



Mental Health for Men



Common Problems ~
Practical Solutions

by John Ashfield PhD



Dr John Ashfield PhD

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IMPORTANT NOTE

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Introduction

This book deals with a range of topics important to male mental health, as well as some basic self-help strategies. But in case that sounds a bit tame, keep reading because it also dares to challenge several popular myths and stereotypes about male mental health, and tackles some hotly debated issues such as how we understand mental health, and the tendency of some mental health commentators, mental health professionals, and the mass media to unnecessarily medicalise mental health difficulties. The book also touches on the issue of services for men: how difficult it can be sometimes for men to obtain appropriate and confidential professional support when they need it.

Mental health difficulties mentioned in the book are those that are termed *high prevalence* difficulties – those that are most common and that affect a significant percentage of the male population. Less common and usually more serious mental health difficulties are not discussed here, both because they represent a quite small percentage of mental health difficulties overall, and because they have a degree of complexity that is best read about in more detail than space here allows.

Though this is clearly a book written for men, it will doubtless be of interest to women too: women who care about men, and whose own health and wellbeing is of course inseparable from that of the men in their lives.



True, False, and Somewhere In-between

There are more mental health difficulties amongst men than women

The prevalence of mental disorder amongst men is approximately equal to that of women

Men suffer from more depression than women

Twice as many women experience depression compared with men

After disaster situations (like bushfires and floods) men suffer more from PTSD than women

In general, at least twice as many women experience PTSD compared with men

Men attempt suicide at a higher rate than women

Women attempt suicide at a higher rate than men, but most men succeed on their first attempt

Men don't seek help when they experience mental health difficulties

When services that know how to engage with men are available and accessible to men, men do use them; men do seek help

If more men sought help with depression less of them would go on to end their lives

In many cases men who kill themselves do not have a depression or any history of depression or any other serious mental health difficulty. Many men who do kill themselves are experiencing situational distress, the significance of which may be overlooked if the emphasis of prevention is on depression or serious mental health difficulties

If men would seek help with mental health difficulties, they could easily receive professional support

Most men are prepared to seek help where appropriate services are accessible and available, but in places – especially rural and regional areas, male friendly services often don't exist, and standard mental health services (if they exist) may have long waiting lists and/or exclusionary eligibility criteria

Antidepressants reduce the incidence of suicide

Current evidence does not suggest that anti-depressants have an effect in reducing the risk of suicide attempts or completions

Current mental health campaigns that focus on reducing the stigma of mental health difficulties make things better for sufferers

There is still no convincing evidence to support this assertion. In fact, in some cases, because of their use of negative illness labels and language, such campaigns may prove to have made things more difficult for sufferers.

*'...not only are things not what they seem,
they are not even what they are called'
Francisco de Quevedo*

There is no getting away from the fact that a significant number of men will experience mental health difficulties. For any man for whom this is true, ignorance is not bliss, it can lead to misery or even tragedy. But we have a lot of work to do as a society around this issue. We use unnecessary illness labels and wonder why there is stigma. We talk of the need for mental health literacy, yet we use mystifying language. We complain about a lack of male help-seeking, yet we don't make help available in a way that respects male experience or appreciates that they are not women.

This book deals simply with key topics of men's mental health, without ducking and weaving to avoid difficult issues.



John A. Ashfield PhD is a bestselling author, psychotherapist and educator widely recognised for his contribution to male health promotion, and the fields of male psychology and mental health.

Dr Ashfield is a Director of the Australian Institute of Male Health and Studies, and a member of the Executive Board of *New Male Studies: An International Journal*.



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