

# Health Humanities: Dealing with Depression and the Power of Books to help sustain the Journey-Reviews & Inferences

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**Dr. M. Anandhi**

*Professor & Head, Department of English*

*Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science for Women, Coimbatore*

## Abstract

*Clinically, Depression can be defined as, "A mental health disorder characterised by persistently depressed mood or loss of interest in activities, causing significant impairment in daily life." The causes may vary from biological, psychological, environmental to lifestyle reasons. The complex interactions between all the above mentioned factors can lead to depression. Life style alterations like loss of a loved one, personal habits etc., can also trigger depression. Psychological and pharmacological remedies exist for different stratas of depression. However, In countries like India there is very less awareness in the view of it. People in the villages still lack the awareness and blame it on witchcraft or the inhabiting of bad spirits. In low- and middle-income families treatment and support services for depression are often inattentive or below advanced. An projected range of 76–85% of people suffer from mental disorders in countries that lack access to the treatment they need.*

*On a clinical angle, there are plenty of perspectives to deal with it depending on the harshness of the finding. It first needs to be understood as a disease that could be cured leading to the aplenty treatment methodologies, though the role of books that deal with depression, and a healthy way out is less comparatively. This research article deals with this particular branch of health humanities and analyses some of the books that could be powerful curatives in dealing with depression. It tries to identify the importance of reading these books and tries to bring an alternative method of dealing with depression on the whole*

**Keywords:** Health humanities, Literature, Depression, Mental disorder, Psychological, Alternative.

## Introduction

Depression is a mood ailment that takes a continuous sentiment of melancholy and loss of interest. It seems to be different from the mood. It is different from the mood instabilities that normally people experience as a part of their life. When it comes to the causes of depression, it might vary from some personal losses, death of a close relative or the loss of a job, can lead to depression. But to consider grief is only a part of depression not the whole of it, and depression seems to be an endless journey, which can be actually ended only if the individual really works for betterment. Depression includes symptoms that range from days to month and years. Sometimes it

can last forever. Research says that on an average around 264 million people are affected due to depression world wide.

The most evident symptom might be the lack of interest in activities, precisely the ones which the person might have felt pleasurable previously. Once affected, the normal day today activities of the person might get altered as the person might witness lack of sleep, appetite, tiredness and inability to concentrate. Though not recognised all over the world as a treatable disease, people try to live with it, not knowing that there are ways to overcome the same. Depression can completely handicap a person's abilities and definitely at one point of time cause irreversible damages to his/her self. Little is known about the treatment methods, altering the life style mechanisms and ways to deal with it. People never tend to accept that at some point of life everyone is prone to some sorts of ailments close to mild & severe bouts of depression. When we come to think about the alternative methods of treating,

As a result of a research study conducted by Reading Agency and summarized by the Independent, it was found that, "*Reading for pleasure can increase self-esteem, reduce symptoms of depression, help build better relationships with others, and reduce anxiety and stress*" (Words alive, Pelt, Jennifer van) This article on health humanities deals with the same phenomena, and tries to divulge into various books fiction and non-fiction that help cope with depression. Reviews and inference are presented which will be really helpful as a study guide in knowing some best books to help come out of depression and move toward a healthy lifestyle.

### **The Onset of Depression & Ways of Dealing**

As researches indicate though depression arises from a chemical imbalance, it is easier said because the complexities of the disease is far more than that. Again it is to be understood that only the chemical imbalance of the hormones, or certain brain chemicals is not the only cause. There are several revolving causes that trigger depression, like the environment, genetic factors, life events, and certain medicines or medical problems. So as stated earlier, it may be one or more factors leading to depression.

Though certain chemicals are definitely involved in the process of altering the brain functionality or tuning depression, it cannot be just like that stated as too high or too low chemical composition leads to depression, as apart from this medically also there are several billion chemicals that work in and out of the nerve cells that altogether make up the beautiful vibrant system responsible for our mood swings, happiness, and how we perceive life. Thus this complex episode may appear as similar from the outside is way to too complicated from the inside, so treatment methods also might differ as well.

### **Genes and their Role**

When it comes to understanding depression from a clinical perspective, our genes have a nominal role to play. There are certain genes which make us captives of certain moods and influences our responses to drug therapies too. Though scientists have fairly argued about their advances in medical science in understanding the functionalities of the brain but still there are certain passages that are still unlit, and thus mysteries unresolved. When we think of emotions, we tend to connect it immediately with our heart, but science connects it with the seats in our brain. There are certain areas in our brain which help to regulate the mood in a person. Medical researchers believe that the levels of brain chemicals, nerve cell connections, their growth, and the functioning of certain circuits have a major role to play in depression, but still research has a long way to go when it comes to the alterations, or neurological foundations.

## Can Reading Change things For Better ?

In 2018, a famous author who wanted to go anonymous was diagnosed with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). It was also the same disorder that affected 1 in 15 people in Britain during rainy or winter season when people could not have an usual social life. (This also might have the same concoctions of effect during COVID 19- the pandemic too !)

He said that during the time he was affected by SAD he used to take solace in books, which though accepted or not is a form of therapeutic relief. He started reading with a voracity, he turned back to reading classics all over and again for that familiar sense of home coming. He aslo read a lot of books set in Africa. When the cold becomes unbearable he would reach for Titi Dandarenga's *Nervous Conditions*. He further analyses the character Nyasha, who embodies the mental disparity of girls who is the best example of a model diasporic woman who is caught between her cultural customs and western ideals. He further identifies that he could find solace in others' lives. Art and fiction can act as tools here as pointed out by the writer. Even if you find that the whole core of your self shakes, you could still broaden your visions of imaginations through the books you are reading thus forget the everyday troubles of life. The sense of community that one finds in books, the characters which live through your imagination can as well become a great friend to the reader.

According to JJ Bola, the poet and author of *No Place to Call Home*, “*the world can get you so down you feel like you're the only person going through what you're going through. But then you read and you realise that you are not alone; that if someone else has gone through it and survived, then maybe you can, too*” So it can be aptly said that the reader will definitely find if he searches for it in the books, the thought that someone else has been through the same journey will definitely make it easier to travel. Reading can have unbelievable effects on one's brain we are transported atleast temporarily out of the present and tend to live a life filled with imaginary happenings. To quote D.H Lawrence, “one sheds one's sickness in books”.

Though books can be definitely a way of solace, books alone will not help if a person is on severe bouts of depression, it is better to be understood that books help in accelerating the healing process. As medical practitioners may argue the chances of making a paerson suffering from depression to read , but it cannot be denied that the more a person reads, lesser are his chances towards dealing with depression. But it is easier said than done as in actual, the person who suffers from it will find it difficult to concentrate.

## Books and their Effect Over the Depressed Mind

Books can be one of the most important ways, which can enlighten our paths on varied occasions. There are numerous books on Depression to be mentioned, This article tries to give a purview over a selected list and why these are important in treating Depression. These select books deal with a clinical angle with real life stories on depression and the way to master the same. There are a mixed bunch of books on these human experiences, that explain the real time struggle of people who at last found their way out of this long tunnel of despair. Some of the books in a very light-hearted way help in overcoming the struggle.

The first on the list is a book by Lawrence Wallace on *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: 7 Ways to Freedom from Anxiety, Depression, and Intrusive Thoughts*. This book comes out with a cue card that happiness is trainable and achievable too. The author throughout his book lays out useful methods that will help the reader to become empathetic towards themselves, love them better to find that eventual happiness. The trainable methods are based on mindfulness & cognitive behavioural therapy which are the most powerful ways of healing depression.

*Control your Depression*, a book by Peter Lewinsohn helps identify the core of depression by analysing the ways in which a depressed mind works, how depressed people think , what is actually happening in them etc., he does not stop at that but offers way out to cure the same

In his book *The Depression Cure: The 6-Step Program to Beat Depression Without Drugs*, Stephen S. Ilardi quickly clarifies the six important elements, which are proven scientifically and historically as the pace setters, which when slowed down to the basics can cure depression from bottom up.

The next book is *Depression-Free, Naturally: 7 Weeks to Eliminating Anxiety, Despair, Fatigue, and Anger From Your Life* by Joan Mathews Larson, Ph.D. Most of the books on depression are usually written by psychologists and those who fought it themselves, this book offers a totally new perspective , written by a nutritionist. Larson throughout her book offers different Poof that will supplement for naturally boosting one's health and mind and she also indicates various deficiencies that lead to the same.

*The Depression Workbook: A Guide for Living with Depression and Manic Depression* by Mary Ellen Copeland can be listed as one book that is for readers who need motivation to take a control of their health. The book helps its readers to boost their self confidence and spells out ways to handle depression rather skilfully. The book also provides a way wherein readers can create their own plans to manage depression

The next book on the list, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* by David D. Burns, M.D. Explains the need to overcome our moods and emotions with mind control on the whole. It lays on the main notion that you can change the way you feel by changing the way you think. Dr. Burns provides rather easy ways to prevent our mind from getting distorted leading to depression. Anxiety & anger. He also provides a lot of exercises to replace negative thoughts in order to feel good.

*The Mindful Way Through Depression* by Collected Authors deals with mindfulness as a tool for focusing on emotions & experiences , which can break the cycle of unhappiness which leads to depression. This book is written by a group of collective authors , who clarify that our attempts to cut off from an unwanted situation is quite harmful, but instead the authors advise us to sidestep the mental habits that eventually leads to despair and self-blame. This side stepping can offer a clear and definite view to face life's challenges in a better way with more strength.

*Lost Connections* by Johann Hari is a New York Times Best seller. This book offers a fundamental, distinct way of thinking which can be helpful in dealing with anxiety. The author himself suffered from depression since childhood and was on anti-depressants for a long time. Though his condition was purely medical, after growing up he started investigating on conditions leading to it, and made a revolutionary discovery that depression & anxiety are not caused by imbalance in brain chemicals, but with the way we live in mostly. His journey paved way for discovering 7 different ways or solutions that helps in dealing with it his TED talk “

“Everything You Think You Know About Addiction Is Wrong.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY9DcIMGxMs>) has more than eight million viewers *In Undoing Depression*, Richard O’Connor deals with various factors adjoining depression like genetic, environmental etc., There is one important thing about this book is that it deals with our own habits as a causative for depression again. How we tend to live with it, hiding the fact that we are suffering internally, not admitting the damage done to us everyday, we try to embrace it. But this book helps one to cut off the roots of depression, and pave way for completely recovering from it.

The Upward Spiral by Alex Korb predicts how depression can be a downward spiral pulling us into its core of sadness, anxiety, tiredness & lack of interests. Korb reveals the science behind depression and places practical solutions and effective methods to deal with it in a better way. This book offers a lot of tips to rewind yourselves thus making an upward spiral towards betterment. It speaks about the smaller steps in the right direction can have deeper effects, which can reshape our brain for betterment, like one small change at a time.

*The Noonday Demon* by Andrew Solomon is an award winning master piece on transforming depression, it deals with various aspects of it with regard to social, personal, cultural & political terms. The book has several important additions like suicide recovery, usage of anti-depressants pregnancy & depression and much more. It deals with the agonies of the disease at the same time also gives a glistening hope towards betterment. The book presents its insights through the author's own struggles, interviews with doctors, philosophers and drug designers. He defines the illness with the methods of cure, with explanations for the causes as well. He takes the reader into an uncommon, humane journey through the lives of people who lived and won depression

*How to Be Happy (Or at Least Less Sad): A Creative Work book* by Lee Crutchley is designed for those who actually requires a workbook, which will serve as a friend, creative outlet, a blanket or a secret diary, which will people to discover their everyday joy ,life's simple pleasures and tunes them towards a better life altogether.

*How to Weep in Public: Feeble Offerings on Depression from One Who Knows* by Jacqueline Novak can be treated as a self-help book depicting how to deal with depression, The book is not aimed at a cure , but helps the reader by providing the tips to sail through depression rather effectively

*I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression* by Terrence Real treats the less discussed area of male depression. The book exclusively deals with Male depression, the way in which it affects the men and their families and in what way it differs from female depression. The book also lists certain tips to curtail and to manage male depression on the whole.

## Conclusion

In the words of British philosopher Sir Roger Scruton “*Consolation from imaginary things is not an imaginary consolation.*” People with depression feel that they are isolated and removed from everyone else , this feel can be lessened with regard to reading books. Reading fiction enables us to move in this fictional world which may be a temporary escapade to see/deal with things in a better way afterwards. As well as a non-fiction book helps/provides strategies to help in managing the symptoms of the disease. Most of the Researches on illness/ailment have atleast mentioned reading as one important form of therapy. The treatment itself can be aptly named as bibliotherapy. The above listed books and their inferences have provided an insight into the nature of the disease and to manage living with it but definitely not adjusting but on an upward spiral.

## Sources

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### Chapter eBooks

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