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## Removing the mask: Women returning to work after a lapse due to depression

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Women who experience depression often refer to wearing a mask to conceal their illness. In this paper the results of a qualitative study involving 40 women who returned to work after being off for a minimum of three months are presented. The women reported that they wore a mask due to the stigma associated with having a mental illness. Unfortunately wearing this mask further contributed to the feelings of social isolation the women experienced. Women were asked about how depression affected them at work and about their experiences of returning to work. Responses included "I needed a gradual return" and "I had no support – if I had a broken leg there would have been support." Women return to work for financial reasons, because their sick time has expired and to combat social isolation. Some of the barriers to women returning to work that have emerged from the data include stigma and discrimination, a fear of self-disclosure, and concentration and memory issues. Strategies for combating these barriers will be discussed.

### Biography

Heather MacDonald completed her MScN at the University of Toronto, Canada, and her PhD in Nursing at the University of Manchester, UK. She has been a Professor at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, Canada, since 1990. In addition to having authored a number of publications, she has presented papers at various local, national, and international conferences. In addition to working at the University of New Brunswick, she has a Parish Nursing Practice.

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