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TRANSGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF DEPRESSION

Depression is the most common mental illness in the world. It is an insidious and silent disease that affects families and communities, as well as individuals. Like other diseases, depression often has its roots in the young person, even if it only manifests later. Child and adolescent depression can affect education and hence employability, negatively impacting on economic activity and quality of life. It's a disorder that exacts a real cost in terms of human suffering.

Depression often runs in families, but the aetiology is varied, complex and multi-faceted. Mood disorders have a clear genetic component, particularly bi-polar disorders. This has been supported by twin and adoption studies but what is being inherited may not be as simple as a certain type of brain functioning or biochemistry. For instance, it may be a type of personality and

temperament that is negatively impacted by environmental factors such as stressful life experiences. Epigenetic changes suggest that traumatic life experiences may 'turn on' the expression of certain genes.

Different psychological theories propose various explanations for the development of depression, including that of a depressive personality. These theories are mostly developmental in nature, meaning a child will grow and adapt to various influences across his lifespan. An early loss, anger-turned inwards, learned helplessness, guilt inducing parental behaviour, abandonment and parental criticism all have been suggested as possible pathways towards developing depression.

Sophie

12-year-old Sophie is the eldest of 3 children. Since she was a baby, her

mother has suffered periodic bouts of MDD. On such occasions, she spends most of her time in bed, with her curtains closed. It then falls on Sophie to care for and look after her mother and younger siblings. When her mother is relatively well, Sophie tries to do everything perfectly, in the hope that her mother will stay healthy. She feels guilty making normal demands of her mother as she's come to believe this will drain and exhaust her. Her father is very preoccupied with his high-powered job and appears distant and overburdened. Sophie is popular and a high achiever at school but recently she's found it difficult to concentrate on her work. She feels tired and anxious, and small obstacles in her day overwhelm her. She has started cutting herself, as she's found it helps her feel calmer and more in control. Her class teacher has noticed the marks on her arms and

