

Study analyzes common misconceptions about depression among older adults

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Determining whether depression affects older adults differently than younger adults and if it calls for the same treatment was the focus of a recent study conducted by University of Maine researchers.

Emily Haigh, an assistant professor of psychology at UMaine, led the study that analyzed five common misconceptions about [depression](#) in older adulthood that initially were evaluated 20 years ago by Dan Blazer, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University School of Medicine.

In 1997, Blazer conducted a review of the existing literature to refute five common beliefs about depression later in life. Two decades later, Haigh and research colleagues reviewed selected articles to provide an update and identify research priorities.

Results reveal that advances have been made toward the understanding of depression in older adulthood, but more research is needed, according to the team.

The research spanning the past 20 years suggests depression in [older adults](#) is not more common than in younger counterparts and is not more often caused by psychological factors.

The researchers found that [major depressive disorder](#) continues to be less common later in life, but has a higher rate of relapse than in younger adults. Moreover, older adults with subthreshold depression symptoms

have levels of impairment in physical, social and role functioning similar to those with a major depressive disorder diagnosis.

Overall, older adults respond to psychological interventions as well as younger adults, although evidence suggests antidepressants are less successful in late life. Older age is a favorable predictor of electroconvulsive therapy response, according to the researchers.

While older adults may benefit from enhanced ability to regulate emotions, research suggests that several age-related biological processes contribute to major depressive disorder.

Depression in late life may be symptomatically different than in earlier stages, but the researchers suggest further studies are needed to clarify the influences of aging and other medical conditions.

Despite advances in the understanding and treatment of depression in older adults, it remains a serious public health issue associated with high levels of morbidity, mortality and health care costs. Older adults with depression are often underdiagnosed and undertreated, according to the researchers, who suggest prevention efforts should be supported as an alternative strategy for reducing depression in older adults.

The results of the study, "Depression among older adults: A 20-year update on five common myths and misconceptions," were published in the January 2018 edition of the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*.

Provided by University of Maine

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