

Schizophrenia: A Psychotic Condition

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Mental illnesses can take many forms, just as physical illnesses do. One in every five people can be considered to have had a mental illness at some point in their lives. Like many other illness, it is common and can occur at any time and happen to any one of us. Severe mental illness is a term used for longstanding conditions and affects only a small percentage of the population [1].

A mental disorder or mental illness is a psychological or behavioural pattern that occurs in an individual and is thought to cause distress or disability that is not expected as part of normal development or culture. Mental disorders have been found to be common. Individuals, who through no fault of their own or their families, suffer from one of several diseases affecting the brain, comes under chronic mental disorders. The causes remain unknown, but are probably multiple. There is no cure, but we do have effective treatment. In addition to having a brain disease, people with serious mental illness are (by definition) significantly functionally impaired by the illness for an indefinite period of time (diagnosis, disability, duration). At least 1% of the population are having severe mental illness. The problems of victims and their families are compounded by stigma; one of the cruellest and most prevalent forms of bigotry that exists [2].

Of all the mental illnesses that cause suffering in society schizophrenia probably is responsible for lengthier hospitalisations, greater chaos in family life, more exorbitant costs to individuals and governments, and more fears than any other. Because it is such an enormous threat to life and happiness and its causes are unsolved puzzle, it has probably been studied more than any other mental disorder [3].

Schizophrenia is a psychotic condition characterised by disturbance in thinking, emotions, volitions and faculties in the presence of clear consciousness, which usually leads to social withdrawal [4].

Worldwide, Schizophrenia ranks among the top 10 causes of disability in developed countries and affecting about 7 per 1000 of the adult population. It is a disease that typically begins in early adulthood, between the ages of 15-25 years. Men tend to develop schizophrenia slightly earlier than women, whereas, most of the males become ill between 16-25 years old, and most female develop symptoms several years later. However, the incidence in women is noticeably

higher after the age of 30. The prevalence rate of schizophrenia Worldwide is approximately 1.1% or 51 million people. However, in India 4.3 to 8.7 million people, in China 6 to 12 million people, in USA 2.2 million people, in Australia 285000 people, in Canada over 280000 people, and in Britain over 250000 are diagnosed as schizophrenia [5].

The incidence rate of schizophrenia is one in 4000; about 1.5 million people are diagnosed with schizophrenia every year. The prevalence rate of schizophrenia is 3.6 per thousand populations in rural Kerala [6].

Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that affects the way a person acts, thinks, and sees the world. People with schizophrenia have an altered perception of reality, often significant loss of contact with reality. They may see or hear things that don't exist, speak in strange or confusing ways, believe that others are trying to harm them, or feel like they're being constantly watched. With such a blurred line between the real and the imaginary, schizophrenia makes it difficult -even frightening- to negotiate activities of daily life. The effects of schizophrenia can be devastating both to the individual with the disorder and those around him or her. Some of the possible effects of schizophrenia are hallucination, delusion, relationship problems, disruption to normal daily activities, alcohol and drug abuse and increased suicidal risk [7].

National Institute of Mental Health (2008)

Most prevalent mental disorders worldwide are schizophrenia, schizoaffective, bipolar disorders and major depression. According to the National Institute of Mental Health approximately 2.5 million Americans are affected by schizophrenia. Five million adults in the United States suffer from chronic mental disorders. It has been estimated that out of these between 40% and 60% either reside with or receive primary care from family members [8].

Mental illness has far-reaching effects on other family members, as individuals and as members of a social system. When a person with a physical or emotional illness needs help, the whole family needs help. Families need education about the disorder and the special needs of the member who is ill as well as significant emotional support [8].

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