



CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE
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Fact Sheet

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS

Although this Fact Sheet was created with input from consumers of mental health services, psychologists and psychiatrists, the information is of a general nature. More comprehensive information can be obtained from libraries, including Ontario Division, and your local CMHA branch.

Mental illnesses continue to be one of Canada's major public health problems. 1 in 3 Canadians will experience a mental illness sometime during their lives, 1 in 8 seriously enough to require professional care.

No one is immune to mental illness. Mental illnesses are not a result of personal failure or weakness. Most mental illnesses are more easily treated than heart and lung diseases, but unlike heart and lung diseases, mental illnesses, and the people who experience them, are shrouded in silence.

Unfortunately, many people have an inaccurate picture of mental illnesses and those who are affected by them. They mistakenly believe that treatment for a mental illness requires long term hospitalization or years in psychotherapy. Another misconception is that everyone who is holding down a job or being a responsible parent and taking care of themselves couldn't possibly be experiencing a mental illness. Some people believe that every person with a mental illness is a threat to society and requires separation from society!

WHAT ARE MENTAL ILLNESSES?

As with physical illness, there are many kinds of mental illness with many different causes. Mental illnesses include a broad range of disorders or illnesses that have psychological or behavioural symptoms, and reduce our capability to cope with daily life.

Specific mental illnesses include depression, phobias, anxiety disorders, manic depression and schizophrenia. The two most commonly encountered mental illnesses are depression and anxiety disorders. In many cases these can be accurately diagnosed and successfully treated.

WHAT CAUSES MENTAL ILLNESS?

Mental illnesses are caused by a social, psychological, genetic, physical, chemical or biological disturbance, or a combination of these factors.

IF YOU HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS DO YOU ACT “WEIRD “ ALL THE TIME?

No! Too often the news and entertainment industries portray people with a mental illness as “dangerous” or “stupid”. It is true that some people with mental illnesses do have periods where they act “bizarre” if they are not receiving proper care, but many times their agitation and irritability are the results of their physical condition, not their motives. On the whole, individuals with a mental illness are well meaning and kind, and no more violent or likely to commit a crime as a total group than the rest of the population. You are probably not aware of all the people you meet in your daily life who have had a mental illness.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO MENTAL ILLNESS

It is clear that there is a need to adopt a far more tolerant attitude toward individuals with mental illnesses in our society. So many of these individuals are prevented from living life to its fullest by the “lack of acceptance” shown toward them by other people. Reintegration into society is tremendously important for those people who have been hospitalized with mental illness.

WHAT KINDS OF PEOPLE GET MENTAL ILLNESS?

Psychiatric problems can affect persons of all ages, from infancy to old age. An estimated one in three individuals will suffer a temporary mental disorder during their lifetime.

CAN YOU RECOVER FROM A MENTAL ILLNESS?

It is unfortunate that only one in five people with a mental illness ever seeks help. In nearly 80 % of cases, appropriate medication can help relieve acute symptoms of schizophrenia or manic depression, and approximately 80% of people with depression can feel better and recover within a few weeks when they receive appropriate treatment. Anxiety disorders can be treated effectively, and 90% of people with panic disorder can recover with effective treatment.

You may want to contact your family physician or local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association for further information or advice about a specific disorder.