Suicidal ideation isn’t only linked to people with depression – a blog by Time to Change York Champion Hazel

When I admit to having struggled with self harm and suicidal ideation, people automatically assume that I have depression, people seem to think that depression, self harm, and suicide are automatically linked. And at times it can be very difficult to explain that, in my case, that is not true.

In reality I have never experienced depression, ok so I've had periods of low mood, but if we are honest then who hasn't? Depression though, that's different, and is not something I have ever had to experience. And yet that assumption is still there from others.

What I have experienced is anxiety, extreme anxiety and panic, bordering at times on paranoia. I also have periods of psychosis and delusional thinking. But depression, nope, never had it, not sure I can even truly imagine the reality of it. Yet whenever I mention any of my thoughts or feelings surrounding the topic of self harm or suicide people just assume I must have depression as if there's nothing else that can lead to these thoughts/feelings.

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A lot of the time this is little more than an annoyance, but when it's the professionals who are doubting my reality it gets beyond frustrating and causes problems with figuring out my treatment. And when it's friends/family making these assumptions it can make me feel even less likely to open up to them because I feel like they are not really listening to me. I start to think that if they are ignoring what I am telling them is the route cause of my feelings then what else are they ignoring? Maybe they are making assumptions just to shut me up? Maybe they don't think I am worth listening to?

People tend to think that I engage in these self destructive behaviours because I am sad, or because of some sort of self hatred, I guess on some level people feel more comfortable thinking this than accepting the reality. Because even if someone doesn't fully understand depression I think that they can relate to feeling sad or low, so on some level perhaps the concept is almost relatable to them – even if they are hugely simplifying the experience of depression. The idea of thinking, hearing or seeing things that noone else does though, that's hard for anyone to imagine let alone understand.

So how does psychosis/delusions lead to self harm and suicidal behaviours? Well I obviously can't speak for everyone, people's experience of psychosis and delusions will be unique to them, and people's responses to them will also be unique. But for me, when my symptoms are at their worst, I will be convinced that there is a finite amount of “bad” in the universe and that by having bad things happen to me I am using it up so that less bad happens to others. I am not sure how easy this is for others to understand... Whenever I see something negative that's happened in the world on the news I will feel like it was my fault for not absorbing that negative energy myself, it is more of a vague feeling, of knowing, than a thought as such, and then the voices (hallucinations) will reinforce these feelings until any/all outside evidence seems irreverent.
Usually, this will lead me to self harm and/or risky behaviours, but sometimes there will be an almost war inside my mind where can’t work out what to trust, what is real, and all I want is an “out”. I end up feeling under pressure to save everyone from “bad things”, to damage myself so that others don’t suffer, and this (combined with the internal confusion) ends up feeling like too much and I feel the need to escape. This is when my behaviours move beyond self damage and risks, into wanting something more permanent, i.e. suicidal actions.

“I am not sad, and I do not really hate myself, I do not have depression…”

Fortunately I am currently stable. I still hear voices, especially when I am stressed and I think they may be forever with me, I also still have unusual thoughts/feelings, but I have the insight not to act on things most of the time. However, it still frustrates me when people find out about certain events, actions and behaviours as they make these assumptions about the reasons.

I am not sad, and I do not really hate myself, I do not have depression, and I am definitely not being “selfish” (a common misconception about suicide). What’s really happening – within my mind at least – is that I am trying to save other people and sometimes the pressure of that gets too much.

Statistically speaking there is a link between depression, self-harm and suicide, am I am in no way denying that. But it is not the only cause and making assumptions about how a person feels/thinks based solely upon their actions can be at best a frustration and at worst actively damaging.

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Time to Change York
This blog is written by a Time to Change York Champion. Champions are people with experience of mental illness who share their experiences openly or anonymously to help break down myths and stigmas associated with mental illness. To find out more about our work, please visit our website:

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Support
If you, or someone you know, are affected by the subject of suicide, the following organisations may be able to help you:

- Samaritans - Samaritans | Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy | Here to listen
- CALM - Get Help - Campaign Against Living Miserably (thecalmzone.net)
- StayALive – StayAlive - Essential suicide prevention for everyday life
- Papyrus - Home | Papyrus UK | Suicide Prevention Charity (papyrus-uk.org)

In an emergency, call 999 and seek urgent medical assistance.