Depression and Personality Disorders

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When You Have More Than One Condition

It's not uncommon for a person to be diagnosed with depression, only to learn later that they also have a personality disorder. Studies have shown around 6-10% of the world’s population is affected by a personality disorder.

I am diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, but this diagnosis didn't happen until after I was told by my doctor that I had depression. The help I was receiving for my depression was helping very little, which increased my intense negative thoughts and behaviours and self harm — I thought I couldn’t be helped and my mental health would never improve.

Personality disorders are those that affect who we are as a person. They affects our thoughts, views, social abilities, how we perceive things and how we relate to others. It is not clear what causes a personality disorder, though some causes may be due to genetics, childhood trauma or abuse. Some examples of personality disorders are:

- **Avoidant personality disorder** – Long-term feelings of inadequacy that will cause a person to avoid situations in which they may feel like others will think negatively of them or judge them.
- **Borderline personality disorder** – Intense and overwhelming feelings of emptiness, being unsure of your identity and fears of abandonment or rejection. Also known as emotionally unstable personality disorder.
- **Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder** – Constant thoughts of control, perfectionism and/or orderliness. The person may show feelings of anger or stress if they are in an environment they cannot control.
- **Paranoid personality disorder** – Constant thoughts that others' actions are to exploit, harm or deceive them, often without any evidence. These thoughts can affect every relationship (family, friends, partners, colleagues).
- **Dependent personality disorder** – Feeling dependent on others and constantly seeking guidance. The person may feel they can’t live their lives without the help and guidance of another.
- **Histrionic personality disorder** – Intense unstable emotions and a need for constant approval from others, which they may obtain by seeking the attention in extreme or dramatic ways.

How Do Depression and Personality Disorders Interact?

So how can depression and personality disorders affect one another? Most personality disorders will cause intense emotions or thoughts. Depression can act alongside this to create even worse feelings of worthlessness.

Feeling unable to act and behave "normally" can also lead to feelings of anger, stress and self-loathing. In some cases, this can lead to self-harm or even suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Seeking help is crucial if you believe you may show signs of a personality disorder or if you believe there is something else affecting you alongside your depression. Personality disorders may not always be noticeable straight away, and diagnosis later in your treatment can affect your current situation and behaviours.

Seeking Help

Speaking to your doctor or therapist about your thoughts, behaviours and emotions is vital and can help you in your recovery. If you're unable to speak to a professional, confide in family, friends, partners or anyone you feel comfortable speaking to.

People you are close to on social media, online support groups or helplines are another way you can seek support. However you do it, it is important to acknowledge your symptoms and to seek appropriate help.

Helping a Loved One

If you notice these symptoms in a loved one, you may want to approach them and suggest seeking help. However, it is important to remember be sensitive in your approach. They may be sensitive to your words, and you can worsen their negative thoughts and behaviours if you don't approach the subject in a caring and correct manner.

Look into things you should say and shouldn’t say to someone with depression and ways you can talk to them about their problems. If they choose not to open up to you straightaway or at all, you must be understanding about this and deal with it appropriately.

Likewise if they open up to you or confide in you, you must not dismiss their emotions. They are putting trust in you by sharing their personal issues. Their mental health concerns affect them on a daily basis and should not be taken lightly.

There are different methods of treatment for personality disorders, including medication and therapy. However, constant support from family and friends is also a big help. Researching ways to support a loved one or speaking to a professional for advice can help.