Mental Illnesses Essay, Research Paper

There is a wide range of problems considered “psychological disorders”. Each is very different, and very complex in it’s own rite. Over 20 million Americans suffer from some sort of mental disorder, such as depression, anxiety disorders, OCD, and schizophrenia (Roleff 50). Most people understand that these disorders are quite difficult to live with, and indeed misfortunate. However, there simply is not enough known about mental illnesses to make the public acutely aware of how serious these disorders really are. Each disease is very different, with different causes, different symptoms, and different treatment needed, but far too often the mentally ill are lumped into a singular category as “crazy” and left to rot. Fewer and fewer of the mentally ill are being hospitalized, which is the only solution for some (Roleff 72). Did you know that, in a survey conducted toward normal people only a few years ago depicted:

43% of people belive that mental illness is brought on by the sufferer.

71% of those surveyed believe mental illness is caused by emotional weakness.

65% believe that mental illness is caused by bad parenting. (Sheilds 9)

No wonder some scientists blow off mental illness as just a way to escape consequences to your actions (Roleff 42).. We need to stop trying to place blame and work on getting more help for people who need it. In order for those afflicted with mental illness to be better understood and treated, we need to be more aware of an illnesses causes, symptoms, and special needs.

There are two major categories of mental illnesses-those which affect solely the mind, and those which have bodily repercussions. Examples of mental illnesses with severe mind effects are

clinical depression, schizophrenia (Hebephrenic and paranoid), and mania. Examples of disorders with mental as well as physical consequences are catatonic schizophrenia, eating disorders, and another very serious disease called Fragile X Syndrome. This disease causes severe mental problems during young childhood, and eventually leads to brain degeneration. It starts in the mind and begins to eat at the body (Bishop B4). This disease has a definite cause, however newly discovered- one in 10 males has a weak X chromosome, which can break off during very early fetal development, causing genetic information to be lost. This disease can be tested for early in pregnancy, and sufferers as well as carriers can be easily identified (Angier 22A). Soon after this discovery, a large number of males found to have fragile X syndrome were found in psych wards. Now that there is a definite cause for such a disease, there is much hope for a definite cure. But that’s only one disease..

On top of all this, each person handles a disorder differently. For some people, depression is something they see a doctor and take medication for, and they are able to live their lives with minimal anguish. However, other people lay in bed, day after day, with each prescription taking place of the last in the line to numb the pain, as they contemplate death by their own hand—just to stop the mental hurt (Young 44). Without excluding either side, there must be a happy medium reached, where everyone can get the help they need.

The causes of mental illnesses are largely mysterious, that is, noone can ever tell for sure, since the disease is of the mind, not a physical part of the brain (Roleff 45). However, for each disease there are a number of proposed causes, and therapy is based upon these. Schizophrenia, a disease characterized by multiple personalities but no real personality of one’s own, is one of the most serious mental illnesses known to scientists. There are different divisions of schizophrenics, as well, such as hebephrenics, who have childlike behavior and very “silly” attitudes but no real thinking, and catatonic schizophrenics, who are comatose but strike strange, statuesque poses and freeze for any amount of time (Young 40). This disease is said by psychologists to be caused by dysfunctional relationships between very young children and their mothers, while doctors tend to lean towards a more medical explanation: babies with low birth weight are more predisposed to schizophrenia (Preboth 2). This all varies according to who you ask.

Eating disorders are another very common, very dangerous mental disorder, where either a person refuses to eat and excercises themselves to death on no nutrition, or they gorge themselves on amazing amounts of food then purge this food from their bodies quickly a binge. This is most commonly believed to be caused by childhood eating habits, and more importantly, unhealthy body image during adolescence and puberty. This disease most commonly affects adolecent girls and young women, but it can happen to anyone. There is no cure for an eating disorder, and too often treatment is futile. An anorexic or bulimic can not gain weight and become healthy again unless he/she truly wants to. However, by the time it is discovered that an eating disorder is at work, the person’s bodily image is so distorted that he or she will choose to die before “getting fat again” (Young 85).

Cures for mental diseases are less than likely, for the fact of limited knowledge about concrete causes. However, treatment is optimistic in most cases, and the sooner a disorder is recognized, the sooner it can be helped, and the prospect for a more normal life is brighter. Major laws have been enacted to ensure some protection for the mentally ill, and care is now more easily attainable than ever (Lippman 14). In reaction to this fact, however, a process that was enacted years ago in effort to get the mentally ill to support themselves, called deinstitutionalization, has attributed to the problem of over 2.2 million homeless mentally ill. Says one scientist: “It’s like 2 steps forward and 5 steps back.” (Roleff).

In as much as there are mentally ill people who need to be hospitalized and treated with the proper care to ensure healthy life, there are those who only want to live like normal people. Katie Flair, a mentally disturbed 13 year old, wants nothing more than to go to school with other kids her age who live normal lives. Her parents are currently fighting with all they have to ensure her acceptance in public school, dispite the school’s claim they have no teachers prepared to accommodate Katie. Her mother confidently states:

“She will be fine in public school. If she continues in this special ed, she will become anonymous. You just don’t develop relationships there.” (Miller 5A).

Mentally ill people are just people with different needs. They need to be assisted in a positive way, by people who care. Society needs to take into consideration the millions of people affected by mental disorders, and put a new foot forward in the quest for better care and perhaps someday, a cure. But, the best care can never be provided without public knowledge of the results of mental illness, and people working together to make a difference, because you never know who around you is affected.