

The fatal consequence of depression

Why do people who have it all end it all?

The Philippine Star · 17 Jun 2018 · (You may email this author at nina.halilijao@gmail.com.) DR. NINA HALILI-JAO

With the recent deaths of two rich and famous international personalities Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, the public awareness of suicide has been heightened. As mental health-care providers have repeatedly stressed, depression is a mental health issue that requires proper attention and professional help. If depression is left unabated, the risk of fatal suicidal attempts may be the regretful sequel. The cry for help by depressed persons in the form of verbal or written messages of hopelessness and helplessness should not be taken for granted.



Illustration by JAYMEE L. AMORES

Depression can happen in all social classes, in people of every age and educational and occupational levels. Many still cannot seem to understand how persons who are rich and famous still choose the option to end their lives when they apparently have everything.

Depression is a real sickness that affects the brain. In fact, it is a serious illness caused by chemical changes in the brain. Other factors that may lead to a depressive condition are genetic predisposition, hormonal changes, stress, mourning or difficult life circumstances (for example cyberbullying and social network bashing and shaming). One or more of these aggravating factors may precipitate and activate changes in the brain that eventually produce depressive symptoms. It can affect a person's thoughts (cannot concentrate, cannot make decisions, thoughts of wanting to die, sometimes with delusions or hallucinations), feelings (sadness, hopelessness, loss of interest in family, friends and favorite activities) and behavior (inability to function at work and at home, substance abuse and social withdrawal).

In 2011, Julian Crowley wrote for Business Pundit an article titled "10 Millionaire Businessmen Who Committed Suicide." Despite their millions, they chose to end their lives through fatal methods. Included in the article was a 35-year-old British millionaire described as a happy and well-adjusted man. He was said to be extremely saddened by the stroke of his father. There was also a Jewish American millionaire businessman, who ended his life before a scandal broke that he had offered \$2.5 million bribe money to the president of Honduras in exchange for the reduction of export taxes for bananas. A 49-year-old Dutch millionaire banker became severely depressed following the take-over of his ABN Amro by the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Also in Crowley's article is a 50-year-old British businessman, who allegedly murdered and shot his wife and daughter prior to burning his house. He was rich because of his company's oil rig insulation technology but he was said to be living beyond his means and incurred debts, which pushed him to his tragic end. A successful businessman who had a lucrative lifestyle because of his profits in the publishing business had everything except that his wife was dying from cancer. The couple allegedly poisoned themselves with a certain substance that they ordered by mail from Mexico. He left a suicide note stating that he could not bear the thought of living alone.

A successful Taiwanese businessman who founded and chaired a securities broker allegedly ended his life triggered by allegations that he was regularly paying a former president of a university. A 54-year-old property businessman who had played polo with Prince Charles killed himself in 2010. He was said to have chronic cardiac problems and tumors, lost capital in his gas and oil surveying company, had married three times and was said to have plans for a fourth wedding.

Wealth and power in the above mentioned millionaires did not exempt them from severe depression. Psychologist Arnold Washton had said that "depression may also be more common in the people who had only known wealth, since they may not be familiar with bootstrapping themselves through difficult times. So, when they find themselves in bumpy or uncharted territory, they may not fare as well, and in fact may fare very poorly. Being born into wealth and privilege, people often show the opposite characteristics — they don't have the experience because they've been shielded from it. They might not respond as well. Whereas people who are really self-made and struggled a lot to get to the top may be more resilient."

Psychiatrist Michael Freeman of the University of California San Francisco Department of Psychiatry studied the relationship between depression and entrepreneurship. He said that "nearly half of the entrepreneurs in his study experienced mental health issues at some point in their lives." Why? He believes the personality traits often found in entrepreneurs — creativity, extroversion, open-mindedness and a propensity for risk — are also traits found with depression, ADHD, bipolar disorder and substance abuse."

Forbes writer Alice Walton wrote an article on why the super successful may get depressed after interviewing psychologists who have treated the high-functioning C-suite types and she said there are six primary reasons why there is more depression among entrepreneurs, CEOs and highly successful persons: 1. The competition is wearying. 2. Working all the time doesn't allow them to focus on simple things.

3. They may feel detached from their former selves. 4. Privilege may make them less resilient. 5. The industry can tear them down. 6. Their values may change over time. Depression can be treated and suicide can be prevented. In line with this, the Department of Health, together with the World Health Organization and Natasha Goulbourn Foundation, launched the Hopeline Project in September 2016 in order to connect depressed and suicidal persons to mental health-care providers via a phone-based crisis 24/7 hotline. The Hopeline numbers are 804-4673 and 0917-5584673.

Government and private hospital facilities in our country have out-patient and in-patient psychiatry services. To know who are the psychiatrists in your regions, you may contact the Philippine Psychiatric Association Inc. at 635-9598, e-mail philpsych.org@gmail.com or visit www.philpsych.ph.