Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), Depression, and Communication/Relationship Problems in Deaf People

National Institute for the Deaf

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Overview

- Seasonal Affective Disorder
- Depression
- Communication and Relationship Problems
  - How common are these problems in deaf people?
  - What might be causing some of these problems in deaf people?
  - What can you and we do to help reduce these problems in deaf people?
Seasonal Affective Disorder

- “Winter Blues”
- Occurs when there is less sun
- Same as depression
- Goes away when warmer weather returns
Summer SAD

- Less common than Winter SAD
- As hot weather approaches, those with summer SAD:
  - Eat less
  - Sleep less
  - Lose weight
  - Extremely irritable and agitated
Prevalence of SAD

• Affects millions of adults and children
• Varies with latitude
  – With more rigorous diagnosis, approximately 2-4% of population of Canada and 1-2% of US population, depending on geography.
• On average, an additional 10% suffer from subsyndromal SAD ("winter blues").
• Women 2-4 times as likely as men to have SAD, depending on study.
Core Symptoms of SAD

- Increased sleep (70-90% of SAD patients)
- Increased appetite (70-80%)
- Unacceptable weight gain (70-90%)
- Carbohydrate craving (80-90%)
Other Symptoms of SAD

- Fatigue/inability to carry out normal routine
- Feelings of misery, guilt, low self-esteem, despair, apathy
- Irritability
- Avoidance of social contacts ("hibernation" syndrome)
- Increased susceptibility to stress
- Decreased interest in physical contact
- Slow, sluggish, lethargic movements
- In some: mood swings and periods of hypomania in spring & autumn
What is Depression?

- Feeling sad or hopeless for weeks at a time
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling negative about yourself
- Not interested in fun stuff
- Avoiding friends and family

http://www.emtr.com.br/english/DEPRESSION.jpg
Depressed?

- Yes - if feeling sad or depressed for most of the time
- No - if only sad for a short time (e.g. a friend died)

- Common Symptoms of Depression
  - Can’t sleep
  - Not interested in fun stuff
  - Feel inferior or worthless
  - Tired all the time
  - Can’t concentrate
  - Eating a lot more or a lot less
  - Feeling sluggish or weak
  - Suicidal thoughts
Poor Mental Health Care Access

• ~2% of deaf individuals in need of mental health care received the appropriate care (Vernon, 1983)

• Causes of poor access:
  – Language barriers limit access for deaf
  – Mistrust in mental health community
  – Few mental health staff specializing in deaf care
Depression and Anxiety

- DHoH have higher rates of depression and anxiety when compared to hearing peers (Kvam et al., 2006)
  - Norwegian postal surveys ➔ Deaf Register versus hearing respondents to Nord-Trondelag Health Study
  - Below are those who responded quite a bit or extremely to 3 of the questions in the survey- a) fearful; b) hopeless; c) blue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deaf</th>
<th>Hearing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeless</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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</tbody>
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Communication/Relationship Problems in Deaf People

- Risk for deaf females with hearing male partners
- Poor coping strategies
- Little prior learned experience on how to handle relationship conflicts
Suicides in Deaf People

- There is suggestive evidence that there is increased risk of suicide among deaf individuals
  - Deaf and hard of hearing women had significantly increased odds of suicide attempts compared with females (Samar & O’Hearn - in press)
  - Suicide attempt rates among deaf school and college students in the previous year varied from 1.7% to 18% (Turner, 2006)
  - Higher rates of suicidal attempts and gestures among deaf students at deaf only education programs (2.2% vs 0.9% of those mainstreamed) (Critchfield et al., 1987)
Prevention of SAD

• People who have had repeated seasonal depression should talk to a mental health care professional about prevention methods. Starting treatment during the fall or early winter, before the symptoms of SAD begin, may be helpful.
Treatment for SAD

- Light therapy
- Medication
- Counseling
- Exercise
- Eat balanced meal
Strategies to Reduce Depression in Deaf People

- Ongoing interventional programs
- Use ASL fluent mental health experts
- Provide mentoring
- Provide educational programs and talks to the deaf community
Strategies to Reduce Communication and Relationship Problems

- Provide educational programs and talks on healthy relationships
- Encourage family members to sign even in private discussions
- Provide deaf mentors and deaf coaches
What You Can Do to Prevent SAD and Depression

- Exercise (body makes endorphins)
- Sunlight or light boxes (helpful for the “winter blues”)
- Healthy diet
  - Fish (omega 3 fatty acids)
  - Vegetables and fruits
  - Whole grains
  - Plenty of water
Get Counseling If You Need Help!!

- RIT’s counseling center offers counseling in American Sign Language

- Deaf Wellness Center at University of Rochester Medical Center also offers counseling in American Sign Language
Questions?

• Thank you for coming!