
Stigmas and Understanding Mental Illness/Disorders

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Stigma

Stigmas are negative attitudes or discrimination against someone based on a distinguishing characteristic such as a mental illness, health condition, or disability. While stigma is not limited to mental conditions, attitudes towards psychiatric illnesses tend to be more negative than that toward medical conditions.



Stigma

Research has shown that stigma is one of the leading risk factors contributing to poor mental health outcomes. Stigma leads to:

- Reluctance to seek out treatment
- Delayed treatment, which increases morbidity and mortality¹
- Social rejection, avoidance, and isolation
- Worse psychological well-being
- Poor understanding among friends and family
- Harassment, violence, or bullying
- Poor quality of life, disability, and increased socioeconomic burden
- Increased feelings of shame

— The stigma surrounding mental health can make it less likely that people will seek treatment. Stigma can also cause people to doubt themselves and their abilities to achieve their goals in life. Mental disorders are **not** caused by character flaws. They have **nothing** to do with being lazy or weak.



What Causes Mental Illness?

There is no single cause for mental illness. A number of factors can contribute to the risk of mental illness, such as:

- Your genes and family history
- Your life experiences, such as stress or a history of abuse, especially if they happen in childhood
- Biological factors such as chemical imbalances in the brain
- A traumatic brain injury
- A mother's exposure to viruses or toxic chemicals while pregnant
- Use of alcohol or recreational drugs
- Having a serious medical condition like cancer
- Having few friends, and feeling lonely or isolated

Who's At Risk For Mental Illness?

- Mental disorders are common.
- More than half of all Americans will be diagnosed with a mental disorder at some time in their life

1 in 5 of U.S. adults experiences mental illness in a given year.

source: nami.org



How Are Mental Health Disorders Diagnosed?

- A medical History
- Physical Exams: medical conditions could cause your symptoms
- Psychological Evaluation: thinking, feelings, and behaviors

