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## **Depression in men, suicidal tendencies and use of psychoactive substances**

### **Analysis of risk and protective factors**

#### **Introduction**

According to statistics, men in Poland suffer less from mental disorders than women, but it is men who have been committing suicides for years far more often (approx. 6: 1) [1]. In the analysis of the etiology of suicidal behavior, two groups of factors are important – the suicidogenic situational system and the individual suicidal tendencies. Suicide can occur only after a specific suicidogenic situational system comes into contact with a specific type of individual suicidal tendencies [2]. The occurrence of depression in men, hospitalization and coexistence of other mental disorders, e.g. alcohol addiction, significantly increases the risk of committing suicide [3]. Blumenthal et al. [4] pointed at the existence of the so-called the deadly suicide triad of overlapping impulsive and aggressive personality traits, substance abuse and depression. It has been proven that this triad occurs significantly more often in men. It was found that the majority (even 82%) of people who took their own life experienced symptoms of mental disorders, the most common being depression and alcohol addiction [5]. Moreover, the scientific literature mentions the frequent occurrence of male depression among men, the symptoms of which vary from the clinical picture of classic depression adopted in the diagnostic criteria. This may result in underestimating the actual number of men suffering from depressive disorders. In Poland, the National Suicide Prevention Program has not been implemented yet and the National Depression Prevention Program for 2016–2020 did not provide any actions targeted at men. Taking into consideration the experience of other countries, there were recommendations developed for creating social campaigns and mental health promotion programs that can be used in activities targeted at men. The basis for effective preventive actions, however, is to estimate the health needs of men [6]. So far, no study has been carried out on the population of Polish men that analyze the relationship between the occurrence of male depression syndromes, substance abuse and suicidal behavior. This study can be the starting point for a comprehensive male suicide prevention strategy.

#### **Aim of the study**

Analysis of men's mental health problems, with particular emphasis on depressive disorders, psychoactive substance use and suicidal behavior, and development of guidelines for mental health programs that take into account the current needs of this group.

### **Specific objectives**

1. Analysis of problems related to suicide and male mental health problems.
2. Review of the scientific literature on the occurrence of depressive disorders in the group of men and the conditions that affect their course.
3. Reviewing the current social campaigns on mental health targeting men and developing guidelines for the development of future campaigns.
4. Review of the scientific literature on mental health promotion and development of recommendations for the development of mental health promotion programs for men.
5. Analysis of the relationship between depression, alcohol and tobacco use, personal resources and sociodemographic variables among men.
6. Analysis of the intensity of symptoms of male depression, alcohol and tobacco consumption, the level of personal resources and suicidal behavior among men from three different groups – men with depressive disorders, men with physical disorders and healthy men.
7. Creating models of risk factors and protective factors related to the level of depression and suicidal behavior among men from three different groups – men with depressive disorders, men with physical disorders and healthy men.

### **A series of publications constituting a PhD dissertation**

#### **Publication I – *Suicides and Male Mental Health. Psychiatry and clinical psychology, 2020, 20 (3), p. 191-195.***

The work is an introduction to the series of publications. The study analyzes male mental health problems with particular emphasis on suicidal behavior. The authors answered the questions:

- Why are men more likely to experience atypical symptoms of mental disorders?
- What are the current mental health problems in men?
- Why in Poland men commit suicide six times more often than women?
- What should be done to improve the current mental health situation of Polish men?

#### **Publication II – *Depression in men – specificity, etiology and relationships with suicidal tendencies and the use of psychoactive substances: a review of the literature, Advances in Psychiatry and Neurology, 2020, 29(1), p. 54-66.***

The work is a review of the literature on the specificity of depressive disorders among men. It presents issues related to atypical symptoms of depression occurring in men, an attempt was made to describe them in detail. The literature review also confirmed the complexity of the problem of depressive disorders among men and the close relationship between depression, addictions and suicides.

**Publication III – *Examples of mental health campaigns targeted at men, Clinical Psychiatry and Psychology, 2020, 20(3), p. 196–201.***

This article provides an overview of social campaigns on mental health issues addressed to men. The work has a theoretical-practical dimension – in addition to theoretical considerations, the essence of the article was to provide a detailed description of practical activities and develop guidelines for future campaigns.

**Publication IV – *Promotion of men's mental health, Psychiatry, 2020, 17(4), p. 212–215.***

This paper is a review of the scientific literature on mental health promotion, with particular emphasis on recommendations for the development of male mental health promotion programs. On this basis, recommendations for the development of male mental health promotion programs have been developed.

**Publication V – *The use of psychoactive substances and the level of personal resources among men with depressive disorders – a pilot study, Psychiatry, 2021, 18(2), p. 79–87.***

This article is a pilot study to establish a link between depression, alcohol and tobacco use, natural resources and sociodemographic variables in men. A sample of 40 men with a diagnosed depressive disorder (F31 – depressive phase, F32 and F33) treated in the 2nd Psychiatric Clinic of the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology and 40 men from the control group were tested using the AUDIT test, the Fagerström test, CECS, GSES, SWLS, GMDS (used only among the control group to exclude men with depressive symptoms from further analysis) and a demographic survey. The frequency of abuse of psychoactive substances by men with depression was similar to that in the control group. Men with depression were characterized by a lower sense of self-efficacy and life satisfaction.

**Publication VI – *Occurrence of male depression symptoms, suicidal behaviors, the alcohol and tobacco use and level of personal resources in three male groups, Journal of Men's Health, 2021, p. 1–11.***

The article presents the results of a study on the severity of male depression symptoms, alcohol and tobacco use, the level of personal resources and suicidal behaviors in three different groups – in men with depressive disorders (clinical group) (n=197), men with physical disorders (control group 1) (n=183) and healthy men (control group 2) (n=197). Several tests were used in the assessment: demographic questionnaire, AUDIT test, Fagerström questionnaire, GSES, Mini-COPE, KOP-26, SBQ-R and GMDS. Men with depression have had suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts more often in the past than men from control groups. The highest number of smokers with high or very high levels of nicotine addiction and all types of alcohol addiction were reported in the clinical group. Moreover, they declared the lowest level of self-efficacy and mental resilience. Based on the GMDS questionnaire, 65% of patients in the clinical group showed male symptoms of depression. In view of the results obtained, it seems particularly important to strengthen self-efficacy, effectively strategy of dealing with stress and prevent abuse of psychoactive substances among men.

**Publication VII – *Factors related to the level of depression and suicidal behavior among men with diagnosed depression, physically ill men and healthy men, Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2021, 12: 644097.***

The article describes models of risk and protective factors related to the level of depression and suicidal behavior among men from three different groups – in men with depressive disorders (n=197), men with physical disorders (n=183) and healthy men (n=197). Several tests were used in the assessment: demographic questionnaire, AUDIT test, Fagerström questionnaire, GSES, Mini-COPE, KOP-26, SBQ-R and GMDS. In men with depression, the strong protective factors against depression and suicidal behavior were as follows: vocational education, active coping, turning towards religion, social competence for resilience and bachelor status. The risk factors in this group were as follows: unemployed status, student status, low satisfaction with financial situation, having children, history of mental disorders in family, alcohol addiction and seeking instrumental support. In the group of men with physical disorders, the following protection factors were identified: medium or small city as a place of living, active coping, venting and personal competence. Psychiatric treatment in the past was the only identified risk factor in this group. In the group of healthy men, the following protective

factors were identified: medium city as a place of living, positive reappraisal, planning abilities, personal and social competence for resilience. In this group the following risk factors were identified: vocational and higher education, student status, satisfaction with financial situation, having more than one child, occurrence of mental disorders in family, occurrence of alcohol abuse in family and use of psychoactive substances as a strategy of dealing with stress. The risk factors identified in this study should be included in clinical assessment of depression and suicidal behavior risk in male patients. There are some protective factors identified, including: productive coping, personal and social competences, which can be developed and should be especially considered and strengthened in mental health promotion programs aimed at men.

## **Summary**

The series of publications for this dissertation comprehensively addresses the topic of mental health problems and mental health promotion in men. The first two review articles review the literature on men's mental health problems, suicidal behavior, depressive disorders, alcohol abuse and tobacco addiction. The aim of the next review article was to provide an accurate description of global social campaigns addressed to men and, on this basis, to develop guidelines for future actions addressed to this group. The next article is an original publication which is a compendium of knowledge on mental health promotion for men. The next three publications are contribution to the need for a study that would provide results on variables important from the point of view of the aetiology of suicidal behavior among men. The activities which have been carried out for years at the Mental Health Promotion Festival in Poland have not been implemented yet. This research provides data on important factors determining depressive disorders and suicidal behaviors, and thus constitutes a basis for building the National Program for Prevention of Suicide, which would pay special attention to the specificity of men's mental health.