

# Discrimination and stigma against the mentally ill



## Introduction

Discrimination of the Mentally Ill is Accepted in Today's Society The treatment of mental illnesses has a shameful history that has contributed to the development of a societal status toward those suffering with different forms of mental illness. Early treatment was characterized by a lack of scientific knowledge about mental illnesses and often involved experimentation and broad based diagnoses that were not based upon sound medical practices. The result of this was that mentally ill patients didn't receive proper or effective treatment and were either institutionalized, where they lost most if not all their rights as a United States citizen, or they were excluded by society and largely forgotten from the public and in the public conscience. Those suffering may be forgotten but they are not gone as there are many different effects to the discrimination of those with mental illnesses. Individuals with mental illnesses who have not received counseling and treatment are increasingly being funneled through our health care, education, and criminal justice systems and ending up on our streets as homeless, as inmates in our prisons and jails, dropping out of high school, and committing suicide. Discrimination against those with a mental illness has become pervasive in the United States due largely to the stigma associated with these types of disorders.

## Position

There are many patterns related to health that lead to a greater risk for school dropout. Depression and other mental illnesses often go unseen by

everyone around them. Administrators usually do not understand all of the issues and do not know what actions to take. Statistics can help shine light on the risks that are going on with highschool dropouts. Studies show three ways in which health problems may lead to dropouts; childhood illness, mental health problems, and poor performance (Tate). A large majority of children with mental health challenges are not identified or treated. Many mental disorders have proven to lead to poor performance at school but this stigma can influence some parents to seek medical care for their children (Tate). Depression in late teens is linked to high school dropouts. Most students who drop out have a screening and are assessed for their mental health (Weinstock). In 2015 an estimated three million adolescents aged twelve to seventeen in the U. S had experienced a depressive episode in the past year, according to the National Institute of National Health. These school dropout rates can highlight other bad outcomes, like the trouble to gain employment. For many people, this depression can end up limiting their abilities to carry out major life activities and can lead people with mental illnesses to think that living is no longer important. Mental illness is a major risk factor for suicide. Mental disorders exist frequently throughout the United States. Close to eight hundred thousand people die due to suicide every year, which is one person every forty seconds. Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan and is the second leading cause of death among fifteen to twenty-nine year olds globally (World Health Organization). The World Health Organization estimates that ninety percent of all suicid victims have some kind of mental health condition (Meyers). People who die by suicide are frequently experiencing undiagnosed, under treated, or untreated depression. Three to twenty percent of people who commit suicide

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are diagnosed with bipolar disorder and six to fifteen percent are diagnosed with schizophrenia. People that have personality disorders are three times as likely to commit suicide than those without. Between twenty-five and fifty percent of these individuals also have substance abuse disorder or major depressive disorder. The number of homeless and mentally ill people has been increasing. Mental illnesses were stated as one of the top three causes of homelessness. These numbers have been increasing since the 1970's (Nieves). This issue of homelessness among the mentally ill has been associated with fewer psychiatric hospital beds due to a lack of treatment. Direct correlations have been found between the availability of these beds and the increase in crimes, arrests, and homelessness. These hospitals were originally created to put away the individuals who posed a direct danger to themselves and everyone else, so that there would be less of a threat to society.

A study of one hundred and thirty-two patients discharged from Columbus State Hospital in Ohio reported that thirty-six percent became homeless within six months (Nieves). Thirty-one percent or one hundred and seventy-five thousand were not given homes and were living on the streets or in abandoned buildings, vehicles, parks, etc. Facilities have been dumping patients out of the hospitals in an attempt to save mental health money. This increases the overall cost for taxpayers by shifting care to more expensive jails and prisons (Nieves). However, prisons are not prepared to treat those with mental illnesses. As a society we have left the mentally ill to fend for themselves and you can see this on our streets and in our prisons. In a country where the mentally ill are often incarcerated instead of treated,

there are the kinds of incidents that are far too common. In New York, a man with schizophrenia spent thirteen years of a fifteen year prison sentence in solitary confinement. In a Minnesota county jail, a man later diagnosed with schizophrenia stabbed both of his eyes out with a pencil in his cell (Swanson). Health care experts claim that the reduced availability of state hospital beds is the main cause of the high rates of incarceration among the mentally ill. We have more people with serious mental illnesses in prisons rather than psychiatric hospitals.

### Opposition Rebuttal

Many experts are hoping that by improving any community based programs and expanding their patient care that the United States will experience better outcomes with treatment. The states do not have the resources or the political will to properly treat the mentally ill so it is more expedient to throw them in jail. However, prisoners have a constitutional right to adequate health care and mental health treatment. But due to the growth of local jail populations, it has strained their response to the health needs of certain inmates. This situation is challenging for the prisoners with serious mental issues who require special treatment and services. There has been constant evidence of people with mental illnesses being under represented and receiving a lack of treatment in jails. According to a report from the Treatment Advocacy Center, American prisons and jails housed an estimated three hundred and fifty-six thousand, two hundred and sixty-eight inmates with severe mental illness in 2012. That number is ten times the number of mentally ill patients in state psychiatric hospitals in the same year (Swanson). In 1955, state mental hospitals held five-hundred and fifty-eight

thousand and nine hundred twenty-two patients, today they hold about thirty-five thousand patients. The Treatment Advocacy Center found that forty-four of the fifty states, in their largest prisons or jails hold more people with serious mental illness than their largest state psychiatric hospital (Swanson). The Treatment Advocacy Center found that forty-four of the fifty states, in their largest prisons or jails hold more people with serious mental illness than their largest state psychiatric hospital (Swanson). Most of these people with mental illnesses go through their whole life with no proper treatment. There are so many different factors to discrimination against mental illnesses. In the past they formed a stigma that ruled the mentally ill out as unfit for society and that same stigma still exists in current times. A second component is those who should be receiving treatment in psychiatric hospitals are instead being thrown onto the streets because we do not think it's important to keep these institutions running. In pursuit to get rid of the patients our society has made the decision to throw the ill into prisons, which increases our taxes and does not give them proper health treatment. Another aspect is higher dropout rates due to the lack of awareness of the mentally ill.

### Conclusion

All these issues result in almost all suicides concerning someone with a mental illness. Mental health promotion is very important for individual and organizational health and success. The evidence is clear that changes need to be made and that discrimination of mental illnesses is a real concern in today's society.

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