

Mental health
conditions such as
high blood pressure



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Mental health is an ever-growing concern on a worldwide basis. In the UK there is a possible teenage mental-health crisis as studies over the last 25 years show that rates of depression and anxiety in teenagers have increased by 70% and the amount of youth entering A&E with a psychiatric condition has more than doubled since 2009. (Bedell, 2016) Before going any further with this subject, the way in which we attempt to define 'Mental Illness' should be discussed as this plays a massive role in the actual clinical diagnosis of any mental health condition. Health care professions all across the globe make use of the latest version of the DSM (DSM-V) in an attempt to collect many ideas about what different mental health illnesses could be, despite there not being an easily recognisable set of symptoms, as there are for health conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes for example. Each mental health condition affects each individual differently and manifests in a multitude of different ways. As a result, there is no solid definition for mental health disorders and is currently simply defined by Stein et al (2010) as "a clinically significant behavioural or psychological syndrome or pattern...associated with present distress, or disability, or with a significantly increased risk of suffering, death, pain, disability or an important loss of freedom"- the definition that was first included in DSM-III and DSM-III-R. The definition also encompasses the fact that this mental illness cannot be a response to a specific life event at one particular period of time, for example the death of a loved one or deviant behaviour unless these behaviours are due to a dysfunction occurring in the individual. (Stein et al., 2010) Another discussion surrounding this topic is whether genetic or environmental factors

play a greater role in the development of mental illness, this all in all boils down to the age-old nature vs.

nurture debate, one idea is that inherited genes may result in the development of mental health conditions and then on the other hand there is the environmental exposures that may be experienced before birth, exposures such as environmental stressors, inflammatory conditions, toxins, alcohol or drugs, all of which could possibly be linked to the development of mental illness. According to the online article 'Mental illness- symptoms and causes' brain chemistry can also be significant in the possible development of mental health conditions when the neural networks (which carry neurotransmitters) become damaged or altered in some way. This in turn affects the way in which the nerve receptors work, possibly causing concerns with regards to an individual's mental health. Other possible risk factors include brain injury, traumatic experiences, experience of abuse as a child and use of alcohol or recreational drugs. Moreover, circumstances such as sexual abuse or the breakdown of a relationship can allow a person to experience feelings of loss or danger which could eventually lead to depressive disorders. All of these factors whether environmental or genetic have the potential to interact with any "genetic vulnerability" to alter brain chemistry and thereby alter the condition of this person's mental health.

(Mayo Clinic, 2015) These mental health issues can result in social isolation from friends and family, legal or financial problems, poverty or homelessness or even self-harm or harm to others (including suicide or homicide) (Mayo Clinic, 2015) which can in some cases result in court sentences and jail-time, particularly for vulnerable young people. However, there still remains the <https://assignbuster.com/mental-health-conditions-such-as-high-blood-pressure/>

overall debate as to whether mental health conditions in juvenile offenders are pre-existing and have caused them to enter the justice system, or elements of the justice system itself has produced psychological stress of some kind that leads to a mental health disorder and later, possibly reoffending in the future. Prior to any contact with the juvenile justice system there are numerous ways in which the probability of an adolescent committing crimes (at times very serious crimes) can be reduced. Chartered child psychologist Jennie Lindon states that through the use of both positive and negative reinforcement, parental figures to children can either dismiss or reinforce specific 'bad' behaviours.

However some adults unknowingly give these adolescents the attention they are craving, thereby reinforcing this behaviour and causing it to repeat where they should instead "choose to ignore the behaviour or, or to give it minimal attention" and also should not "ignore the child as a person". She goes on to discuss how selectively ignoring unwanted behaviour is in fact more successful and much more reliable than punishment which provides a very restrictive message to the child, enforcing the message of "'don't' rather than 'do'" (Lindon, 2009). Furthermore another explored possible pathway to delinquency is children's exposure to violence. This pattern is extensively explored by the NatSCEV (funded by the OJJDP) which researches the extent to which exposure to violent behaviour can possibly affect a child living in the United States. According to the 'Crimes Against Children Research Centre' website, the survey addresses multiple areas which prior to the set-up of the survey were previously not addressed, such as the variety of violence across the demographics of gender, race, age and family structure,

as well as the different types of violence within schools, families and also within the community. (Crimes Against Children Research Centre) Further details were consistently released by the OJJDP in the form of a ' Juvenile Justice Bulletin' which detailed that after gaining knowledge on individual's experience research teams asked further questions with a higher focus on the child and these specific experiences, including the location of the violence, the child's relationship to the perpetrator and details upon possible injuries sustained by the child. The survey eventually led to the conclusion that youth who are considered to be both victimised and take part in delinquent activities are seen as displaying higher rates of mental health symptoms paired with lower level of social support, than groups of youth who are either victims or delinquent exclusively.

Supporting evidence that "' bully-victims' are often the most distressed children" and therefore are most in need of support, as they are the adolescents who are considered more high-risk for taking part in delinquent activities. (National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, 2013) On the other hand, Fuller's summary of ' Juvenile Delinquency: Mainstream and Crosscurrents' states that the nature theories with regards to delinquency state that both Body-type theories and Biosocial theory claim that certain characteristics within adolescents can make them more likely to commit crimes and thereby become involved in the Juvenile justice system. This is proved by the way in which hormones are thought to in some way be responsible for the demonstration of these antisocial tendencies, for example testosterone has previously been linked to a general increase in aggression. However, Anthony Walsh (American Criminologist) objects to

these biological theories in relation to crime stating they are “deterministic and socially dangerous” on the basis that “crime is socially constructed so there can't be any genes for crime” (Fuller, 2013) This gives the idea that we are all born as a blank-canvas and that our environmental factors play a much larger role in this nature vs.

nurture debate of the causes of juvenile delinquency. Media influences such as TV and video games has been considered in more recent years to be very impactful upon behaviour of children and young people, through its depictions of pro-social and anti-social behaviour. According to the work of Kaplan (2012) Emanuel Tanay, MD (retired Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Wayne State University) states that “violence in the media has been increasing and reaching proportions that are dangerous” and in accordance with the Nielson Company “Nearly two-thirds of TV programs contain some physical violence. Most self-involving video games contain some violent content, even those for children”. This evidence showing that as these different media outlets are incorporating more and more violent imagery into our TV and video games, the more accepting we are as a society of these types of abusive, gore-ridden images and so the more normalised it becomes, especially to impressionable young people. According to Tanay, “mentally ill individuals are vulnerable to dramatized violence...they are sick, and they may misinterpret something” (Kaplan, 2012) now whilst it is unfair to assume that all people suffering from a mental health condition who are exposed to high levels of violence in the media will react in horrific ways and commit terrible crimes, it may not be impossible to see that there can be a certain vulnerability around those with a mental health illness that leaves them very

open and impressionable to the violence that they are seeing. One case study in aid of this point is the 2 teenage boys- Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold- who murdered 12 schoolmates and one teacher whilst injuring 21 others before killing themselves at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999. The two boys were said to have lived in a “ pathological environment” and were both heavily involved in violent video games which is said to have had some influence in the boys committing this tragedy (Kaplan, 2012)