



MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS

Mental illness is a major public health problem affecting people in every part of the world. Recent studies report that 20% of, or one in five, Canadians will suffer from a mental disorder at some time in his/her life.

Definitions

Mental Wellness

People who are mentally well are able to carry on their usual daily activities, cope with their emotions, and overcome problems in a positive manner, have self respect, and neither underestimate nor overestimate their abilities.

Mental Illness

People who are mentally ill experience a substantial impairment of thought, mood, perception, orientation, or memory that impairs their judgment, behaviour, capacity to recognize reality, and/or ability to meet the ordinary demands of life.

Symptoms

People who experience mental health problems exhibit certain behaviours called symptoms. Below is a list of symptoms common in people who have a mental illness. A person may exhibit one or several of these symptoms.

Common Symptoms

- Withdrawal from society
- Chronic fatigue
- Confused or distorted thinking
- Inappropriate expression of emotions
- Loss of touch with reality
- Inability to maintain good inter-personal relationships
- Inability to cope with problems
- Inability to take care of one's personal needs
- Negative self-image and outlook
- Violence towards self or others
- Delusions and/or hallucinations

This year, it is estimated that 9,000 Canadians will take their own lives or die from complications related to mental illness.

Stigma

The biggest obstacle facing those with a mental illness is **STIGMA**.

Stigma is a social attitude that discredits an individual and justifies the exclusion of a person from normal life. The problem of having a mental illness is compounded when it is accompanied by misunderstanding, rejection, and ridicule. Stigma is considered the most significant secondary symptom to having a mental illness. It will prevent many people from seeking help until it is too late.

Treatment

There are many forms of treatment available to people living with a mental illness. The most common are a combination of medication and psychotherapy or counselling. With the right supports and medication people suffering from a chronic mental illness can lead a satisfying life in the community. More acute conditions may require hospitalization and then follow up with medication(s), therapy and supports. Other examples for the treatment of a mental illness are as follows:

- Cognitive and behavioural psychotherapy
- Self help support groups and management programs
- Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
- Relaxation and coping techniques

How You Can Help

- Recognize that stigma exists
- Get informed, be aware of warning signs/common symptoms
- Always show positive regard and respect
- Do not diagnose the problem
- Show empathy, listen
- Be accepting and non-judgmental
- Take threats of suicide seriously
- Acknowledge the person's difficulties
- Be calm and straight forward
- Insist that the person seek a professional evaluation
- Maintain a positive, respectful attitude
- Be clear about your limits

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