CONTEXT MATTERS: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF DEPRESSION AND OF SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP.

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Abstract

Most existing research on women and depression takes a realist approach that effectively silences the voices of women and limits our understandings of depression. By engaging with the stories of seven women, recruited from a provincial New Zealand area, this research privileges women's voices. Taking a discourse analytic approach, this research explores how women construct their experiences of depression and of seeking professional help. I take a micro discursive approach in identifying how the women utilise various discursive resources in constructing their accounts of both depression and of seeking professional help. In order to locate these discursive resources within the broader socio-cultural environment, I employ a macro discursive approach drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis and Davies and Harré's Positioning Theory. Participant's accounts of their depressive experiences change over the course of their journeys. I explore how the women's accounts shift from a contextualised explanatory framework that locates their experiences of depression within the gendered context of their lives, to a medicalised explanatory framework as they enter the professional help arena. This research offers insights into how dominant discursive construction of the 'good' woman/mother dovetail with a biomedical explanation of depression and prevailing discursive constructions around anti-depressant medications. Working together, these discourses effectively silence women's voices, both pathologising and decontextualising women's depressive experiences. Furthermore, I suggest that these dominant discursive resources and practices offer limited ways for women to make sense of their experiences in meaningful and empowering ways. A need for new understandings about women and depression is called for - one grounded in the material-discursive realities of women's gendered lives.

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