

# **Mental Health**

## **Definition**

Mental illness is a medical condition that results from a bio-chemical malfunction in the brain.

## **Types of Mental Illness**

Many types of mental illness exist. The most common are\*

- Anxiety Disorders (Generalized Anxiety Disorder, PTSD, OCD, Panic Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, Specific Phobias)
- Mood Disorders (Depression, Bi-polar Disorder)
- Psychotic Disorders (Schizophrenia, Schizo-Affective Disorder, Brief Psychotic Episode)
- Eating Disorders (Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge-Eating)
- Personality Disorders (Borderline, Narcissistic, Anti-Social)

*\*this list is not intended to be exhaustive.*

## **Causes**

Exact causes of mental illness are unknown; however, research indicates that biological and/or psychological and/or social factors may lead to mental illness.

- Biological factors may include: imbalance of chemicals in the brain (neurotransmitters), genetics/heredity, infections, traumatic birth (e.g., loss of oxygen to the brain), substance abuse, poor nutrition
- Psychological factors may include: early childhood loss, neglect, abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual)
- Social factors may include: financial situation, exposure to violence, isolation, family breakdown

The cause of a person's mental illness can result predominately from one of the above (bio-psycho-social) factors. For example, schizophrenia is rooted primarily in a bio-chemical imbalance, whereas a personality disorder tends to have roots in psychological factors. However, mental illness may also result from some combination of all three factors in the bio-psycho-social spectrum.

While having certain risk factors can predispose a person to mental illness, no situation is prescriptive. For example, an individual with a family history of mental illness may have an increased risk of developing mental illness (due to genetics/heredity), yet that family history is no guarantee. Similarly, those with no family history of mental illness can develop mental illness.

Mental illness does not discriminate; it affects people from every social class, ethnicity, gender, and home environment. In other words, no one is immune.

## **Diagnosis**

Similar to other physical illnesses, mental illnesses can be diagnosed and treated. Medical professionals utilize a specific set of criteria to generate a diagnosis, such as symptoms, the length of time individuals experience these symptoms, and the ruling out of any other medical cause or condition. A critical component of receiving a mental illness diagnosis is the degree of impact on the individual's quality of life and daily functioning. In other words, how debilitating are the symptoms? It is important to note that a diagnosis can help form treatment. Diagnoses, however, have also historically carried stigma and generalized assumptions regarding the individual, which are harmful to recovery.

## **Treatment**

For optimal recovery from mental illness, treatments may include short-term or long-term medication, self-care, counseling, and family/community support. While mental illness can be difficult to treat (as each case must be assessed on an individual basis), medical research and history can provide helpful guidelines. For example, mild to moderate depression may respond significantly with only counseling and a change in lifestyle, while severe depression often requires medication in order to reap the benefits of counseling and other forms of treatment.

## **Prognosis**

With the proper supports in place, the outlook for a person living with mental illness can be quite optimistic. Often, the individual will return to a similar level of daily functioning to his/her pre-symptomatic life. Further, the individual can experience increased hope for the future and significant satisfaction with his/her life, even if some mental illnesses require a person to never stop utilizing medication. Counseling and an emphasis on self-care are also beneficial components to a person's long-term recovery plan. Additionally, a person within compassionate and informed families and communities tend to fare better in recovery than those who live without such supports.

Even with such a potentially optimistic future for those who live with mental illness, it is worth noting that these individuals still carry a statistically increased risk for being taken advantage of throughout life, along with being at high risk for suicide.

## **Statistics**

From the *Canadian Mental Health Association* (CMHA) website (accessed November 2013):

- 7 million (20%) of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.
- Approximately 8% of adults will experience major depression at some time in their lives.
- About 1% of Canadians will experience bipolar disorder (or "manic depression")
- Schizophrenia affects 1% of the Canadian population.
- Anxiety disorders affect 5% of the household population, causing mild to severe impairment.

- Suicide accounts for 24% of all deaths among 15-24 year olds and 16% among 25-44 year olds.
- Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in both men and women from adolescence to middle age.
- The mortality rate due to suicide among men is four times the rate among women.
- Almost one half (49%) of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem.
- It is estimated that 10-20% of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder – the single most disabling group of disorders worldwide.
- Today, approximately 5% of male youth and 12% of female youth, age 12 to 19, have experienced a major depressive episode.
- The total number of 12-19 year olds in Canada at risk for developing depression is roughly 3.2 million.
- Once depression is recognized, help can make a difference for 80% of people who are affected, allowing them to get back to their regular activities.
- Canada's youth suicide rate is the third highest in the industrialized world (4,000 Canadians aged 15-24 die prematurely each year by suicide).
- Schizophrenia is youth's greatest disabler as it affects an estimated 1 person in 100 in the 16 to 30 year age group.
- In Canada, only 1 out of 5 children who need mental health services receives them.

From the *Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)* website (accessed November 2013):

- 46% of Canadians believe that mental health is used as an excuse for poor behaviour.
- Canadians experience an 11% hospital readmission rate within 30 days for mental illness.
- In any given year, one in five people in Canada experiences a mental health problem or illness, with a cost to the economy of well in excess of \$50 billion.
- An estimated 25-50% of homeless people live with a mental health disorder, and homelessness can reduce a person's life expectancy by 20 years.
- Supportive housing costs \$13,000 to \$18,000 per year; in comparison, traditional institutional responses like prisons and psychiatric hospitals cost \$66,000 to \$120,000 per year.

## **Mental Health Web Resources**

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

The 2012-2013 Annual Report: [www.cmha.ca/news/cmhas-2012-13-annual-report/#.Un2kSFD0kxE](http://www.cmha.ca/news/cmhas-2012-13-annual-report/#.Un2kSFD0kxE)

[www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)

The Mental Health Strategy for Canada:

[www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/724?terminal=39](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/724?terminal=39)

[www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/spring/throughglass.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2011/spring/throughglass.html)

[www.amysimpsononline.com/category/mental-health/](http://www.amysimpsononline.com/category/mental-health/)

[www.focusonthefamily.ca/Pastors/mental-health-and-the-ministry.html](http://www.focusonthefamily.ca/Pastors/mental-health-and-the-ministry.html)

[www.mpuuc.org/mentalhealth/MentalHealthInformationforMinisters.pdf](http://www.mpuuc.org/mentalhealth/MentalHealthInformationforMinisters.pdf)

[www.blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/2013/09/17/half-of-evangelicals-believe-prayer-can-heal-mental-illness/](http://www.blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/2013/09/17/half-of-evangelicals-believe-prayer-can-heal-mental-illness/)

[www.depressionoutreach.com/](http://www.depressionoutreach.com/)

[www.reconnect.hk](http://www.reconnect.hk)

[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)