

Mental Illness & Violence: Fact or Fiction



The single greatest predictor of violence is a history of violence. Unfortunately, we have likely all heard of recent tragic events where the media has portrayed a relationship between mental illness and violence. Public opinion surveys confirm this flawed belief. In some of these cases, the perpetrator has had a mental illness however saying mental illness equates to violence is no more true than saying that "all people who wear red hold positions of power".

Research suggests that people with mental illness are more often victims of violence rather than perpetrators. There is no compelling scientific evidence to suggest that mental illness causes violence. The lifetime prevalence of violence among people with serious mental illness has been estimated at 16% and more specifically lifetime risk of someone with an illness such as schizophrenia harming another person has been estimated at .005%

In reality, substance abuse is a key contributor to violent behaviour. Certain socio-demographic and socio economic factors such as being young, male and of lower socioeconomic status are also prevalent factors in violent behavior.

The suggested link between violence and mental illness is central to the ongoing discrimination and stigma of people living with mental illness. The fear of stigma can keep people from disclosing or seeking treatment for mental illness. Being perceived as dangerous or potentially violent has a devastating effect on an individual's relationships, employment and functioning.

If you know someone whose behaviour has changed, or who is confused and expresses strange or "magical" thinking it is important that they see a medical professional to get assistance as soon as possible.

What can you do for someone with a mental illness?

- Encourage them to seek treatment
- If they are reluctant to get help offer to accompany them
- Learn more about mental illness to reduce any fears you may have
- Offer your ongoing support and friendship
- Ask what they would find helpful

Remember: Most people who are mentally ill are not violent and most people who are violent are not mentally ill. Violence is often a criminal activity with little correlation to a person's mental health.

Talk About it.

Facing Facts: Tackling the Stigma if Mental Illness. Visit www.virtualwellness.ualberta.ca for addition information

Contact Information:

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Health Resource Services
Phone: 780.492.7124
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Employee and Family Assistance Program
Phone: 780.428.7586
www.hrs.ualberta.ca/efap

Postdoctoral Fellows:

Postdoctoral Fellows Assistance Program
Phone: 780.428.7587
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Students:

Graduate Student Assistance Program
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Counseling & Clinical Services
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