



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

MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER (MPD)

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.

Research on Multiple Personality Disorder is limited, but in recent years there has been an increase in interest as more cases are being diagnosed. This fact sheet will attempt to answer some of the questions you may have about “multiple personalities.”

WHAT IS MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER?

Developing multiple personalities is often a “coping mechanism” that an individual uses as a child in response to mistreatment.

WHAT CAUSES MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER?

Research indicates that MPD usually occurs as a result of a prolonged child sexual, physical, emotional or ritual abuse. The individual develops altered personalities or multiple personalities as a “coping strategy.”

Typically the individual has sought help previously and may have received a variety of diagnoses such as schizophrenia, manic depression, or substance abuse, before the treating clinician settles on MPD.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED?

It is estimated that 1 in 100 individuals may suffer from MPD. Their disassociative abilities have allowed them to survive traumatic abuse.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

MPD involves the existence, within a person, of two or more distinct personalities or personality states, which alternatively take control of the person’s behaviour. An individual with MPD may hear voices from the various alter (alternate) personalities trying to communicate with the “host” or predominant personality. The host personality may not hear what is being said, or even remember events that have happened. Not all personalities hear each other. Many personalities may hear what is being said on a

given occasion and may react differently. Often some of the personalities do not understand that they are sharing one body.

Some of the symptoms of MPD:

- Memory loss
- Feeling dream-like
- Hearing voices or thoughts that don't seem to belong to you
- Not recognizing people you know
- Not feeling any emotions
- Unexplained items in your possession
- Not remembering childhood or major life events
- Denial of behaviour observed by others

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS?

Persons with MPD find difficulty trusting anyone and need acceptance of their diagnosis. Receiving the correct treatment, finding the right clinician, and locating treatment facilities and services locally are very important. In most cases, persons in therapy have the potential for complete recovery.

When an individual with MPD “owns” and remembers all the memories that each alter personality has, and they remember their entire life, then there is no more need for the alters to be around. The alter can then become part of a unified individual.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

Social support groups are beginning to form for people with Multiple Personality Disorder as the diagnosis is losing its “stigma” and it is becoming to be known as a “surviving mechanism.” You may want to contact your family physician or local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association for information and referrals.

