

Mental Health

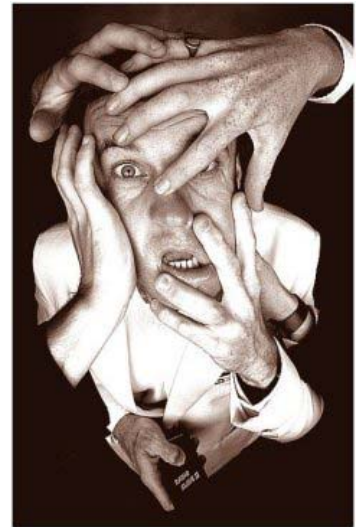
We no longer send people with mental illness to a far-away asylum. Instead, we isolate them socially, a much more artful though equally debilitating form of ostracism.

-The Stigma of Mental Illness, NIMH brochure

The Issue:

Each one of us has mental health and mental illness, and they constantly fluctuate (as does our physical health). Mental health is how we think, feel, and act when facing life situations. Our mental health affects how we perceive ourselves, our friends, and those around us. It also may affect how we react to stress, relate to others, evaluate our opinions, and make decisions. Mental health is not a reflection of one's character, morals, or personality. It does not reflect a character flaw or personal weakness. Factors such as hormones, genetics, and environment are major determinants of mental health, and pressures from identity issues, relationship problems, isolation, or other societal, environmental, and personal stresses have profound effects on our mental health.

Severe mental illnesses are biomedical puzzles. These disorders may affect thought processes, moods, emotions, and relationships with others. Some mental illnesses include Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD/ADHD), Anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder (Manic Depression), Depression, Eating Disorders, Personality Disorders, Schizophrenia, Alcoholism, Autism, Substance Abuse and Suicide. These illnesses can occur in varying degrees and at any age in an individual's lifetime.



Deinstitutionalization was initially meant to grant patients who have been hospitalized for mental illnesses the freedoms guaranteed to all Americans by the Constitution. Long-term hospitalization was often un-therapeutic to patients, their needs as people often being dismissed. It was expensive and cost-inefficient. The "solution" was to close institutions and turn to the community for support. Federal funding for community mental health centers decreased dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. This left many people on the streets, untreated, as availability of treatment decreased while costs increased. Police and courts have turned to prisons to reduce homelessness and deal with behavior that neither the government nor the mental health systems were able to handle. Well-meaning in theory, this "solution" has led us to an increased homeless population, more people with mental illnesses in prisons, and not enough community support.



Chemical dependency is a primary, progressive, and fatal illness, which responds to medical treatment. In most people, addictions begin slowly and grow until the victim's life becomes progressively unmanageable. As repeated efforts to gain control over the addiction fail, life for the chemically dependent person begins to fall apart. (Alcohol is the most common drug of dependency in the U.S.)

The Facts:

- 1 in 5 Americans will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their life
- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds in U.S.
- Mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes or heart disease
- Almost 1/3 of all U.S. jails incarcerates people with severe mental illness, who have no charges against them
- Depression affects 19 million American adults each year and is the leading cause of disability
- Nearly 1/3 of the nation's estimated 600,000 homeless individuals are believed to be adults with severe mental illnesses
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men will develop depression during their lifetime
- At least 2/3 of elderly nursing home residents have a diagnosis of a mental disorder such as major depression
- Mental health spending fell 54 % from 1988-1997, while spending on all health care decreased 7%
- The treatment success rate for schizophrenia is 60%, for major depression 65%, and for bipolar disorder 85%

For More Information:

American Psychiatric Association	http://www.psych.org/
American Psychological Association	http://www.apa.org/
National Institute of Mental Health	http://www.nimh.nih.gov/home.cfm
National Mental Health Association	http://www.nmha.org/
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill	http://www.nmhi.org/
National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia & Depression	http://www.narsad.org

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