

MODULE 3C

Activity #4 Handout

Group #6: Schizophrenia (Fact Sheet)

What is Schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a mental illness which affects about one person in every hundred. Schizophrenia is one of a group of illnesses called Psychotic Disorders. It interferes with a person's mental functioning and behaviour, and in the long term may cause changes to their personality.

The first onset of Schizophrenia is usually in adolescence or early adulthood. Some people may experience only one or more brief episodes of psychosis in their lives, and it may not develop the illness called Schizophrenia. For others, it may remain a recurrent or life-long condition.

The onset of the illness may occasionally be rapid, with acute symptoms developing over months. More commonly, it may be slow, developing over years.

Schizophrenia is characterized by two different sets of symptoms: positive symptoms such as delusions (thinking things that aren't true), or hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there).

Negative symptoms refer to things that are taken away by the illness, so that a person has less energy, less pleasure and interest in normal life activities, spending less time with friends, being less able to think clearly. These symptoms tend to begin gradually and become more pronounced over years.

What are the Symptoms of Schizophrenia?

- **Positive symptoms of Schizophrenia include:**
 - **Delusions** – false beliefs of persecution, guilt or grandeur, or being under outside control. These beliefs will not change regardless of the evidence against them. People with Schizophrenia may describe outside plots against them or think they have special powers or gifts. Sometimes they withdraw from people or hide to avoid imagined persecution.
 - **Hallucinations** – most commonly involving hearing voices. Other less common experiences can include seeing, feeling, tasting or smelling things (which to the person are real but which are not actually there).
 - **Thought disorder** – where the speech may be difficult to follow, for example, jumping from one subject to another with no logical connection. Thoughts and speech may be jumbled and disjointed. The person may think someone is interfering with their mind.
- **Other symptoms of Schizophrenia include:**
 - **Loss of drive** – when the ability to engage in everyday activities (such as washing and cooking) is lost. This lack of drive, initiative or motivation is part of the illness and is not laziness.
 - **Blunted expression of emotions** – where the ability to express emotion is reduced and is often accompanied by a lack of response or an inappropriate response to external events such as feeling happy on a sad occasion.
 - **Social withdrawal** – this may be caused by a number of factors including the fear that someone is going to harm them, or a fear of interacting with others because of a loss of social skills.

- **Lack of insight or awareness of other conditions** – because some experiences such as delusions or hallucinations seem so real, it is common for people with Schizophrenia to be unaware they are ill. For this and other reasons, such as medication side-effects, they may refuse to accept treatment which could be essential for their well being.
- **Thinking difficulties** – a person's concentration, memory and ability to plan and organize may be affected, making it more difficult to reason, communicate and complete daily tasks.

What Causes Schizophrenia?

No single cause has been identified, but several factors are believed to contribute to the onset of Schizophrenia.

- **Genetic factors** – A predisposition to Schizophrenia can run in families and has a genetic cause. In the general population, about one percent of people develop it over their lifetime. Some people develop the illness without having it in their family.
- **Family relationships** – No evidence has been found to support the suggestion that family relationships cause the illness. However, some people with Schizophrenia are sensitive to family tensions which, for them, may be associated with relapses.
- **Environment** – Stress does not cause Schizophrenia. People with Schizophrenia often become anxious, irritable and unable to concentrate before any positive symptoms are evident. This can cause relationships to deteriorate, possibly leading to divorce or unemployment. Often these factors are blamed for the onset of the illness when, in fact, the illness itself has caused the crisis. There is some evidence that environmental factors that damage brain development (such as a viral illness in utero) may lead to Schizophrenia later in life.
- **Drug use** – The use of some drugs, such as cannabis (marijuana), LSD, Crack and crystal meth may to cause a relapse in Schizophrenia. Some people with a particular genetic type may be at higher risk for Schizophrenia if they use marijuana often. Occasionally, severe drug use may lead to Schizophrenia.

Myths, Misunderstandings and Facts

Myths, misunderstandings, negative stereotypes and attitudes surround the issue of mental illness in general - and in particular, Schizophrenia. They result in stigma, discrimination and isolation.

Do people with Schizophrenia have a split personality?

No. Schizophrenia refers to the change in the person's mental function where the thoughts and perceptions become disordered.

Are people with Schizophrenia dangerous?

Not mostly. People with Schizophrenia are generally not dangerous when receiving appropriate treatment. However, a minority of people with the illness may become aggressive when experiencing an untreated acute episode, or if they are taking illicit drugs. This is usually expressed to family and friends - rarely to strangers.

Is Schizophrenia a life-long mental disorder?

Like many mental illnesses, Schizophrenia is usually lifelong. However, most people, with professional help and social support, learn to manage their symptoms and have a reasonable quality of life. About 20-30 percent

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of people with Schizophrenia have only a few psychotic episodes in their lives.

How can Schizophrenia be Treated?

The most effective treatment for Schizophrenia involves medication. In addition, psychological counseling and help with managing its impact on everyday life is often needed.

The sooner that Schizophrenia is treated, the better the long-term prognosis or outcome. The opposite is also true: the longer Schizophrenia is left untreated, and the more psychotic breaks are experienced by someone with the illness, the lower the level of eventual recovery. Early intervention is key to helping people recover.

The development of antipsychotic medications has revolutionized the treatment of Schizophrenia. Now, most people can be treated and remain in the community instead of in hospital.

Antipsychotic medications work by correcting the brain chemistry associated with the illness. New medications are emerging which may promote a more complete recovery with fewer side effects than the older versions.

Schizophrenia is an illness like many physical illnesses. Just as insulin is a lifeline for people with diabetes, antipsychotic medications can be a lifeline for a person with Schizophrenia. Just as with diabetes, some people will need to take medication indefinitely to prevent a relapse and keep symptoms under control.

Though there is no known cure for Schizophrenia, regular contact with a doctor or psychiatrist and other mental health professionals such as nurses, occupational therapists and psychologists can help a person with Schizophrenia recover and get on with their lives. Informal supports such as self-help and social support are also very important to recovery. Meaningful activity, employment assistance and adequate housing and income are all essential to keeping people healthy.

Sometimes specific therapies directed toward symptoms such as delusions may also be useful.

Counseling and social support can help people with Schizophrenia overcome problems with finances, housing, work, socializing and interpersonal relationships.

With effective treatment and support, most people with Schizophrenia can lead fulfilling and productive lives.

Group #6: Understanding Schizophrenia (Reporting Page)

What is Schizophrenia?

How common is Schizophrenia?

Describe some of the symptoms of Schizophrenia:

List and briefly explain some of the factors that may contribute to the onset of Schizophrenia:

What type of treatment is available for people with Schizophrenia?

What other kinds of support can help people with Schizophrenia recover?