

Invisible disabilities essay sample

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Disabilities come in many different forms and effect individuals in various ways, whether they're openly apparent to society or not. However, one commonality that all disabled people share, is the negative stereotypes and indignities that society stamps upon them, whether it's a degraded stare, rude comment, or unequal treatment. In this paper I will focus on the variety of disabled groups that fall into this largely overlooked class of "invisible disabilities." By examining these life-limiting conditions, we can acquire a better, more concrete, understanding to help remove society's judgmental stigmas and dismissive treatment surrounding them.

When attempting to define the ambiguous notion of invisible disabilities, it is most accurate to identify it as embodying individuals with conditions, illnesses, and structural or biochemical anomalies that are life limiting but not readily discernable to others. (N. Ann Davis). This includes, but is not limited to, mental health illnesses (anxiety-panic disorders, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder etc.), learning disabilities (attention deficient disorders, dyslexia, etc.), chronic health issues (fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, mild traumatic brain injury etc.), and much more. The social problem surrounding this topic is that when individuals are not "seen" as disabled, they are subject to forms of rejection, humiliation, and social disapproval. There are many different viewpoints surrounding social understandings of what is deemed a viable life-limiting disability, including being able to physically see the disability, having a medical diagnosis, or being able to fluently communicate and describe the symptoms. For those who suffer from disabilities that are invisible, being able to meet this burden of proof, that is, to convince other people that they really are disabled, and

not seeking some special-unfair-advantage, is excruciatingly hard, and in most cases impossible.

They thus face a double bind; either they forgo the assistance or accommodation they need- and thus suffer the consequences of attempting to do things they may not safely be able to do by themselves- or they endure the discomfort of subjecting themselves to strangers interrogations (N. Ann Davis). The main cause of the social problem in discussion is that the invisible nature of these many illnesses and disabilities creates an atmosphere of suspicion or disbelief, even by those who are closest to you. “It’s all in your head!” Doctors, friends, co-workers, and family often make this statement when they can’t “see” what you are going through or find a diagnosis (Wayne Connell). In consequence, people whose disabilities are not generally perceived by others as substantial or real do not, for that reason alone, find it easier to minister to themselves or to engage productively and effectively in the world without having to endure pain, discomfort, and exhaustion (N. Ann Davis).

For those who are disabled, not receiving needed assistance is not merely disappointing or frustrating: it may be an insuperable obstacle or a risk to health or life. People begin to believe that their own conditions are not worthy of special treatment. Some even feel shame and believe so much that they themselves are to blame that they take their own lives. (Wayne Connell) Zooming in on the prevalence of invisible disabilities in academic environments, studies show that learning disabilities, mental health issues, and other conditions, affect a significant proportion of students, and that

number appears to be on the rise. According to the learning disability association of Canada statistics estimate that 1/10 Canadians has learning disabilities and 30% of adults with severe illiteracy problems were found to have undetected or untreated learning disabilities. (Nancy E. Black).

Due to these disorders, their achievement outcomes, including graduation, are poor; their dropout rate remains high, and the extent to which they are unable to achieve academic and social integration is affected. In fact, reported barriers to the retention and success of students with learning disabilities include lack of understanding of students conditions and requirements on the part of institutional staff and instructors, in addition to practices that make the students feel that they are not accepted as legitimate members of their learning communities. Consequently, students may fail to disclose their LD and forgo requests for the accommodations for fear of discrimination and negative stigma (Emmanuel Manalo). Not getting the support they need to offset the limitations their disabilities themselves inflict makes academic success incredibly more difficult, if not impossible.

In addition, by studying another specified class under the umbrella of invisible disabilities; the largely unknown mental illnesses of historical leaders Abraham Lincoln, Charles Darwin, Winston Churchill and Florence Nightingale, we can further see the impeding repercussions of society's stigmatization toward invisible disabilities. It is argued that if these famous figures were alive today, the negative attitudes and discrimination that exists toward the mentally ill would have prevented them from achieving what they did. And perhaps the most important result of the study of mental

illness in historical heroes is that it provides positive images for those experiencing mental health problems today. That each of these great historical figures experienced mental illness yet still made major contributions to the world should help reduce the stigma that mental illness evokes and provide hope to current sufferers and their families (Jerome Carson and Elizabeth Wakely).

As a society we need to acquire a better understanding of invisible disability, in order to comprehend the severity of the many disorders and the reality of their prevalence, and in turn remove the discrimination and indignities surrounding them. These people can't just "get over it" or stop feeling constant pain, depression, and the many other life inhibiting effects of these conditions, they need real help and support in order to combat these hardships and live effectively with their non-disabled counterparts, and we need to make this world a safe place for them to feel comfortable and entitled to ask for and to receive the aide that they deserve.