

Understanding Christmas Depression

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Abstract

Depression is quite common during the Christmas season. It does not matter your religious beliefs or affiliations or even if you are agnostic, atheistic, or minimally spiritual. This paper reviews some of the most salient issues that confront people, families and even children and adolescents during this time-period.

1. Introduction

Depression is a major mental health issue, and it is often accompanied by suicide. This is seen a great deal during the Christmas season. Mental health workers need to be aware of depression, the signs of suicidal cognitions and lethality [1].

Christmas seems to start earlier every year. It is not even Thanksgiving, but the stores begin their barrage of signs, advertisements and snowmen and holly and ivy that permeates the store. If you are a member of a church, the sermon is in the coming season and across the nation- Christmas trees are hauled out of some garage or closet and the onerous chore (for some) of putting up the tree with the tinsel and bulbs begins. Sadly, so does the depression and the heavy weight of Christmas.

People begin to reflect on, well, “Christmases’ past” to echo Charles Dickens and when they reminisce about past happy times and are faced with the writing of cards and sending of packages, there is a disconnect between “Christmas present” and the joyous memories of their youth.

For some the memories are of parents- giving gifts, perhaps toys, perhaps clothes and other necessities and in some instances, a wonderful Christmas dinner of turkey or ham or whatever.

For single individuals, Christmas brings home the fact that they are not married and do not have a family and the old song “I’ll be home for Christmas” is somewhat emotional- if they do not have a family.

Christmas for some is a haunting reminder for some that they may not have a home to go to.

Military stationed abroad have their own sets of depressive elements. Christmas IS a time to be with wives, children, significant others- and their loved ones. But sadly, they are off in some foreign fields, fighting for their lives and protecting American interests.

2. Money and Christmas and Expectations

Gift giving is a major problem. The more friends and relatives and colleagues that one has- the more stress is apparent.

Purchasing for a “Secret Santa” becomes another stressful event- as one wonders what their secretary or administrative assistant could possibly want for under five dollars- and the five-dollar limit is about as impossible a figure as could be imagined.

3. Marriage, Divorce and Christmas

When Christmas rolls around, one’s thoughts return to the past and past loves and past wives, now deceased, or divorced. Some begin to wonder as to what their exes are doing now. Depression sets in, recriminations begin, self- blame for the failure of the marriage begins and thus starts a vicious cycle that lasts long into the New Year.

Christmas invariably brings back childhood memories. For some they were wonderful events with presents under the tree— but for others living in poverty, there was pervasive sadness and yearning as they may have seen presents a plenty in the local stores.

For some, Christmas brings the end of the year and invariably, people look back on what may not have been accomplished. People look back on wasted time, people look back at funerals that they may have attended, and friends that they have lost.

Christmas carols permeate the air waves and while it is supposed to be “the most wonderful time of the year” for some, in reality, it is not.

Depression sets in as some feel that because others are happy and joyous, that they should be too.

4. 9/11

For those individuals who have lost friends, loved one and relatives, Christmas simply brings back the fact that those who are departed in the 9/11 event are missing. Some died on that day, some survived and have passed and yet others died because of injuries sustained on that day.

Those who are recovering from surgery in a hospital may feel that they are losing out on festivities with their family. After all, Christmas is a time to be with family.

And for those whose parents are deceased, and they are single or divorced, the pain of loneliness sets in- and loneliness is a psychic not a physical phenomenon.

Even counselors begin to feel depression and to feel overwhelmed by the number of clients who want to discuss their feelings of numbness, of incompetence, of stress, and their disconnect between the religious aspects of Christmas and the secular aspects of Christmas.

Some irrational beliefs of Christmas:

1. Everyone else is happy so I should be happy too.
2. Everyone must be glad because it is Christmas because all the television shows revolve around Christmas.
3. Hallmark has all these Christmas shows that show everyone so happy- why can't I be happy?
4. Another Christmas and I am still single. Why can't I find a smoldering volcano of virile manhood to be with?
5. Why did I not start to save for Christmas earlier?
6. Why do these people have to X out Christmas? What is wrong with a manger?
7. What should the purpose of Christmas really be? What if the good Lord could only tell us?
8. Hopefully this Christmas will be different- I know it can be- Maeve Binchy wrote a book on it?
9. All these Christmas movies---I have seen them all before- so boring and trite and mundane- never anything new.
10. Are all those people on television really that happy?

5. Summary and Conclusions

This paper has cursorily reviewed a phenomenon that confronts mental health workers and counselors during the Christmas season. Understanding the dynamics of this realm of depression may be helpful to facilitate coping with Christmas and holiday depression.

REFERENCES

1. Shaughnessy MF, Johnson A. Depression and Suicide: The Need for Awareness of Signs of Suicidal Cognitions and Lethality. *J Advances Med Med Res.* 2019;29(8):1-8.