

Aggielife

Living in the Dark

Campus services help students suffering from depression

BY MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
The Battalion

"I don't want to go to class, I don't want to get dressed. My grades suck. I don't know where I am going. There must be something wrong with me. I am not worth anything. I am nothing."

These sentiments are among the signs experienced by a depressed individual.

According to a pamphlet released by Charter Behavioral Health Systems, depression is more than feeling low for a day.

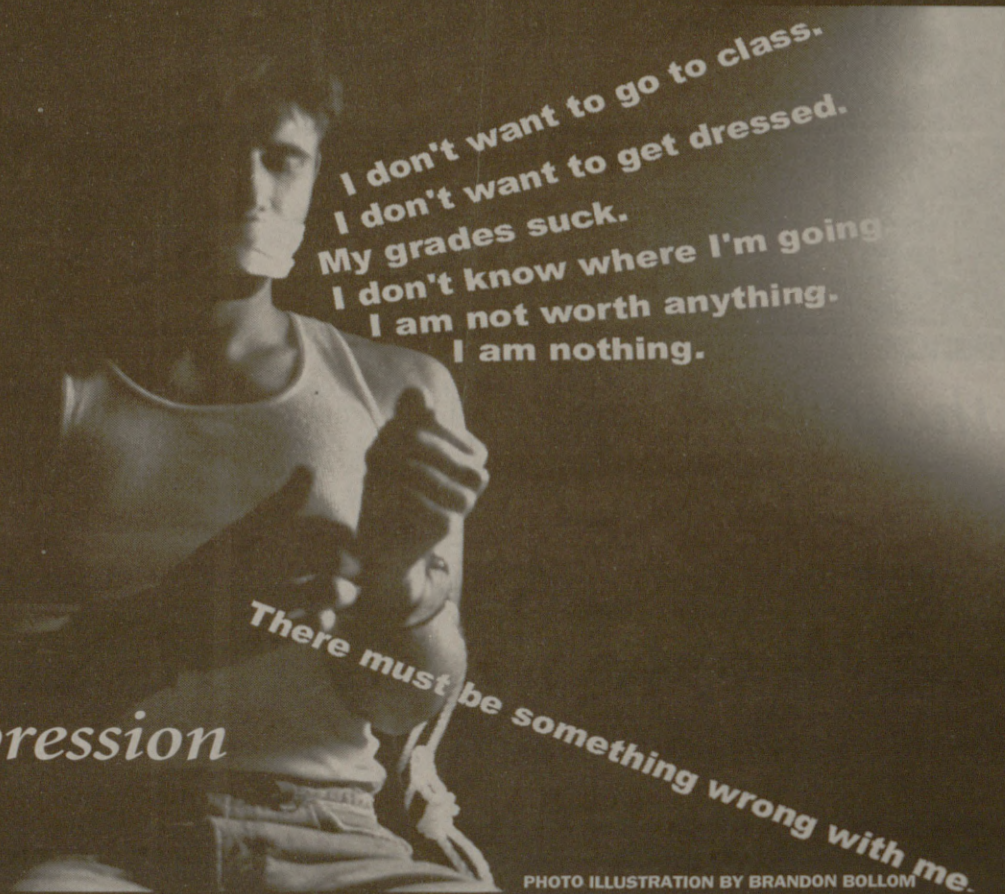
Depression is more accurately defined as a long-lasting, often recurring illness as real and disabling as heart disease or arthritis.

People who experience clinical depression may feel an oppressive sense of sadness, fatigue and guilt.

Performing on the job may be difficult, going out with friends may be unthinkable and merely getting out of bed may be impossible.

The person who has depression feels increasingly isolated from family and colleagues — helpless, worthless and lost.

One student said she did not know she was depressed, but lived in a constant world of gloom.



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I don't want to get dressed.
My grades suck.
I don't know where I'm going.
I am not worth anything.
I am nothing.

There must be something wrong with me.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BRANDON BOLLOM

"I felt like everything was my fault," she said. "Some days I felt like an ogre. I felt everybody was looking at me and staring at me."

"I felt like nobody loved me. Actually, it was more than that, I felt like nobody cared. Coming to A&M didn't help. No one would talk to me, and I didn't have any friends."

Dr. Andrew Smith, associate director of counseling for the Student Counseling Service, said when depression settles in, a person's perspective about himself or herself changes.

"They begin to feel very negative and hopeless," he said. "Some think that this is just the way I am, and it is my fault and my problem. Sometimes they will have bad days, and sometimes they will have good days, but it is usually constant."

The student said it took a friend to point out what she might be going through was depression.

"My friend was a psychology major, so she was studying this kind of stuff," she said. "One day I was talking to her, and she just said, 'I think you are depressed.' It hit me like a ton of bricks. I could not admit to myself that this is what it could be. I felt that if I admitted being depressed then I would be considered some kind of nut."

The student said she was embarrassed to even let her family know how she was feeling.

"I knew they would think I was weak, and that I was just sorry for myself," she said. "Do you know how hard it is to be that the problems you were facing were because of your own doing? I was so ashamed to be me. So I told no one."

Dr. Anna Jenkins, psychologist at the Employee Assistance Program and coordinator of The Depression Screening Day, said in a city, we make people feel as if depression is not valid.

"Something just goes wrong in their life, and it does not have to be anything specific," Jenkins said. "People feel ashamed to admit they have a problem. We make them think it is absolute nothing. So they end up not telling anybody and just assuming it will go away."

There are several signs of depression, but Smith said the question of whether someone has depression cannot be diagnosed by the signs alone.

"There is not one simple answer to this," he said. "There is not a 'Yes you are,' or 'No you are not.' Some typical signs are not taking care of themselves. In general, they experience a loss of energy."

"There is a flip side to this as well. Some don't look depressed at all. They are trying to compensate for what they are feeling, but it is difficult for them. But this is not to say that all people who are this are depressed."

The student said most of the time she would wear the same clothes over and over again.

"Most people associated depression with wearing black, but beyond that," she said. "I did wear it a lot, but that was more because those were the clothes lying on the floor. I also wore it because the darker the colors the more I could blend into the background and not be noticed."

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Depression affects about 10 percent of the United States population — 17.6 million people. This is crossing all racial, gender, age, and religious lines.

One in four women and one in 10 men will experience depression in their lifetime.

Depression accounts for \$24 million a year in lost productivity. Smith said depression always has been a problem, but we are just beginning to look at it.

"The numbers seem to be high because society is now paying more attention to it," he said. "There are a lot of people who just don't know that this is an illness and that it can be diagnosed and treated. We are trying to help people through this."

Jenkins said it is important for everybody to gain more information and to be screened.

"I just feel, 'Why go through it when you don't have to,'" she said. "Yes, in time it may become less, but why put yourself through pain and misery?"

Jenkins said Thursday will mark the eighth National Depression Screening Day. The Employment Agency will be hosting events for the day on the A&M campus for faculty and staff only. The day will begin with a seminar about depression followed by a depression screening test. The Student Counseling Service will hold a depression screening day later in the year for all students.

Students who feel they may be suffering from depression can contact the Student Counseling Service Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or call the HelpLine, open 24 hours a day, at 845-2700.

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Questions? Call 845-1627