

A Submission To The Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
09/06/05

My submission is about my own experience of having, and living with depression and covering terms of reference **F, H, L & M**

The depression I live with is I believe, hereditary and environmental and I start first with the hereditary.

My grandmother lived with depression for most of her adult life. I don't know too much about her case or what type of depression she had but I know she lived a very sad life. She would see her doctor for her depression and was given every pill known to man to "help" her. This turned into a drug dependency for decades and her life was mainly at home doing housework, buying groceries once a week and seeing her doctor often. Most of the time I remember her just sitting at her dining room table smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee, depression in full swing and the drugged to the eyeballs. A lot of the time she would just cry. Our family believes she took her own life in the end as a few days before she was found dead she had said she would like it all to end. That she took her own life was never verified though.

This is where I believe the roots of my depression came from, but maybe it went back further than this. Who knows?

The environmental component of my depression is made up of how I was raised and the seed of depression that I believe was already there. A potent mix.

I grew up with a step father who was physically, verbally and mentally abusive towards me and my family for the first fifteen years of my life. In response to this I was a complete wild child, always in trouble, aggressive and anti social. At a very early age I remember speaking with counsellors and shrinks. Never once was I asked if I was being abused or even assessed properly as to my mental well being. Just asked why I was so naughty. I think this had to do with my age (at this time I was under eight years old) and also that I lived in outback Western Australia. I'm not sure at whose insistence but I was twice sent to youth detention centres before I was ten years old, where I spent about two years in total. Even in these places I do not believe that I was assessed for my mental well being or probed on my family situation. And both times I was sent back to my abusive home and the cycle started all again.

At age thirteen I stole all the pills I could find and tried to end my life (thankfully I just made myself sick). Once, when I was fourteen I had just had severe belting by my step father and about an hour later I picked up a knife and went into his room where he was sleeping. I was going to kill him. I wanted to but I didn't. I walked out of the room. I didn't want to spend my life in jail because of him.

About the age of fourteen I had my first drink and I immediately binged. I would drink until I passed out or threw up or both. I also started smoking pot around this time. I wanted to not feel anything at all so moderation didn't come into it.

At fifteen I left home and spent the next thirteen years battling the depression demon, amongst other things.

I ended up in a youth hostel where drinking continued and I was introduced to “downers”, valium and the like. I also got involved in sex work, an occupation that would last for ten years.

Also I progressed to harder drugs like ecstasy and speed. Until I was 28 I was a drug addict using marijuana, speed, ecstasy, crystal meth, valium (and assorted downers), alcohol and practically anything else I could find. I also dealt drugs and had run ins with the law for drug offences and assault.

During this ten year period I saw many psychiatrists and counsellors and I was prescribed anti depressants, like Prozac and Xanax. I didn't like how I felt on anti depressants, I felt like a zombie. More so than when was on my other drugs of choice.

So all of the above mentioned crossed with a family history of depression was an unfortunate mix.

In my late twenties I had finally had enough of my lifestyle and I stopped taking drugs, finished with the sex industry and got a steady job. I still had to contend with my depression though and I shopped around for a counsellor that was compatible with me that could help me.

I realised during these sessions that depression would be with me for life and I made the decision to fight it head on. I chose not to take anti depressants and to fight depression with lifestyle change and understanding my enemy.

These days my life is much better but I have to remind myself what I am dealing with and I battle with that each day. Most days are good, some days not so good and some days are just plain terrible. But understanding my enemy has been helpful.

I now want to live my life, as opposed to being suicidal for many years.

I don't know what the answer is for depression. Then again I don't think there is only one answer as each case of depression is entirely different. A bit like fingerprints. Some cases have more or less environmental or hereditary components and some are chemical imbalances. Some people do well on anti depressants and some don't.

The single most important thing I would like to see come out of the senate inquiry is a public campaign on depression so that the public are more understanding of people with depression and other mental health issues. And I would like to see a campaign that defines the difference between depression and being depressed.

There are many people out there who believe depression and being depressed are one in the same and that type of ignorance riles me to no end.