

THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY AMONG BLACK MEN DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION RESIDING IN A TOWNSHIP IN PRETORIA

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Abstract

Background and Objectives:

Depression, characterised by emotional vulnerability, withdrawal, and diminished functioning, may conflict with dominant constructions of masculinity that emphasise strength, stoicism, and independence. This study explored how Black South African men diagnosed with depression negotiate masculinity within the context of these competing expectations. The objective was to understand how cultural norms shape experiences of depression, identity, and help-seeking.

Methods:

A qualitative, exploratory research design was employed within an interpretivist framework. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Black South African men diagnosed with depression and residing in a township in Pretoria. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to masculinity and mental health experiences.

Results:

The findings revealed significant tensions between traditional masculine ideals and the lived experience of depression. Key themes included pressure to fulfil gender roles, emotional suppression, identity disruption, coping strategies, and perceptions of help-seeking. Participants reported that depression undermined their perceived roles as providers and protectors, contributing to increased psychological distress. In response, some engaged in maladaptive coping strategies, including substance use, as a means of maintaining socially acceptable masculine identities. Although psychotherapy was initially viewed as inconsistent with masculine norms, some participants later experienced it as beneficial, suggesting a potential shift in attitudes towards mental health care.

Conclusion:

The study highlights the complex interplay between masculinity and depression among Black South African men, illustrating how rigid gender norms may exacerbate psychological distress and hinder help-seeking. While limited by a small, non-generalisable sample, the findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive interventions that engage with masculine identities to improve mental health outcomes.