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www.bayareahearingvoices.org

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Study finds No Evidence Depression Caused By Chemical Imbalance

For decades people have been led to believe that depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain due to a deficiency of the brain chemical serotonin. Yesterday, the prestigious journal *Molecular Psychiatry* [published the first exhaustive review of the main research on links between depression and serotonin](#), which has found that there is no evidence of a connection between reduced serotonin levels or activity and depression.

Professor Joanna Moncrieff, a Professor of Psychiatry at University College London and a consultant psychiatrist at North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT), who led the research, says “it is always difficult to prove a negative, but I think we can safely say that after a vast amount of research conducted over several decades, there is no convincing evidence that depression is caused by serotonin abnormalities, particularly by lower levels or reduced activity of serotonin.”

The idea that depression is caused by a serotonin deficiency has also provided the justification for the use of antidepressants. Antidepressants were originally said to work by rectifying serotonin levels. There is no other accepted pharmacological mechanism by which they affect the symptoms of depression. Therefore, this research calls into question reasons for the use of antidepressants. *(Continued on next page)*

BAY AREA HEARING VOICES NETWORK



Chemical Imbalance *(continued from previous page)*

For decades people have been told by doctors and by official information that their depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in their brains, particularly a lack of the brain chemical called serotonin. The vast majority of people have accepted this idea, with studies showing that 85-90% of the public believes that depression is caused by low serotonin or a chemical imbalance. This peer-reviewed, umbrella review of systematic reviews and meta-analyses led the authors to conclude that there is “no support for the hypothesis that depression is caused by lowered serotonin activity or concentrations.”

These findings have important implications, the authors argue. The public overwhelmingly believes that depression is caused by low serotonin or other chemical abnormalities. This belief shapes how people understand their moods and has been shown to lead to a pessimistic outlook on the likelihood of recovery, and the possibility of managing moods without medical help. This is important because we now know that at least 85% of people will meet criteria for anxiety or depression at some point in their lives. It is possible that believing that low mood is caused by a chemical imbalance makes it more likely that people will become significantly depressed and less likely that people will make a good recovery.

Other studies show that the idea that depression is a result of a chemical imbalance also plays a role in people deciding whether to take an antidepressant and whether to continue taking it. People can be reluctant to stop antidepressants, even when they are no longer recommended, because they believe that they have a chemical deficiency in their brain.

Part of the reason why the story of chemical imbalances in depression has become so prevalent is because it was propagated by drug companies when they were marketing new antidepressants. Antidepressants have been blockbuster drugs for the pharmaceutical industry over the last few decades, frequently ranking among their most profitable drugs. The internet means that drug company marketing reaches a much wider audience than ever before.

The lack of evidence for lowered serotonin in depression has been increasingly recognized by psychiatric bodies, with the Royal College of Psychiatrists removing all reference to ‘chemical imbalances’ from their website in recent years. They now say in official statements that “the original idea that antidepressants ‘correct a chemical imbalance in the brain’ is an oversimplification.”

(To read the full article go to [Molecular Psychiatry Journal July 2022](#))

TRAINING

PRESENTED BY THE WILDFLOWER ALLIANCE

ALTERNATIVE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE:

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION
TUESDAY, AUGUST 16TH • 6:00 PM

FEATURING TWO ALTERNATIVE CRISIS PROGRAMS
EARL MILLER, AMHERST CRISIS PROGRAM
& SEAN DONOVAN, NORTHAMPTON DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITY

REGISTER HERE: tiny.cc/AlternativeCrisisResponse

Wildflower Alliance on NPR

In July, Wildflower Alliance Director of Training, Caroline Mazel-Carlton, took some time out to talk with Krys Boyd of National Public Radio in Dallas, Texas to talk about hearing voices, suicide, and advocating for change.

In May, Wildflower Alliance Lead Trainer, Cindy Hadge, took some time to appear on a segment for National Public Radio in Wisconsin, and talked about peer support, hearing voices, and more.

To listen to both talks go to: WildflowerAlliance.org



RESOURCES

Recommended Resources on Hearing Voices

Go to the WildflowerAlliance.org website for recommended introductory books, articles, videos, and web sites on the experience of hearing voices, the history and philosophy of the Hearing Voices movement, family & friends groups, and ways to support loved ones who hear voices. (We are limited to 35 downloads per month, after which you'll receive an error message.)

One-on-one Consultations with Cindy

Cindy Marty Hadge, Wildflower Alliance Lead Trainer and BAHVN board member, continues to offer individual sessions for personal support of you and/or your family members. She can talk with you on Zoom or by phone.

The recommended sliding fee for an hour-long consultation is \$25-45. Please use to following link and select the "Personal Support with Cindy Marty Hadge" option. If you have questions about scheduling or payment, you can reach Cindy at families@wildfloweralliance.org

SAVE THE DATE

Thursday, Sept 22, 2022 5-6:30

Perspectives on the Hearing Voices Approach

Presented by the Bay Area Hearing Voices Network

Speakers: BAHVN Board Members: Bret Fiminari, David Hallsted, and Ed Herzog

**Bi-monthly on the third Thursday of the month:
Nov 17, 2022; in 2023, Jan 19th, March 16th, May 18th; and
July 13th**

ALL WEBINARS ON LINE

(For more info go to: bayareahearingvoices.org)

HEARING VOICES GROUPS

The Bay Area Hearing Voices Network offers five, online groups Monday-Thursday. To enter the on-line support group meeting go to our website: www.bayareahearingvoices.org and click on the link at the bottom of the page to the Wednesday group.

Monday Meetings:

BAHVN in partnership with Berkeley Mental Health offers separate support groups for adults and family members. The 2 separate support groups meet Mondays from 6 to 8 pm.

Tuesday Meeting:

BAHVN in partnership with [HealthRIGHT360 of San Francisco](#) offers an online adult support group Tuesday evenings from 6 to 8 pm led by trained facilitators with lived experience in the mental health system.

Wednesday Meeting:

BAHVN, in partnership with the [Mental Health Association of San Francisco](#) (MHASF), offers an online adult support group Wednesday evenings from 6-8 pm.

Thursday Meetings:

The HVN-USA Family and Friends Group (friends, lovers, and caretakers) are welcome too) meets online for 90 minutes every Thursday 2:30-4:00 pm PST. To join contact cindy@westernmassrlc.org

BAHVN Game Night, Friday Nights, 5-7 pm:

An on-line weekly night of fun and games. Game play is free of charge to BAHVN adults, TAY, and family members, All attendees are required to open an [account at boardgamearena.com](http://boardgamearena.com), where the game night will be held online. Go to the [BAHVN homepage](#) for a Zoom audio link to Game Night.

The Bay Area Hearing Voices Network is a non-profit 501©3 organization. We seek to expand public awareness, provide community support, and refuge for those who hear voices, see visions, and experience other forms of extraordinary perception. To submit articles contact edherzog48@gmail.com For more information about us visit our website: bayareahearingvoices.org