make you weak but rather I think it takes an immense amount of strength to buck the system and buck what we've known to be true for men and ask for help. I think that also can be helpful for a lot of guys to know to reach out for help, let's say even at the counseling center, we have a men's group that can be maybe a little bit easier for some men to consider because you are amongst others who identify the same amongst their gender and for that reason there can be some presumed safety and some sense of security or comfort knowing that maybe this guy here is going through something similar than I am and so I'm not alone in that. So I think I want to let the guys out there know that there are options available to you on campus or even outside of campus, if that kind of works best for you.

**Peters:** Yeah, that's good to know about the men's group here on campus as well at CAPS. I would like to take this time to really thank you, Dr. Woodfork, for joining us today.

**Dr. Woodfork:** Thank you! Thank you for having me again I really enjoyed this conversation.

**Peters:** Absolutely! If you would like to know more about CAPS visit us at [caps.fiu.edu](http://caps.fiu.edu), to listen to more podcast and to learn more about CAPS services.

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