

"Mental illnesses", as defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), "are health conditions involving changes in thinking, emotion or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities." [1] These include, but are certainly not limited to, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, agoraphobia, eating disorders, and personality disorders. These also come in many different shapes/forms (major depressive disorder, clinical depression, pervasive depression, etc. are all forms of depression) and affect a person in many different ways.

Now that we've established what it is... how do we identify it? Symptoms vary greatly from one mental illness to another, but there are some common red flags we can keep an eye out for. The Mayo Clinic lists these as common symptoms of mental illnesses: feeling sad or down; confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate; excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt; extreme mood changes of highs and lows; withdrawal from friends and activities; significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping; detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations; inability to cope with daily problems or stress; trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people; alcohol or drug abuse; major changes in eating habits; sex drive changes; excessive anger, hostility or violence; and suicidal thinking [2].

Now, we come to the most important question... why is it important to address mental illnesses? There are many reasons why we need to intervene when mental illnesses arise in ourselves or loved ones, but the main reason is that mental illnesses can be risk factors for many activities that will negatively affect our future or the futures of our loved ones. Amongst these 'complications' are: unhappiness and decreased enjoyment of life; family conflicts and relationship difficulties; social isolation; problems with tobacco, alcohol and other drugs; missed work or school, or other problems related to work or school; legal and financial problems; poverty and homelessness; self-harm and harm to others, including suicide or homicide; weakened immune system, so your body has a hard time resisting infections; and heart disease and other medical conditions. [2] Dependable on the illness, it can make the patient a danger to themselves or others and it causes them to make poor decisions sometimes (side note: as someone who has been there, I can tell you that is true. I, fortunately, didn't go doing reckless things; but there was always that persistent thought in the back of my head that, no matter what I did, it "didn't matter if I lived or died". Gladly, I don't have that ideology anymore. - Jacob Knox). Not only do we need to address them due to the complications they can cause, but also because of the sheer number of people mental illnesses affect. "1 in 5 Adults have a mental health condition. That's over 40 million Americans; more than the populations of New York and Florida combined" - Mental Health America [3], 2017 data. For some perspective.. that's over 12% of the US population (which, as of 2017, is 325.7 million!), it is also greater than the total population of 197 countries as of 2018 [4] and greater than the combined populations of the 76 smallest countries in the world (out of 223) as of 2018 [4]. The problem isn't only that mental illness is prevalent, but that it continues to GROW--especially among teenagers. "Rates of youth with severe depression increased from 5.9% in 2012 to 8.2% in 2015. Even with severe depression, 76% of youth are left with no or insufficient treatment" - Mental Health America [3]. Which brings us to yet another issue in this field: lack of treatment. Whether it be due to financial or legal issues, familial or relational issues, the mental illness itself (they can cause a person to isolate themselves and never seek treatment), or some other reason... many people

(almost 50% of American adults with a mental illness) do not receive treatment. It has been found that whites receive more treatment than any other race (which may be due to customs, better economic situations, values/morals, etc) and females receive more treatment than men (which may be due to male ego, pride, masculinity, etc), but whites have been found to be the race with the least number of mental illness cases. This reverse is also seen in age, youth (18-25) have more mental illness cases than older people and yet they receive the least treatment of them. There are many factors that can lead to this, but whatever they may be... we must find ways to break these barriers and get as many people as possible the help they need.

Well... how can we help!? Treatment styles vary based on the person, the illness, and the circumstances. However, some common paths to recovery or at least being able to cope with the illness (as many with chronic ones must do) include medication (such as antidepressants) which may take some experimentation (one medication doesn't work for everyone, it depends on the patient and it may take time to figure out which is best for them), therapy (there are many different kinds, so it depends on which would best help the patient), support groups, physical activities and activities to promote a healthy lifestyle. In all honesty, though, being a supportive friend or family member is essential... being there in their times of need, being patient with them, showing your love and support, doing anything you can to get them the professional help they need, listen to them, etc. Many times people with a mental illness want to feel heard and they want to be acknowledged, so that can help greatly. What can I do for myself if I have a mental illness? If you have a mental illness, then here are some things YOU can do to promote your recovery: think positively (it can be HARD, but it is possible), think about what you want in life and what drives you, do things you love (it can be HARD to do things period, but find that motivation inside of you), surround yourself with those who love you and care about you (REMOVE negativity if possible), and most importantly accept the help... almost everyone in the field agrees that the first step to recovery is admitting that you need help.

### **Works Cited**

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### **Not Quoted**

- 1.) "Mental Illness." *National Institute of Mental Health*, National Institute of Mental Health, Nov. 2017, [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml).