



New Trends  
in Psychology

## The Influence of Major Depressive Disorder in Romantic Relationships

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**Abstract:** In its nature, humans are social beings, and for this reason, relationships play a crucial role in the daily activities of every individual. In the case of romantic relationships, the behaviors of each partner represent a very important factor in deciding whether or not the relationship is going to last. Behaviors stemming from certain personal disorders influence the way the relationship unfolds. This paper identifies and details both the challenges faced by partners who suffer from major depressive disorder and those faced by individuals who are in a relationship with someone diagnosed with major depressive disorder.

**Keywords:** major depressive disorder; relationship communication; behavioral changes; stigma; isolation; relationships

### 1. Introduction

Major depressive disorder is a complex medical condition characterized by a wide range of symptoms, including profound sadness, loss of interest in usual activities, changes in appetite and sleep, alterations in behavior, reduced energy, and excessive self-criticism. These changes can vary from mild to severe, depending on the severity of depression and how it affects the individual. It can significantly impact a romantic relationship.

Such an impact includes difficulties in communication, behavioral changes, tension, loss of intimacy, challenges in maintaining daily responsibilities, and even stigma or

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judgment from the partner. Support and understanding from the partner are essential, and seeking treatment and therapy can be crucial for managing depression within the context of a romantic relationship. (Torres, 2020).

## 2. Specific Aspects of Depressive Disorder

Major depressive disorder can have significant effects on a romantic relationship. Depression is a medical condition, not just a personality trait or emotional weakness. The ways in which major depressive disorder influences a relationship are as follows:

- a) **Difficulty in communicating:** An individual suffering from depression may struggle to communicate openly with their life partner. This can lead to misunderstandings and increased tension in the relationship. At times, the affected person may withdraw and become more isolated, making communication even more challenging (Dall, Fellingner, & Holzinger, 2022).
- b) **Behavioral changes:** Depression leads to significant behavioral changes, such as a lack of energy, decreased interest in previously enjoyed activities, and a decrease in libido. These changes can affect intimacy and emotional connection within the relationship. (Kennard, 2012)
- c) **Stigma and judgment:** Often, major depressive disorder is misunderstood or stigmatized, leading to negative biases from others or life partners. This can worsen the individual's depression and break trust in the relationship (Cosentino, 2023).
- d) **Challenges in maintaining daily responsibilities:** Depression can make it difficult for the affected person to fulfill daily responsibilities, such as household maintenance or childcare. This can place additional pressure on the partner and the relationship as a whole. (Leonard, 2023).
- e) **Therapy and treatment:** Therapy and treatment are vital for managing major depressive disorder. However, the individual who suffers from depression may be reluctant or may face challenges in seeking help. The partner plays an important role in supporting their loved one to seek treatment and participate in therapy sessions (Torres, 2020).

### 3. Common Behavioral Changes

The behavioral changes associated with a depressive disorder vary from person to person. These changes do not reflect a lack of willpower or the weakness of the depressed individual. Treatment, which may include therapy and/or medication, helps manage and alleviate the symptoms of depression.

Some of the most common behavioral changes include: (Torres, 2020):

- *Social isolation* - many individuals with depression withdraw and socially isolate themselves. They may avoid interactions with friends and family, even the social activities that used to bring them joy.
- *Loss of interest in activities* - People with depression lose interest or pleasure in activities they once found enjoyable and satisfying. This includes hobbies, sports, reading, or any other activity that used to bring them joy.
- *Sleep changes* - Depression can lead to sleep disturbances. Some individuals may experience insomnia, which involves difficulties falling asleep or waking up early in the morning, while others may experience hypersomnia, sleeping excessively.
- *Changes in appetite* - Changes in appetite and body weight can be observed in depressive disorders. Some people eat too little and may lose weight, while others overeat and become overweight.
- *Decreased energy* - Individuals with depression may experience a significant decrease in energy levels. They feel tired, lethargic, and lack motivation to perform daily tasks.
- *Difficulty concentrating and decision-making* - Cognitive functions, including the ability to concentrate and make decisions, suffer from changes. There may be difficulties in completing tasks or finding the right words during conversations.
- *Excessive self-criticism* - A common feature of depression is excessive self-criticism. People with depression can be overly harsh on themselves, exhibiting a high level of self-criticism and self-blame.
- *Self-destructive behaviors* - In some cases, depressive disorder can lead to self-destructive behaviors, such as excessive alcohol consumption, substance abuse, or self-harm.
- *Lack of initiative* - Depression can make it difficult for a person to take on responsibilities or initiate new activities. A sense of paralysis and a lack of motivation may also be present.

- *Suicidal thoughts* - Some individuals with depression may experience suicidal thoughts or self-harming tendencies. This is a severe manifestation of depression and requires immediate medical assistance.

#### **4. Difficulties in Relationships**

Stigma and criticism surrounding individuals with major depressive disorders exacerbate their suffering and often deter them from seeking help as readily as others might. An essential aspect of treating depressive disorders is destigmatizing the symptoms in individuals suffering from depression. Depression is frequently stigmatized in society. People with depression may be wrongly perceived as weak, lazy, or simply not trying hard enough to recover. This stigma can lead to social isolation and avoidance of seeking help. Consequently, individuals begin to self-stigmatize. People with depression can internalize the societal stigma, feelings of guilt, shame, and a decrease in self-confidence (Leonard, 2023).

Moreover, criticism from a life partner, negative comments, or a lack of understanding can worsen the impact of depression and make the individual feel isolated and rejected. Individuals with depression tend to distance themselves from their partner because they underestimate the seriousness of the situation. Sometimes, people may underestimate the severity of the condition and offer advice such as “you just need to get over it” or claim that “everyone goes through tough times.” This can diminish the person’s suffering and make them feel unsupported.

When these types of misunderstandings arise, the romantic relationship faces new challenges. Communication declines because individuals with depression develop difficulties in expressing themselves or effectively communicating with their partner. They may also withdraw when feeling guilty or neglect communication in the relationship because they are unable to handle certain discussions or avoid those in which they believe their partner truly doesn’t understand. This can lead to increased tension between the two and feelings of misunderstanding in the relationship. Consequently, frequent changes in mood, such as sadness, irritability, or apathy, may occur. These changes, in turn, impact the mood in the relationship and make it challenging to maintain a healthy emotional connection.

The common thread among these issues is that they break the connection between the individuals. In this case, it results in a loss of interest in activities that they used

to engage in as a couple, including recreational, social, and even intimate sexual activities.

## 5. Methods of Handling a Major Depressive Disorder

Treatment for depression is personalized. What works for one person may not work for another. The crucial aspect in this case is for a specialist to develop a personalized treatment plan with the afflicted individual and monitor progress over time. Additionally, support from a romantic partner plays a crucial role in the recovery of the person affected by depression.

A partner can support the individual with depression by receiving accurate information about the condition in order to counter any type of misunderstandings. Moreover, it is necessary for open dialogue between the two, creating a safe space where the person with depression can feel that they are understood and supported, and not alone on this journey of personal healing. Support from the partner may involve sharing responsibilities, providing encouragement and understanding in order to help contribute to maintaining a daily routine. On the other hand, help can also mean offering moral support when the person with depression sets small, achievable goals to help tackle daily responsibilities step by step and increase their sense of control over life.

In line with this, it is important for individuals with depression to seek professional help from a therapist or psychiatrist and consider treatment, which may include therapy and/or medication. The treatment for an individual with depressive disorder can vary depending on the severity and specific components of the depression. However, effective treatment for depression often include a combination of therapy and, in some cases, medication.

The existing forms of therapy are as follows (National Health Service, 2023):

a. *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)*: CBT is a form of therapy that focuses on identifying and changing negative thoughts and behaviors that contribute to being unable to manage depression. The therapist helps the patient develop skills for managing emotions and changing distorted perceptions.

b. *Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)*: It focuses on the patient's interpersonal relationships and helps understand how they may contribute to depression. Interpersonal therapy concentrates on improving relationships and communication skills.

c. *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)*: ACT helps the patient develop the capacity to accept negative thoughts and feelings and engage in building personal values and goals.

d. *Group Therapy*: Participation in group therapy can provide patients with a supportive environment to share experiences and learn from individuals going through similar situations.

e. *Adjunct Therapy*: In addition to primary therapy and medication, other forms of treatment, such as occupational therapy, art therapy, or exercise therapy, can be beneficial.

## 6. Conclusions

Recognizing the seriousness and importance of treating major depressive disorder, as well as seeking medical and psychological help, when necessary, is an essential aspect in reducing the increasing incidence of this disorder. With proper treatment, support, and time, many individuals can regain control of their lives and experience a significant improvement in their mental health. Regarding romantic relationships, the treatment of major depressive disorder is indispensable for maintaining a healthy couple's life, as it can contribute to improving communication, self-esteem, stress management, and quality of life. Through treatment, conflicts and isolation can be avoided, and partners can find mutual support and understanding during these challenging times.

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