Mental Disorders Essay, Research Paper

There are many diseases and disorders that may affect the human mind. Some of these are serious, while others are minor and may not even be noticed. Some of the disorders and diseases to be covered in this report are delirium, dementia, and schizophrenia, also a discussion of specific symptoms and treatments available for the different disorders.

A mental illness is defined as any disease that affects a person’s mind, thoughts, emotions, personality, or behavior. For any mental illness, as in a physical illness, there are symptoms that make it possible to identify when a person is suffering from a mental disorder or illness. Some of the more common symptoms of these disorders include extreme moods, sadness, anxiety and the inability to think clearly or remember well. Just because a person may experience some of these symptoms it does not mean that he or she is suffering from an illness. Almost everyone at sometime in their lives will not be able to think clearly or be in a bad mood. These characteristics are just part of human nature and are more than likely than not just a passing mood that will pass in a few moments. A diagnosis of a mental illness may be necessary if the symptoms occur so often that they interfere with the person’s everyday life.

An amazingly large number of Americans have mental illnesses, approximately 43% of the entire population of the United States. Although most of these are not serious, about 3% of the American population have a mental illness that can be classified as serious. This small population of the public will require treatment to either relieve or cure them of their illness. Since the 1950’s, treatment for mental illness has greatly improved and has made recovery faster. These improvements will help the majority of the people who seek treatment return to their normal lives faster.

There are two basic terms used to describe the seriousness of mental illness that a person has. The terms used are neurosis, and psychosis. A neurosis is the term used to describe a mild disorder that may cause a small amount of emotional stress, but does not cause a great deal of interference in the patients everyday life. The term psychosis is used to describe a severe mental illness that is strong enough to prevent someone from performing as they normally would. The term “insanity” is used to describe a person with a mental illness. This is not a medical term. It is actually a legal term that is used in court to try to prove a person to not be legally responsible for their actions.

There are more than one hundred different types of mental illness. They are divided into ten categories. These categories include delirium, dementia, schizophrenia, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, dissociative disorders, somatoform disorders, personality disorders, eating, and finally substance disorders.

The first of these categories, delirium is when a person is not aware of their environment and can be distracted very easily or become confused. Sometimes a delirious person may not know where or who they are, their speech may be hard to follow and be very disorganized. Delirium however is not usually a long lasting illness and the person is over it in a week or so.

A second form of mental illness is dementia. Dementia can be diagnosed by a loss of the ability to remember and judge things appropriately. A person with dementia may have a difficult time with remembering names, conversations, and not follow rules or laws. Dementia occurs mostly in elderly people and is the result of illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease that destroys brain tissue.

A third, and very serious type of mental illness, is schizophrenia. This disorder affects a person’s way of thinking, their emotions, perceptions, and their behavior. It is determined that a person has schizophrenia if he or she displays one or more of the following characteristics. One of these characteristics that a person may hear “voices” even tough they are completely alone. Another characteristic is that the person may feel persecuted for no apparent reason.”(World Book Encyclopedia). Other more subtle symptoms of this disease include a decrease in the person’s ability to work, their inability to maintain personal relationships and their inability to perform well in school.

The symptoms of schizophrenia are divided up into two categories, positive and negative. Positive symptoms of schizophrenia are exaggerations of emotions that a person may feel. These exaggerations of emotions are the cause of the hallucinations, delusions, and strange speech patterns that a schizophrenic may experience. The negative symptoms of schizophrenia are the loss of emotions and mental ability. The negative symptoms cause the person to begin to have trouble finishing activities, show a decrease in, as well as, a dulling in their speech and emotions.

Although the exact cause of schizophrenia has not yet been pinpointed, scientists believe that schizophrenia is the result of either physical or chemical changes in a person’s brain. These changes begin during the late teens to early twenties. Unfortunately, the person cannot be completely cured with any of the methods now in use.

The next type of disorder is commonly referred to as a mood or affective disorder. These disorders are based upon a person’s mood. The two major types of disorders are depression and mania. Depression is when a person undergoes a period of extreme sadness and mania is when a person is overly happy, excited or overactive. A type of illness that falls into these categories is a bipolar disorder, which is when a person will experience periods of extreme mood swings. Although a person has bipolar disorder the episodes of mood changes are usually brief and he or she can return to normal functioning levels after they receive treatment from their doctor.

A person with depression may have feelings of extreme sadness and may also suffer from a number of other symptoms. These symptoms include feelings of being worthless, loss of appetite, sleeplessness or lack of concentration during their depressive states. Along with these symptoms some experience a slowing in their thinking, while others become restless and consider committing suicide. Even though there is treatment for depression, about fifteen percent or so of the people who receive treatment actually do commit suicide.

Anxiety disorders are another type of mental illness that people experience. These disorders are characterized by feelings of extreme fear and/or anxiousness. The four major types of anxiety disorders are panic disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, general anxiety disorders and finally phobias.

A person with a panic disorder experiences periods of extreme fear. These “panic attacks” are accompanied by shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, numbness, sweating and trembling. Along with these symptoms, the person may also experience a fear of death. Most people will at some time in their life experience a “panic attack”, but again this does not mean that they have a panic disorder. A person is not determined to have a panic disorder until they commonly experience panic attacks or when they interfere with normal everyday activities that he or she would usually do.

A second type of anxiety disorder is called Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, O.C.D. It is the presence of illogical and uncontrollable thoughts that cause an obsession or compulsion. The act of obsessing is defined as “reoccupying the mind with an idea or emotion” (Webster’s Dictionary). A person who suffers from an obsession may consider the thought to be senseless, be he or she cannot stop themselves from doing to them. A common obsession is that a person may be scared that he or she will become infected with germs and become ill. This person may frequently wash their hands and surrounding objects to an extreme.

A person who suffers from compulsions believes that if they do not perform a series of events something will happen. Compulsive people usually realize the senselessness of the things that they do but cannot control them. In very severe cases a compulsion may be a person’s main daily activity and in doing this activity over and over again may prevent them from living a normal life.

A person who suffers from generalized anxiety may experience hot or cold spells and they may be very irritable and hard to get along with. This may happen because they worry that something will happen to them. These symptoms may last for periods of six months or longer. Physical symptoms include muscle tension, nausea and a rapid heart rate.

A person who suffers from a phobia has a constant fear of objects or situations that they could come across, for example the fear of spiders. A phobic person, if forced to face their fear, may panic or become ill. Although nearly all people have at least one or two phobias it is not considered a disorder until it seriously interferes with a person’s everyday life.

Dissociative disorder, or psychogenic amnesia, is a disorder that affects a person’s ability to remember his or her past. A person who suffers from the type of dissociative disorder called fugue, not only forgets his or her past, but also travels from their community and begins a new life somewhere else as a different person. A familiar type of this disorder is multiple personality disorder in which a person may have two or more completely separate personalities and one personality will dominate during certain situations.

A somatoform disorder is a disorder in which a person experiences physical symptoms with no explainable reasons. Physical symptoms include chest pain, sexual problems or paralysis.

A person who suffers from personality disorders may have trouble keeping a personal relationship. Other symptoms of a personality disorder are aggressive behavior, stealing, lying, fighting and resisting authority. They may also have trouble accepting responsibility.

Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are serious problems that can endanger a person’s life. Both of these disorders are the result of a serious fear of gaining weight. Although eating disorders are more common in women than men, they occur in both. An anorexic person will do anything to lose weight, including dieting or fasting even though they are already underweight. A person with bulimia eats large quantities of food during a binge and vomits it up or takes laxatives to stop weight gain.

Substance disorders involve alcohol abuse or the use of other drugs such as cocaine and heroin. An addiction can lead to brain damage and make a person moody and can also lead to death.

The treatment of mental illnesses can either be handled with medication or under the care of a psychiatrist. The treatment that a patient undergoes depends on the type of their mental illness, as well as, the severity of their situation.

In conclusion, it is obvious that a mental illness is a serious condition. It is important for a person experiencing symptoms, such as those associated with the different types of mental illnesses, to seek out appropriate medical treatment. Having a mental illness is a disease and shouldn’t be associated with a specific weakness in an individual. Seeking treatment is the best thing that one can do to help ensure a life that has more positive situations than negative thoughts and emotions.

Bibliography

World Book Encyclopedia