

# Study highlights need for increased promotion of support groups for men with depression

June 26 2013

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(Medical Xpress)—GP's and health professionals need to do more to promote support groups for men suffering with depression and anxiety according to new research published in the journal *Primary Health Care Research & Development*.

The assumption that men are less vulnerable to depression and anxiety than women is increasingly being questioned. Previous research indicates that men are less likely to be diagnosed as they demonstrate greater reluctance to seek help due to social stigmas.

The study, led by Dr Helen Cramer in the School of Social and

Community Medicine at the University of Bristol, aimed to establish the best ways to support men with depression and anxiety in primary care. The findings highlight the role that groups can play in supporting them.

Researchers conducted interviews with 17 men attending one of four different support groups and 12 staff who worked with depressed men (half of whom also experienced the condition themselves). The team explored the reasons why each had attended their support group and the benefits and barriers.

The study showed that men with depression and anxiety do go to groups and appear to be well supported by them, but also that peer support, reduced social stigma through sharing and opportunities for leadership were important factors of them attending.

The team also found that different types of groups may relate to different potential member audiences. For example, unemployed men with greater [mental health](#) and support needs attended professionally led groups whereas men with milder mental health problems attended peer-led groups. However, the main barrier to men accessing support was centred on their perceptions that, as men, they should deal with their personal issues themselves.

Importantly, the study found that GP's and [health professionals](#) play a key role in helping men to acknowledge their experiences of depression and anxiety through listening and providing information on the range of support options, including groups, but could do more to identify and promote them.

Dr Cramer said: "Given the stigma of depression for men, their lower rates of seeking help, we sought to explore group support for men suffering with depression.

"The findings not only highlight the contrast between how women deal with mental health issues compared with men but also reveal a discernible pattern of isolation with many men suffering from depression having limited family and friend-[support groups](#) they can talk to, while those who did feel they could not talk openly about their concerns.

"GP's and other health professionals may be able to play a key role in helping to acknowledge their experiences of [depression](#) and [anxiety](#) through promoting group therapy as a good starting point to engage men and may combine well with one-to-one talking therapies. These peer-led community groups can offer men year round, low cost social and mental health support that may be one of the most effective ways to help their condition."

The study was supported by the Royal College of GP's Scientific Foundation Board and the NIHR School for Primary Care Research.

The paper, entitled 'Do depressed and anxious [men](#) do groups? What works and what are the barriers to help seeking?' is published in the journal *Primary Health Care Research & Development* on the 26 June 2013.

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Provided by University of Bristol

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