BEHAVIORAL HEALTH MYTHS

MYTH: HAVING A MENTAL ILLNESS MEANS YOU ARE "CRAZY."

It is straightforward – **having a mental illness does not mean you are "crazy."** It indicates vulnerability and that you have an illness with challenging symptoms, similar to conditions such as diabetes. While mental illness might affect your thinking, destabilize your moods, or distort your perception of reality, it does not denote craziness. It signifies that you are human and prone to sickness and illness, like any other person.

MYTH: PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS ARE VIOLENT AND DANGEROUS.

Within the last few years, the U.S. has had an increase in mass violence. Whenever these tragedies take place, the media is quick to judge the suspects and label them as "mentally disturbed" or "mentally ill." In reality, hate is not a mental illness. Only 5% of violent crimes in the U.S. are committed by people with serious mental illness.

The unfortunate truth is that individuals with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. There is no reason to fear a person with a mental illness just because of their diagnosis.

MYTH: PEOPLE WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER ARE MOODY.

Bipolar disorder does not cause quick mood swings; it involves cycles lasting weeks or months. Using "bipolar" to describe unpredictable weather undermines the severity of the condition and spreads misinformation. Bipolar disorder includes episodes of mania (high energy, lack of sleep, grandiose ideas) and depression (sluggishness, sadness, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem). These extremes alternate but do not shift suddenly.

MYTH: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) IS ONLY A MILITARY MAN'S DISEASE.

PTSD can affect anyone, not just military personnel. It can occur in victims of rape or sexual assault, domestic abuse, natural disasters, or those who've experienced loss. It also affects people who witness traumatic events (vicarious trauma). Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, panic attacks, avoidance of triggers, and reacting as if the event is happening again.

MYTH: PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATIONS ARE BAD.

There is a misconception that psychiatric medication is harmful or merely "happy pills." This is untrue. Mental illness is a medical condition requiring treatment, much like diabetes requires insulin. Medication can be essential for survival for some with severe mental illness. For others with conditions like depression, anxiety, or ADHD, medication can alleviate symptoms, allowing normal functioning. Combining medication with regular therapy can significantly enhance quality of life.

MYTH: SEEKING HELP FOR MENTAL ILLNESS WILL LEAD TO BEING OSTRACIZED AND MAKE SYMPTOMS WORSE

It can be difficult to discuss having a mental illness due to common misunderstandings. People unfamiliar with mental illness might attribute it to nature, personality, or attitude. However, opening up about mental health can help reduce stigma, increase awareness, empower individuals, foster personal growth, and promote understanding. It is important not to let others' perceptions prevent you from seeking the necessary assistance. *(National Alliance on Mental Illness)*

MYTH: IF A PERSON HAS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION, IT MEANS THE PERSON HAS LOW INTELLIGENCE.

Mental illness, like physical illness, can affect anyone regardless of intelligence, social class, or income level.

MYTH: YOU ONLY NEED TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IF YOU HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION.

Everyone can take actions to promote their well-being and improve their mental health. Similarly, individuals can engage in healthy habits to optimize their physical health.

MYTH: POOR MENTAL HEALTH IS NOT A BIG ISSUE FOR TEENAGERS. THEY JUST HAVE MOOD SWINGS CAUSED BY HORMONAL FLUCTUATIONS AND ACT OUT DUE TO A DESIRE FOR ATTENTION.

Teenagers often experience mood swings, but this does not mean they do not also face mental health challenges. Fourteen percent of the world's adolescents have mental health issues. Globally, for those aged 10–15, suicide is the fifth most common cause of death, and for adolescents aged 15–19, it is the fourth most common cause. Half of all mental health conditions begin by the age of 14.

MYTH: NOTHING CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT PEOPLE FROM DEVELOPING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS.

Strengthening social and emotional skills, seeking early support, having loving family relationships, a positive school environment, and healthy sleep patterns can protect people from mental health conditions. Overcoming adversity depends on a mix of protective factors rather than just stressors. Children and adolescents who thrive despite challenges often have biological resilience and supportive relationships, which together promote well-being.

MYTH: A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION IS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS; IF THE PERSON WERE STRONGER, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE THIS CONDITION.

A mental health condition is not related to a person's strength or willpower, and it is not something that individuals can choose. Recognizing the need for help with a mental health condition requires significant resolve. Mental health conditions can affect anyone.

MYTH: ADOLESCENTS WHO GET GOOD GRADES AND HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS WILL NOT HAVE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOTHING TO BE DEPRESSED ABOUT.

Depression is a mental health condition that results from a combination of social, psychological, and biological factors. It can affect individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status or life circumstances. Young people who perform well academically may experience pressure to succeed, which can lead to anxiety, or may have difficulties at home. Depression or anxiety can also occur without an identifiable cause.

MYTH: BAD PARENTING CAUSES MENTAL CONDITIONS IN ADOLESCENTS.

Adolescents' mental health can be affected by factors like poverty, unemployment, violence, migration, and adverse events. Both adolescents from supportive homes and those from challenging environments can face mental health issues. Caregivers, with the right support, are crucial in helping adolescents overcome these problems. *(UNICEF & The WHO)*

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