

Mental illness: Dispelling the myths

Mental illness is common

Around half the population will experience a mental illness at some stage of their life and about one in five people will experience some form of mental health problem each year. About one in every hundred people will develop schizophrenia at some time in their lives and up to two in every hundred will develop bipolar disorder. For more information see Factsheet: *Facts and Figures about mental illness*.

The vast majority of people with mental illness are not generally violent

Having a mental illness does not mean someone will be violent. People being treated for a mental illness are no more violent or dangerous than the general population. If anything, they are more likely to be the victims of violence, especially self-harm. A small sub-group of people with a mental illness may be more violent than the general population. These are likely to be people who have a history of violent behaviour, who abuse drugs or alcohol, and who are not receiving treatment or taking medication as prescribed. Mental illness is associated with only a minuscule proportion of the violence which occurs in society. For more information see Factsheet: *Mental illness and violence*.

Most people with mental illness receive treatment in the community

With modern medications and treatment, there is generally no reason for most people with a mental illness to be in hospital. If they are, a stay is usually for a few weeks when they are unwell . . . as with many other types of illness. There is now an emphasis on treatment in the community so that people can continue to live at home. However, we need to ensure that there is sufficient support in the community for people with a mental illness — accommodation, rehabilitation, recreation and help back to work. Understanding and respect from others is an important form of support that all of us can give. For more information see Factsheet: *Treatments for mental illness*.

Mental illness is treatable

Contrary to what is commonly believed, most people with a mental illness recover well with appropriate ongoing treatment and support. For some there will be a psychiatric disability. The vast majority of people with a psychiatric disability are able to live independently (and often to work) in the community, if given the opportunity and support to do so.

People with schizophrenia have only one personality

Schizophrenia has nothing to do with split personality. It is an illness, a medical condition which affects the normal functioning of the brain, interfering with a person's ability to think, feel and act. Some people recover completely, and, with time, most find that their symptoms improve. There is no cure yet, but it is a treatable illness. People with schizophrenia find it hurtful to have their diagnosis inaccurately misrepresented as a split personality. For more information see Factsheet: *Schizophrenia*.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness.

For more information about this topic see:

① *SANE Guide to Reducing Stigma*

Describes what stigma means, explains the harm that stigma in the media does, and offers ideas on what you can do about it.

① *SANE Guide for Families*

Explains how to better handle common issues associated with being a carer such as developing a positive attitude, looking after yourself and getting the help you are entitled to.

① *SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments*

Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.

To order visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org or call 1800 18 SANE (7263).