

Lawyers ASSISTANCE

By Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq.

THE BATTLE WITHIN!

Adverse parties are usually two or more individuals or entities on opposing sides with contrary interests seeking to argue against, counteract or limit the actions of another. But what happens when you cannot pinpoint your opponent, and your resistance or challenge comes from within? What about when you have an internal war going on? What happens when you are battling yourself? Stated differently, what happens when you are all dressed up on the outside, but empty on the inside, *i.e.*, feeling unfulfilled, lost or of no purpose? Do you torture yourself with feelings of worthlessness, guilt and helplessness? Do you constantly feel sorry for yourself? Are your emotions unbearable, and do they coincide with physical pain?

We all know every day will not be a great day. Feeling sad or down sometimes is a normal part of life. However, if you consistently feel down or hopeless and your feelings interfere with your daily activities, you could be suffering from depression.¹

The National Institute of Mental Health describes depression as one of the most common mental disorders in the United States, affecting how you feel, think and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating or working.² The medical field classifies depression as a mood disorder, with research suggesting that the cause is a combination of genetic, biological, environmental and psychological factors.³

Even though depression can happen at any age, it often appears during the late teens to mid-20s.⁴ Research shows depression as the leading cause of disability in the United States among people ages 15-44.⁵ Estimates are that one in 15 adults is affected by depression, and one in six people will experience depression in their lives.⁶

More women than men suffer from depression, with some studies showing that

one-third of women will experience a major depressive episode in their lifetime.⁷ Depression manifests differently based on sex and age. Men often show symptoms of tiredness, irritability and anger, and they may engage in more reckless behavior and abuse drugs and alcohol. Women show signs of sadness, worthlessness and guilt. Younger children who are depressed are more likely to display school avoidance and anxiety when separated from their parents. Teenagers who are depressed are usually irritable, sulky and get into trouble in school. Teenagers also frequently have co-morbid anxiety, eating disorders or substance abuse issues.⁸ In midlife and older adults, depression can co-occur with other serious medical illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease and obesity.⁹

If you have been experiencing four or more of the following symptoms for at least two weeks, you may be suffering from depression and should seek professional help:

- ▶ Persistent sad or “empty” mood.
- ▶ Feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless, pessimistic or guilty.
- ▶ Substance abuse.
- ▶ Fatigue or loss of interest in ordinary activities.
- ▶ Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements.
- ▶ Disturbances in eating and sleeping patterns.
- ▶ Irritability, increased crying, anxiety or panic attacks.
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.
- ▶ Thoughts of suicide, suicide plans or attempts.
- ▶ Persistent physical symptoms or pains that do not respond to treatment.¹⁰

The Anxiety & Depression Association of America explains several types of depressive disorders. Depression and anxiety can coincide, and research shows that more than 70% of people with depres-

sive disorders also have anxiety symptoms such as nervousness, irritability, and problems sleeping or concentrating.¹¹ However, no evidence suggests that one condition causes the other.¹²

Here are some depression disorders that may cause a battle within.

Major Depressive Disorder is the most diagnosed form of depression and is characterized by having at least five of nine common symptoms for two weeks or longer. One of the symptoms must be either an overwhelming feeling of sadness or a loss of interest in everyday activities.¹³ Other symptoms include: a decrease or increase in appetite; insomnia or hypersomnia; psychomotor agitation or retardation; constant fatigue; feelings of worthlessness or excessive and inappropriate guilt; recurring thoughts of death, and suicidal ideation with or without specific plans for committing suicide; and cognitive difficulties, such as diminished ability to think, concentrate and make decisions.¹⁴

Persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia) involves an ongoing low, dark or sad mood lasting at least two years in adults and one year in children and teens. A diagnosis of persistent depressive disorder also requires two of the following symptoms: poor appetite or overeating; insomnia or hypersomnia; low energy or fatigue; low self-esteem; poor concentration; difficulty making decisions; or feelings of hopelessness.¹⁵

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), another type of depression, is a more severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Although PMS and PMDD both have physical and emotional symptoms, including bloating, fatigue and changes in sleep and eating habits, the mood changes in PMDD are much more severe and debilitating. Symptoms of PMDD include: severe sadness or hopelessness; anxiety or tension; extreme moodiness; and irritability or anger.¹⁶

Depressive disorder due to another medical condition is when other medical conditions trigger depressive symptoms. HIV/AIDS, diabetes, stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, heart disease and cancer are a few diseases that increase the likelihood of depression.¹⁷

Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood is an unhealthy or excessive emotional or behavioral reaction to a stressful event or change in life. The reaction occurs within three months of the event or change that can be positive such as a new job, marriage or baby. Other examples include moving/relocating, divorce or separation, and the loss of a pet.¹⁸

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), or winter depression, relates to seasonal changes. People with SAD suffer Major Depressive Disorder symptoms during a specific time of year, usually fall and winter, when the days are shorter and there is less sunlight.¹⁹ Symptoms such as social withdrawal, increased sleep and weight gain typically accompany SAD.²⁰

Lastly, women and men can experience **Postpartum Depression** after the birth of a baby. Postpartum depression is described as feelings of emptiness, extreme sadness, anxiety, exhaustion and hopelessness, all or most of the time for longer than two weeks. These feelings make it challenging to complete daily care activities.²¹

Depression should never be trivialized or minimized. Know that you do not have to suffer in silence. A medical doctor or mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychotherapist, can accurately diagnose and treat depression with medication, psychotherapy or a combination of the two.²² Suffering from depression is not a weakness but an involuntary and actual illness that you do not just "snap out" of.²³

The American Bar Association's 2020 Profile of the Legal Profession concluded that lawyers have been, and still are, more susceptible to alcohol use, substance use and mental health issues compared to the general population and other highly educated professionals. The study cites a partnership with the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation in 2016. Of nearly 13,000 lawyers surveyed, 28% struggled with depression and 19% had anxiety symp-

toms.²⁴

The adversarial nature of the practice of law combined with demanding, unpredictable schedules predisposes lawyers to chronic stress or higher rates of depression. The stigma of mental health still exists, further discouraging identification, discussions, and seeking professional medical care. Medical care is vital because chronic stress and depression can trigger unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse and lead to suicide or suicidal ideations.²⁵

Tips to reduce symptoms of depression include:

- ▶ Be active and exercise regularly;
- ▶ Eat a healthy diet;
- ▶ Read a good book;
- ▶ Watch a funny movie or TV show;
- ▶ Volunteer for a good cause;
- ▶ Spend time with family and friends and try not to isolate yourself;
- ▶ Let others help you;
- ▶ Rest for at least eight hours a night; and
- ▶ Avoid alcohol and drugs.²⁶

These tips are not only for judges and lawyers, but law students and bar applicants are encouraged to get help now so mental health issues and substance abuse do not jeopardize their bright futures.

Remember, JLAP is here to serve and support you. There is always someone who will listen and help you in your time of need. JLAP services are available to all judges, lawyers, law students, bar applicants, legal professionals and family members. JLAP is not a disciplinary entity or reporting agency. The identity of any judge, lawyer, law student or family member who requests assistance for themselves or others remains confidential.

To learn more or seek help with any mental health or addiction issue, contact our professional clinical staff at JLAP at (985)778-0571, email jlap@louisianajlap.com, or visit the website at <https://louisianajlap.com>.

We are a confidential Safe Haven of Healing.

FOOTNOTES

1. Valencia Higuera, "Everything You Want to Know About Depression," Healthline (Feb. 11, 2020), www.healthline.com/health/depression.

2. *Depression*, National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/.

3. *Depression and Suicide*, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, <https://save.org/about-suicide/mental-illness-and-suicide/depression/>; *Depression*, National Institute of Mental Health, *supra* note 2.

4. *What is Depression?*, American Psychiatric Association, www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression.

5. *Depression, Anxiety & Depression Association of America*, <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/depression>.

6. *What is Depression?*, American Psychiatric Association, *supra* note 4.

7. *Id.*

8. *Depression, Anxiety & Depression Association of America*, *supra* note 5.

9. *Depression*, National Institute of Mental Health, *supra* note 2.

10. *Depression and Suicide*, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, *supra* note 3.

11. Higuera, *supra* note 1.

12. *Depression, Anxiety & Depression Association of America*, *supra* note 5.

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *Depression, Anxiety & Depression Association of America*, *supra* note 5.

19. *Id.*

20. *Depression*, National Institute of Mental Health, *supra* note 2.

21. *Id.*

22. *Depression and Suicide*, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, *supra* note 3; *Depression*, National Institute of Mental Health, *supra* note 2.

23. *Depression (major depressive disorder)*, Mayo Clinic, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>; *Depression and Suicide*, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, *supra* note 3.

24. *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession 2020*, American Bar Association, www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf.

25. Jeena Cho, "Attorney suicide: What every lawyer needs to know," ABA Journal (Jan. 1, 2019), www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/attorney_suicide_what_every_lawyer_needs_to_know; *Depression*, American Bar Association (Jan. 13, 2021), www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/depression/.

26. *Depression*, National Institute of Mental Health, *supra* note 2.

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