

One in 10 Indians depressed, don't ignore subtle symptoms - The Times of India

[Malathy Iyer](#), TNN | Mar 29, 2015, 03.29AM IST



The neighbour who slams the front door every time, the co-worker who constantly fails to meet deadlines, the teacher whose scathing words never fail to reduce some students to tears every day, the rebellious teenager who smokes despite knowing it's injurious to health, the friend who is obsessed with alcohol could all have a common cause: depression.

MUMBAI: Extreme weepiness and severe melancholy are not the only calling cards of depression, a serious mental disorder that roughly affects 10% of the population. Doctors say the symptoms could be subtler or of a lower degree — a sudden habit of rash driving, making mean observations or even showing perpetual irritability.

As it emerges that Germanwings co-pilot Andreas Lubitz, who reportedly crashed a plane into the French Alps killing 150 people last week, was suffering from depression, doctors say there is a need to create greater awareness about the disorder.

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Depression is one of the biggest public health challenges because of its high incidence. "Research worldwide, including in India, suggests that at least one in five women and one in 10 men suffers from major depressive disorder at some time in their lifetime. Imagine you are walking on the street and there could be so many people in front of you who suffer from some degree of depression," said Dr Shamsah Sonawalla, consultant psychiatrist at Jaslok Hospital, Pedder Road.

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"Depression can have several symptoms. People who suffer from excessive exhaustion, snap easily, have difficulty in concentrating, conduct recurrent miscommunication, obsessively need to rush home after work or are preoccupied with gadgets or are continuously putting down colleagues on mails and social media could be depressed to some extent," said psychiatrist Dr Harish Shetty.

SYMPTOMS WE IGNORE
American National Institute of Mental

American National Institute of Mental Health lists following as symptoms

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable
- Decreased energy, fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Persistent headaches, cramps, digestive problems

He believes depression has become such an epidemic that people in high-risk jobs may soon be screened or counselled for depression as a rule. The problem is that very few admit to needing help. Said Dr Vishal Sawant, who heads the psychiatry department at civic-run Cooper Hospital in Juhu, "At present, people with corporate jobs don't like to reveal that they suffer from depression. They worry that they may be stigmatised at work or overlooked for promotions."

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Dr Shetty said a pilot was derostered for abusing benzodiazepine (anti-anxiety pills), and he nursed a grudge against the psychiatrist for years. "Hence, many pilots don't like to approach doctors empanelled by their airlines. They would rather go to a private doctor with their anxiety, depression or alcohol abuse. It is up to the airlines, or any employer for that matter, to conduct enrichment programmes that help employees with psychological issues integrate better with the workplace," said Dr Shetty.

On the bright side, doctors say there is better-than-before awareness about depression in cities. "People walk into my clinic saying they are depressed. This shows that there is better awareness among people as well as acceptance that they need help," said Dr Sawant.

Doctors say families and friends can help by noticing any sudden change in appetite, hobbies or sleeping patterns. "If a person stops doing what he or she previously liked doing, like an avid reader being unable to read any more, it could be a sign of depression. Depression can bring about subtle changes ever so slowly that many people miss it until much later. In fact, some people trace depression back to their childhood, saying they always felt low as far as they can remember," said Dr Sonawalla.

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