Schizophrenia A Life Destroyer Essay, Research Paper

Schizophrenia

A Life Destroyer Schizophrenia is one of the most common serious psychiatric illnesses.

It affects one percent of the general population. This is a socially and financially devastating

disease that robs people of their most productive years of life. Schizophrenia still continues to be

one of the most complex, puzzling and disabling of the major mental illnesses. Most symptoms

develop in men around the age of sixteen and twenty-five years old, and around twenty-five to

thirty years old in women. Schizophrenia rarely develops in children and most schizophrenics

appear to have a normal childhood. A delusion, which is a false belief that defies logic and

common sense, is a common symptom of schizophrenia. The person thinks someone is watching

them constantly or they think people can read their mind. Hallucinations, hearing, seeing or

sensing something that isn?t there, are another common symptom of schizophrenia. Some people

experience heightened senses, which is hypersensitivity of sense that leads to visual distortions.

Others experience auditory hallucinations. They sometimes carry on conversations or are told to

do things by one or may voices that are not there. Very rarely, but still as devastating, some

experience visual hallucinations or smell odd smells coming from themselves. (Young, 67-68)

More that 300,000 adults in this country are unable to distinguish their imaginations from reality

(Cookson pg. 12).

In the 1700?s and the 1800?s, before much was known about mental diseases,

schizophrenia was thought of as witchcraft (Nichols pg. 1). Anyone who displayed signs of this

disease was thought to have been possessed. The Puritans believed “distraction”, as they called

it, was either possession by the devil, or punishment for sins. Yet, the strange behavior of those

afflicted was looked upon with tolerance. Through much of the 1700?s, family or friends were

expected to take care of the mentally ill. Dorothea Dix was a school teacher who took up the

cause of the mentally ill in the mid 1800?s, found disturbed individuals living in sordid

conditions, “confined in cages, closets, cellars, stalls and pens: chained, naked, beaten with rods

and lashed into obedience.” She worked to help these people live a more normal life. (Goode

pg. 55)

A dismal outlook for schizophrenia was dramatically changed in the 1950?s with the

development of the first antipsychotic drug, Chlorpromazine. Since then, more that a dozen other

similar-acting antipsychotic medications have been developed. These drugs work by

blocking binding sites of dopamine, which is a main factor in schizophrenia. Chlorpromazine

was first used as an antihistamine. Then, it was found to calm hyperactive schizophrenic patients

out of withdrawal and reduced major symptoms of the disease. A lot of false medication was

used before the discovery of chlorpromazine. An insulin coma, as one example, was used to

relieve most symptoms by overloading the patient?s body with insulin. This helped some

patients, because it calmed them down, but killed most of them.

Electroconvulsive therapy, where brief pulses of electronegativity are passed through the

brain, was also used. It was thought that using this type of treatment, symptoms could be reduced

or eliminated, but it did neither. This only helped the severely depressed and only calmed them

for a little while. Doctors also attempted a frontal lobotomy, which was a surgical removal of the

front parts of the brain. A frontal lobotomy was done because it was thought that the front part of

the brain was responsible for schizophrenia. This did nothing but make a quieter patient. These

practices were commonly used to try to suppress the main symptoms of schizophrenia. Mainly,

these practices did nothing but torture the patient and make him or her suffer extremely. (Young

67-68) Many schizophrenics will carry on conversations with voices or people who are not really

there. The voices may tell them what to do and how to harm themselves or others. This puts the

patient at a huge risk for committing suicide. The medication that is prescribed to them attempts

to stop the voices or other symptoms. In turn, most schizophrenics would experience severely

painful side effects. These side effects included constipation, drowsiness, dry mouth and blurred

vision, which would most like diminish after a few weeks. Other side effects that is less likely to

diminish included restlessness, slurred speech, trembling of hands and feet, muscle rigidity in the

neck and head. Most patients experienced a tremendous amount of weight gain and could not

lose the extra pounds, while some also experienced sun sensitivity and fainting.

The next story is one case of schizophrenia. It shows what a typical schizophrenic would

go through in life. The ending is like most schizophrenics, where the stress becomes too much

and the patient attempts to escape it by killing themselves. Eighteen to fifty-five percent of

people living with schizophrenia attempt suicide, with more than ten percent of a success rate

(Bathen pg. 14). Many schizophrenics cannot cope with the stresses of everyday life and feel that

the only way to escape would be to kill themselves.

Environmental factors can affect the person too. If the person is constantly treated as a

nuisance, is abused about how the act or is not shown love and understanding, he or she may be

lonely and turn to other things to help them deal with it. In turn, some talk to the voices in their

heads and actually think that the situation is really that bad and may listen to what they are being

told. It can be quite frightening for the patient. Janet was 15 in the late 1960?s. Her parents

assumed she was rebelling like the rest of the kids were during that time. They took Janet to an

adolescent specialist and were told there was no need to worry. (Goode pg. 63)

In 1972, after changing schools for the third time, she lived at home and became a

born-again Christian. She would lie on her bedroom floor and would scream, “I?m

damned to hell and my family is damned to hell.” She would slam her sister

against the wall. She tells them “You?re not my family.” She left home and moved

in with a cult leader in downtown Boston, collecting donations on the street and

ate from open carts in the North End. (Goode pg. 64)

At nineteen, she asked her parents to meet her outside a counseling center. She runs to the car,

screaming, and she hit her father on the shoulder. She was taken to the emergency room where

she was put on the psychiatric ward. This was Janet?s first hospitalization. (Goode pg. 65) Janet

was shuffled to and from private and city hospitals. Some doctors told her parents its best if she

was at home, yet others told them not to take her home. She was prescribed numerous drugs,

alone and in combination. They make her muscles stiff and her hands tremble. They do nothing

to help her. Sometimes, she would escape the hospitals and disappears for months. Sometimes,

she was discharged and her parents were not told. One night, she was picked up for hitchhiking.

Another time, she was arrested for shoplifting. She stayed in halfway houses or at home. In her

last years, she lived in a halfway house for two and a half years. She occasionally broke the

rules, but she otherwise was on her best behavior. On August 25, 1986, the painful news arrives

to Janet?s parents. She has killed herself by drinking several bottles of nail polish remover and

jumping from a second story window. (Goode pg. 58) This story, although sad and painful, is

what many schizophrenics go through.

Anyone who has seen up close the disintegration of a mind by schizophrenia can

understand the pain of this horrible disease. Many schizophrenics experience far worse than what

Janet has went through. Some lose total touch with reality and do not know what is real and what

isn?t. They experience things in a much different frame of mind than others. Many

schizophrenics end up like Janet, taking their own life to escape the torment of this living hell.

Dealing with a schizophrenic is very hard work. It is made even harder when the person is in

your family and is someone you love. To try to calm a schizophrenic during a temper tantrum is

near impossible due to their lost connection of reality. Also, attempting to make the person

realize their hallucination or delusion is not real is also very hard and painful. All one can do is

to watch the patient to make sure he or she does not hurt themselves and that they are ok. It is a

very painful process for both the caretaker and the patient.

Schizophrenia is in part caused by an inability to cope with the psychological stresses of

human existence. Stress is a pressure that a person finds difficult to cope with. Overwhelming

stress can cause schizophrenic like symptoms to appear. Schizophrenia is also caused by a

chemical overload in the person?s brain. This causes the brain to be off balance and causes these

horrible symptoms. Environmental factors also affect the disease and can irritate the symptoms.

Negative experiences with family or friends can cause schizophrenia to develop more versus

positive experiences that can keep the schizophrenic gene down so that it can never bother a

person. The risk factors for developing schizophrenic are not for certain, but some psychologists

have found some factors that can influence the development of this disease. Some inherit the

disease but it?s affected by environmental factors also.

If family communications are poor, a patient is more likely to develop schizophrenia,

such as hearing negative or confusing messages. Separation from parents can also be a major

factor. Being shuffled from one family member to another, or being placed in a foster home and

not having a stable family life can also have a tremendous effect on the development of this

disease. School problems can affect the risk also. If a student has a short attention span, a poor

short-term memory or a high level of anger can be a main sign of developing schizophrenia later

in life. This is because the extra stress in his or her life, due to family or school related problems

could put a strain of the child?s life, causing a higher risk of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia runs in

the families mainly.

Ten people out of one hundred who have the schizophrenic gene will get the disease if

their mother or father has the disease. If the mother and father both have the disease, the chances

for developing the disease is doubled and will most likely have schizophrenia later in life.

Someone who inherits a schizophrenia gene has an average one-in-three chance of actually

developing the disease. Ten to fifteen percent of schizophrenics have the disease in their

immediate family. Some psychologists believe that some people inherit the disease by the way a

child is raised. The environment that the child is raised in can affect the disease because the child

may have a hard time adjusting or dealing with the negative influences in his or her life. If the

parents have the disease, then they are more likely to raise the child in a way that he or she will

most like develop it. By the way the child is nurtured or the nature in which they are raised is a

major factor in whether or not the child will develop schizophrenia. Researchers have found that

if one of the two identical twins has schizophrenia there is a thirty five to sixty percent chance

the other twin will develop the disease also (Cookson pg. 12). Whereas in fraternal twins, if one

of the two has schizophrenia, there is only a ten to fifteen percent chance the other twin will

develop the disease (Cookson pg. 12). Schizophrenia is a difficult and trying disease. It is one of

the most common serious psychiatric illnesses.

Having this terrible mental illness is hard for everyone involved. Schizophrenia is a

socially and financially devastating disease that robs people of their most productive years of

their life. This illness robs people of their most productive years of their lives, forcing them to

live a majority of their live on medication, out of touch with reality. Many people who have this

disease spend half of their life unable to live a normal, productive life due to the major symptoms

of this illness. Although advances have been made in this work, schizophrenia continues to be

one of the most complex, puzzling and disabling of the major mental illnesses. Hopefully, on

day, a cure can be found for this horrible illness and the people affected by this can live a normal

life on a daily basis.

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