



Myths and facts about mental illness

Myth 1 Mental illness is the same as mental retardation.

Fact These are two different disorders; retardation is generally associated with a limitation in mental functioning as well as difficulties with certain daily living activities. With persons who suffer from psychiatric disabilities, the limitations in intellectual functioning vary as it does across the general public.

Myth 2 Mental disorders are a figment of one's imagination.

Fact Mental illnesses are real. Mental illnesses and brain disorders cause suffering, disability and can even shorten life (this is evident from episodes of depression after a heart attack, liver disease due to alcohol abuse and attempted suicide). Mental illness can be diagnosed and treated before it is too late. The symptoms are a sign of real illness.

Myth 3 Mental disorders are caused by a weakness in character.

Fact Mental disorders are caused by biological, psychological and social factors. Research has shown genetic and biological factors are associated with schizophrenia, depression and alcoholism. Social influences such as loss of a job or loved one can contribute to various disorders.

Myth 4 Recovery from mental illness is not possible.

Fact Long-term research has shown that the majority of people with mental illness show genuine improvement over time and lead stable lives. There are many treatments available to individuals who suffer from mental illness such as medications, therapy and rehabilitation.

Myth 5 Mental illness only affects people in rich countries.

Fact Mental and brain disorders are a concern for people in developed countries as well as those in developing nations. In a study of 27 countries conducted by the WHO (World Health Organization) no country was found to be free of schizophrenia. Alcohol abuse is another commonly found disorder.

Myth 6 Mentally ill and mentally retarded individuals are dangerous or violent.

Fact The vast majority of these individuals are not dangerous or violent. Statistics show that violence in people who have a brain disorder is not much higher than in the general population. People with psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia are far more frequently frightened, confused and despairing than violent. This myth is reinforced by portrayals in the media of people with mental illness as frequently violent. It is important to eliminate discrimination and replace it with positive images and messages and a greater awareness of what mental health really is.

Myth 7 Psychiatric conditions are not true medical illnesses like heart disease and diabetes- they are personality disorders.

Fact Disorders of the brain are no less medical conditions than disorders of the heart or kidneys. Research has shown that there are genetic and biological causes for psychiatric disorders and that they can be treated effectively.

Myth 8 Schizophrenia is multiple personality disorder.

Fact Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness, often confused with multiple personality disorder. In fact, it is a condition that blurs the distinction between what is real and what is imagined. People with schizophrenia have symptoms ranging from social withdrawal to delusions and hallucinations but are often helped by modern medicines.

Myth 9 People with manic depression are dangerously unstable and generally drop out of society.

Fact Manic depression- or bipolar disorder- is one of the most serious mental illnesses, causing severe distress and destroying personal relationships. Yet many people with bipolar disorder lead full and meaningful lives. Indeed, some of the most brilliant creative geniuses are thought to have suffered from bipolar disorder including Ernest Hemingway, statesman Winston Churchill, Einstein and other creative minds from around the world.

Myth 10 Mental illness cannot affect me.

Fact Mental illnesses are surprisingly common and do not discriminate- they can affect anyone. According to the WHO, 1 in 4 families are affected by mental illness in some way. It could be you... or someone around you.