

“I was sat there thinking, I need to drop out of uni, I don’t want to be alive anymore”

Across the country’s university towns, Wednesday night promises cheap fun until the early hours. But on a cold evening in the middle of February last year, 21-year-old medically depressed university rugby player Connor Moore couldn’t pretend anymore, he needed help.

There was a six-week build-up, everything was just stacking up, rugby didn’t help. My mental health was deteriorating and I was in no position to stop it. I’ve been medically diagnosed with depression since July 2018, I’ve got tablets to take. Rugby was quite serious, we were at a point where we could win the league which Huddersfield University hadn’t done before. When you’re playing well the social side becomes bigger, everyone’s happy, and it’s like: “no you’ve got to come out because we’ve just won”. If you didn’t go out, it’s the twenty questions: “Why aren’t you coming out” “you should be out”, it’s constant peer pressure.

If someone’s pushing me, I’d rather just shut them up, so I found myself from Christmas to February, going out on a Wednesday with rugby and not wanting to be there, knowing I was going to drink to compensate for how I was feeling. I was getting absolutely annihilated to take me away from reality. I couldn’t go out and have a few, I didn’t have that off switch, I just confided in drink. I found myself drinking four, five nights a week as well as rugby nights, which would be a twice a week heavy blowout. I’d get aggressive, I’m not someone who fights, but I found that when I was depressed and angry, I was looking for a fight to vent how I was feeling.



Connor (centre) pictured in October 2018 playing for Huddersfield University

The moment that it all came to a head was the Wednesday after I’d been to a funeral and my partner had just broken up with me. I was stupidly far behind with uni work but I went out on the Wednesday night after an away game in Hull. I cried on the bus, I didn’t want to go out after but I got the whole: “you’ve got to come out”. So I did and got absolutely slaughtered. I remember going home at midnight and just sitting in bed crying, thinking that I physically cannot do this anymore, I cannot go out, see people and pretend it’s

okay when it's not. I sat with a lad I lived with and I was saying: "I need to drop out of uni, I don't want to be alive anymore". I was waking up every day upset.

I was taking my tablets, starting to feel better, then I'd stop because I felt it was weak to have to take them, I didn't want people knowing. I'd had a few comments about me taking tablets, about needing happy pills to get out of bed, that rocked me. In the run-up to that Wednesday, I'd go days without leaving the flat, I didn't see many people, I stopped talking with my friends. I kept saying "I don't want to be 150 miles away from my family, I don't want to wake up to the group chat and see everyone out having a good time and I'm thinking in my head: why can't I be happy? Why can't I be one of the lads who goes out, has a few drinks with the boys, and doesn't take it too far?"

That night was hands down one of the worst nights of my life. I didn't sleep in my room, I slept on the sofa in my mate's room because I was at the point of, if I'm on my own, I don't trust myself to not do something that, looking back now I would have regretted. I wasn't sleeping a lot, if I was in my room I'd sit there and wallow. I realised I'd hit rock bottom, so I got it into my head that I needed to start taking my tablets consistently. After that I stopped going out with rugby, I realised that the nights out and the kick you get is not worth the day after.

"They're not toxic people, it's a toxic culture"

I honestly believe that if I'd gone up to any lad on that team and said: "this is happening to me", I think they would have all been there individually. As a group, it's the intimidation of telling 6 or 8 lads that I cry myself to sleep, or that I wake up and feel sad. If it's one-on-one, people take a lot more time and a few people did reach out to me. None of those rugby people are bad people, they're not toxic people, it's a toxic culture. I have a good relationship with my rugby boys, they're my friends, but it's still hard to talk.

Since lockdown, I've been out running on two occasions and I've had people shout things about my weight. Now, I would stick my middle finger up and not care, but if that had happened to me last year at that moment, that could have pushed me over the edge. When you're feeling low, the small things can push you. When that got shouted at me I just thought f**k you, that's not going to bother me, but that comment would have had the potential to derail me last year.

I still have days where I can't get out of bed, I'm still taking tablets, still depressed if you want to use a medical term, but there's a point to everything now. I've played rugby this year but stayed away from the social

side. I play, get on with it and if I feel like going out then I will. •

If you are having suicidal thoughts or are struggling with mental health then contact your university welfare team or any of these helplines below:

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably for men between 15-35):

0800 58 58 58- Daily between 5pm and midnight

Or visit their website: <http://www.thecalmzone.net>

Men's Health Forum (24/7 stress support for men by text, chat or email)

Visit their website: <https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/beatstress.uk>

PAPYRUS (young suicide prevention society)

0800 068 4141- Monday to Friday, 10am-10pm

Or visit their website: <http://www.papyrus-uk.org>