

SAMHS INFO BULLETIN



Compiled by Corporate Communication

MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS MONTH

The month of July has been declared Mental Health Awareness month with the objective of not only educating the public about mental health but also to reduce the stigma and discrimination that people with mental illness are often subjected to.

What causes mental illness

Although the exact cause of most mental illnesses is not known, it is becoming clear through research that many of these conditions are caused by a combination of biological, psychological and environmental factors.

What Biological Factors are involved in Mental Illness

Some mental illnesses have been linked to an abnormal balance of special chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. If these chemicals are out of balance or are not working properly, messages may not make it through the brain correctly, leading to symptoms of mental illness. In addition, defects in or injury to certain areas of the brain have also been linked to some mental conditions.

Other biological factors that may be involved in the development of mental include:

- **Genetics (heredity):** Many mental illness run in families, suggesting that people who have a family member with a mental illness are more likely to develop one themselves.
- **Infections:** Certain infections have been linked to brain damage and the development of mental illness or illness or the worsening of its symptoms.

- **Brain defects or injury:** Defects in or injuries to certain areas of the brain have also been linked to some mental illness.
- **Prenatal damage:** Some evidence suggests that a disruption of early fetal brain development (Autism) or trauma that occurs at the time of birth; e.g. loss of oxygen to the brain, may be a factor in the development of certain conditions such as cerebral disability.
- **Substance abuse:** Long-term substance abuse, in particular has been linked to anxiety, depression, paranoia and dementia.
- **Other factors:** Poor nutrition and exposure to toxins such as lead may play a role in the development of mental illnesses.

Psychological factors that may contribute to Mental Illness includes:

- Severe psychological trauma suffered as a child, such as emotional, physical or sexual abuse.
- An important early loss, such as the loss of a parent
- Neglect
- Poor ability to relate to others.
- Severe traumatic experience causing post traumatic depression.

Certain stressors can trigger an illness in a person who is susceptible to mental illness: These stressors include,

- Death or divorce
- A dysfunctional family life
- Feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, anxiety, anger or loneliness.
- Changing jobs schools.
- Social or cultural expectations (Family a society that associates beauty with thinness can be a factor in the development of eating disorders)
- Substance abuse by the person or the person's parents.

NB: Treatment include medical, psychological and social support, as well as spiritual support by Chaplains.

Approved by: D Med (SAMHS)