

# MYTHS & FACTS: MENTAL HEALTH

MYTHS	FACTS/ Explanations
People who have a mental illness are less intelligent.	Mental illness and mental retardation (below average intelligence) are two different conditions.
Mental illness is unusual.	Rather it is quite common. Many mental health conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, etc are in fact called Common Mental Disorders!
Mental disorders are a figment of one's imagination and not true medical illnesses.	They are very much real disorders, and not imaginations in people's minds. These cause real distress/suffering to people affected and interfere with their functioning. These disorders have various biological and psychological factors associated with them.
Mental health problems do not happen to people who are 'strong'.	Mental health problems can happen to anybody, including those who are seen as 'strong' or 'weak' as these depend on multiple biological and other factors.
If someone has a mental health problem, they cannot live a normal, productive life.	In spite of the suffering, many individuals with mental health conditions can live a productive and satisfying life as there are effective treatment approaches available to manage a variety of mental health conditions. Of course, there are some individual variations in extent of recovery depending on the severity of the problem and the nature of response to different treatments. This is similar to what happens in the case of physical illnesses.
People who have mental health problems are 'crazy'.	It is a stigmatizing general comment that society makes. This label suggests that all people with mental health problems are not in touch with reality. But this is not the case. Only one group of mental illnesses called psychoses (major mental disorders) can result in temporary loss of touch with reality.
Mentally ill people are violent.	In fact, mentally ill individuals are more likely to be victims of violence. Only a minority of persons with severe mental illness might show aggressive behaviors at times when their illness is not well managed.
If someone has attempted suicide in the past, he/she has lowered risk for suicide.	Generally speaking, past history of suicide attempt indicates that the person is at increased risk for suicide attempts in future.
Mental health treatments are just about medications that make you dull, drowsy or dependent	Psychiatric medications are meant to target the symptoms of the condition. Though some medications may have side effects such as excessive drowsiness, many newer medications have minimal side effects. Moreover, while selecting medication for a given person, an expert takes in account the differential side effect profiles of the medications as well as the needs of the person. Most psychiatric medications do not have a potential for addiction. Also, there are multiple treatments available, including a wide range of non-medication forms of treatment for different conditions.

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People with alcohol dependence can just snap out.	Alcohol dependence is an illness. Once a person is addicted, it is not easy to just come out of it by merely wishing to do so. It requires sustained efforts and appropriate interventions.
When people face major negative events or losses- sadness and distress are anyway expected- so no professional help is required/nothing much can be done.	Sometimes distress due to an understandable reason also can become severe enough to require the diagnosis of 'clinical depression'. So when someone is distressed due to a major life event, it can be worth considering psychological intervention and or medication to help in coping especially when the distress is severe and is resulting in dysfunction.
If you have good support from people around you- that is enough to handle all mental health issues.	Good support system is a big resource but it may not always be enough. Several times professional help is also needed.
Non- drug treatment of mental health problems means- just counseling – which means just getting advices- which anyway we know/hear from others & it does not help.	Non-drug treatment or psycho-social treatments are not just 'advising'. It is a systematic process, learnt through professional training. There are different kinds of psychological interventions/therapies which involve different techniques and processes. There are psychotherapy approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective through research, for a variety of mental health disorders.
Psychological needs are taken care of automatically if physical needs are met.	Both physical and psychological aspects of health require attention and care. Although both influence each other, taking care of one does not automatically result in taking care of the other.
Emotional problems are a result of obvious trauma and if one cannot identify such a cause one cannot have an emotional problem.	Emotional problems can arise as a result of many factors and trauma is not a necessary factor. For example, a person can suffer from clinical depression, without there being an obvious negative life event/stress in his/her life.
Seeking consultation for mental health is a sign of weakness.	Rather, it is a sign of courage and responsibility taking for one's health.
If I know the cause of my emotional problems I can bear it and will not need help.	Just knowing/analyzing the cause or reason is often not enough for individuals to deal with the mental health concerns/problems
Asking about suicidal thoughts makes a distressed person more likely to attempt suicide.	Sensitively asking about suicidal thoughts helps to explore suicidal risk and provide professional help accordingly. Asking also gives signal to the person that it is OK for them to disclose such thoughts and seek support as well as that someone is willing to listen about the extent of their distress.