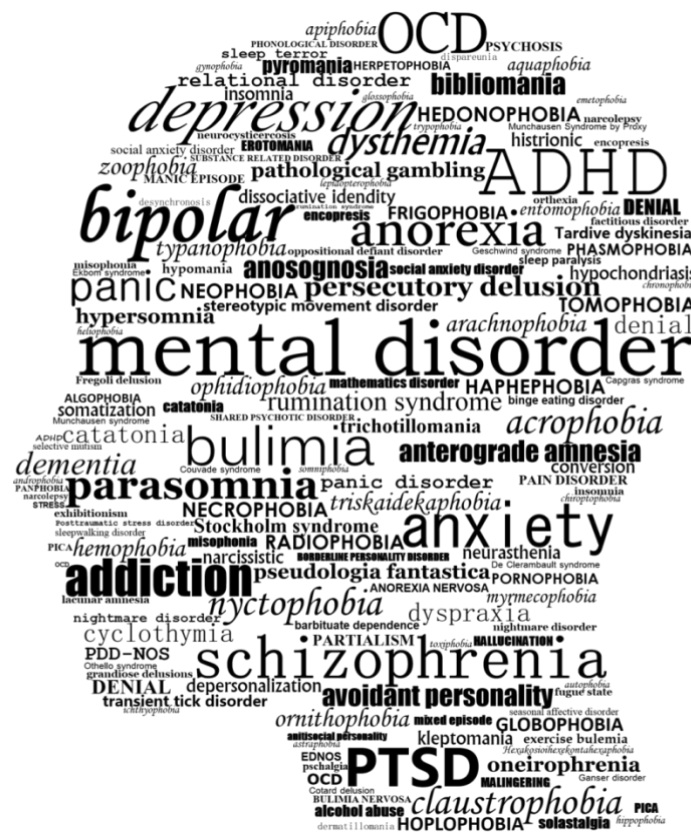


INTRODUCTION TO MENTAL HEALTH AND DISORDERS



Disclaimer:

This is report for informational purposes only. It is not intended to be a guide, or does it imply full content on the issues here covered. For full technical description please visit the appropriate professional sites.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO MENTAL HEALTH

Since the past few decades, a lot of effort has gone into letting people know about mental health. While that is true, statistics show that people don't take it seriously as they should. Our mental health is very important. Just as we pay attention to our physical hygiene, we must also pay attention to our internal well-being. Mental illness is as serious as a common cold or headache and must be taken seriously by everyone. The goal of this eBook is to provide you with the necessary information you need to know about mental health.

Our mental health has to do with our well-being emotionally, psychologically (the state of our minds) and socially (how we interact with others). It affects how we think, how we feel, and how we act. It's the quality of our mental health that determines how well we can handle stress, our attitude towards our social world, and the choices and decisions we make. Mental health risks are as serious in children, as it is in adolescents and adults.

Failure to pay attention to our mental health will lead to a decline across every facet of life - from our relationships to our physical health, and day to day living. Mental health can affect our daily lives just like those other areas of our lives affect our mental health. Our relationships, physical illness, also can contribute to a lack of well-being mental.

When it comes to your ability to enjoy and lead a fulfilled life, paying attention, and doing what is necessary to take care of your mental health can make all the difference. Paying attention entails striking a balance between your responsibilities, your daily activities, and relationships. Your mental health wellbeing is determined by your ability to maintain psychological resilience. The most common symptoms of our mental health problems today are stress, depression, and anxiety. You

will be surprised at how these seeps into other areas of our lives.



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To put in a proper perspective, the United States National Alliance on Mental illness reveals that approximately 1 in every 5 adults experiences a form of mental health illness yearly. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in 2017, 11.3 million adults in the US (about 4.5% of adults) were estimated to have a severe psychological disorder. Also in Northern Ireland, one in every five persons is said to be potentially at the risk of having mental health problems. Everyone is at risk of having a mental health illness. Although some individuals are more vulnerable, no one is completely immune to the risk of poor mental health. The situation has become worse even because those with poor mental health have faced a lot of stigmas, which prevents them from revealing and seeking the help they need for their recovery. Let's look at some of the risk factors associated with mental health issues.

RISK FACTORS

As mentioned earlier no one is completely immune to the risk of poor mental health, regardless of age, income level, sex, origin. In the US, and also in the rest of the world, mental disorders have been revealed as one of the leading causes of disability.

Several factors like our social and financial circumstances, lifestyle choices, and biological factors can all play a role in shaping our mental health. Almost every mental health patient has more than one condition at a time. Good mental health rests on your ability to strike a balance between these factors since it's obvious that several elements of our life can directly or indirectly lead contribute in no small way to mental health imbalance.

Let's explore some of the known factors that can contribute to our mental health disorders in more detail.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

One of the leading factors of our mental health disorder is continuous pressure from our social and economic worlds. Study reveals that having limited or poor financial means or belonging to a persecuted or marginalized ethnic group increases your risk of facing mental health disorder. The result of 903 families studied in Iran revealed that several socioeconomic causes including, dire living conditions and poverty, were major causes of mental health conditions in that area. The availability and quality of mental health treatment in those areas were also assessed for certain groups. These treatment options were classified based on modifiable factors which can change over time.

Examples of modifiable factors include:

- Education
- Occupation
- Level of social involvement

And non-modifiable factors that cannot be changed. Example:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender

In the study carried out, gender was enlisted as both a modifiable and non-modifiable factor. The study revealed that being female in that area increased the risk of poor mental health status by 4 times, approximately. The highest-ranking sets in the study who were at the highest risk or had the severest mental health condition were people who had a weak economic status.

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

Another leading factor of mental health illness is biological factors. The NIMH revealed that genetic family history can increase a person's likelihood of developing mental health conditions. It suggests that certain genetic makeup places a person at a higher risk of having a mental disorder. However, many other factors contribute to the development of these disorders. For instance, having a genetic family history that links to disorders like depression, schizophrenia, etc does not seal the fate of a condition developing. In the same vein, people with no related genetic makeup of family genetic history relating to disorders can still develop mental health conditions. These mental health conditions like depression, stress, and anxiety may develop not only by genetics but due to underlying life-changing physical conditions like diabetes, chronic pain, cancer.

SOME EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

How can you tell if you are having mental health problems? Or how can you tell you if someone you know is having mental health problems?

Treatment is easier and better when signs of mental health problems are discovered in its early stages. One or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be early warning signs of a mental health problem.

- Overeating
- Sleeping too much or too little - insomnia
- Detachment from people and usual activities
- Experiencing severe mood swings that can lead deteriorations of relationships
- Feeling edgy unusually and continuously, forgetful, confused, anxious, worried, scared, upset, angry
- Smoking and drinking more than usual
- Continuous feeling of hopelessness and helplessness
- Having extreme aches and pains
- Having incessant thoughts and memories you can seem to get out your head

It is advised that you seek help if you experience any of these early warning signs of mental health illness.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Taking alcohol moderately can lead to no problem; it is normal to enjoy booze without any concerns.

Alcohol has its benefits and can be therapeutic for some as it helps us relax.

Can uncontrolled intake of alcohol and drug abuse lead to mental health problems?

However, alcohol is linked to mental health conditions for others. Some statistics on suicide reveals the role alcohol plays on mental health problems, according to the Mental Health Foundation.

- Over 65% of the suicides have been linked to excess intake of alcohol
- 70% of suicides among men have been found to consume alcohol before committing suicide
- Among young persons, one-third of the suicides have happened when intoxicated

Also, illegal drug usage is associated in no small way to mental health conditions. Some use these drugs as a means to manage an existing mental health condition while for others, taking these drugs often leads to long-term mental health problems.



Continuous consumption of drugs like cannabis and ecstasy has been linked to mental health conditions like depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety. Cannabis intake affects our cognition and regular use will affect our ability to concentrate and affect our learning. Due to the addicted

component of these drugs, users develop an uncontrollable dependence physically and psychologically.

KINDS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

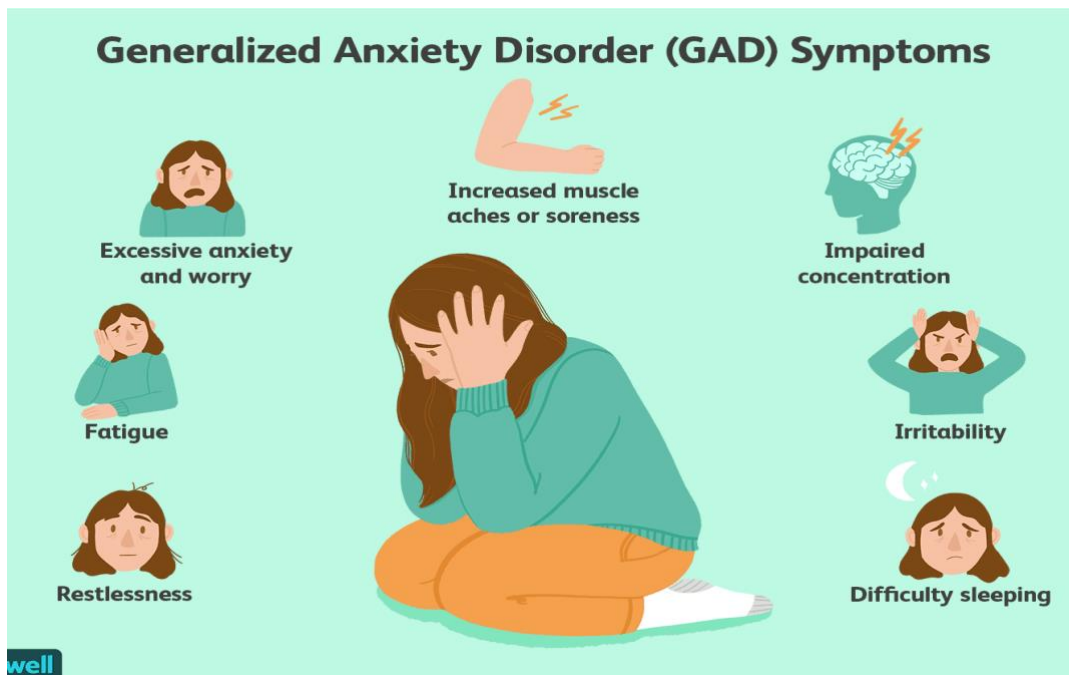
Mental health disorders can manifest in so many ways but the most common types of mental health illness include:

- Mood disorders
- Anxiety disorder
- Schizophrenia disorder
- PTSD Post-traumatic stress disorder

Let's discuss them briefly.

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental health illness today and can be caused by a wide range of factors including the often overlooked addiction to our screens. In no small way, our addiction to screens and other activities has introduced a new kind of condition. The disorder often manifests in its patients in form of extreme fear as it relates to objects or situations. In most cases what these people are anxious or fearful about are things that don't deserve that much attention.



Mood disorders

Also known as an affective disorder or depressive disorder, people who have mood disorders are known to experience major fluxes in their emotions, leading to mania - has to do with high energy and elation, and depression.

Some examples of affective disorders include:

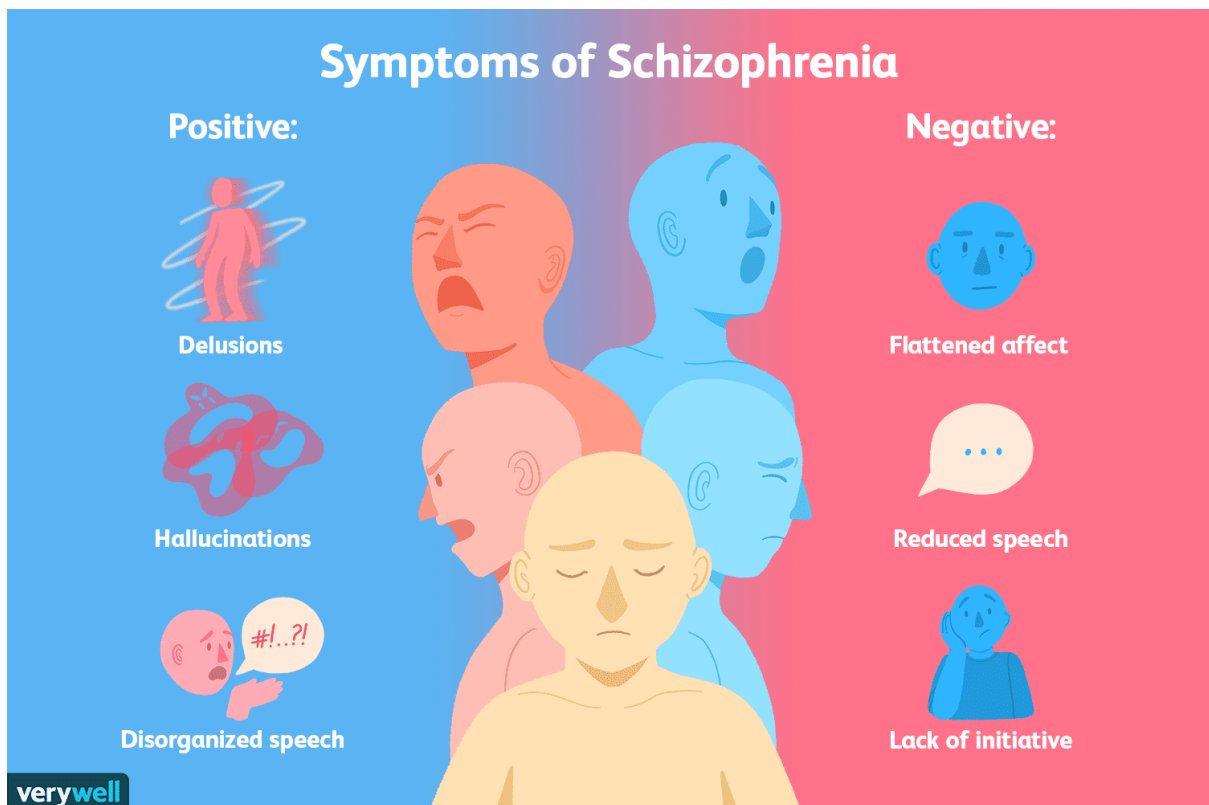
- ✓ **Depression:** Generally, this refers to a constant low mood and loss of interest in activities and events that they previously enjoyed. It also leads to stretched periods of extreme sadness and self loathe and stress. More on this later.
- ✓ **Bipolar disorder:** This is also another form of affective disorder. Bipolar disorder patients are known to experience an unusual flux in their mood or emotions, and energy levels. The unusual and sometimes abrupt change in their level of activity affects their ability to continue throughout the day. They can switch sometimes abruptly from a high mood to low mood and vice versa. The periods of high energy or moods are known as manic phases, while the low mood episodes are known as depressive phases.
- ✓ **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** This mental condition is most common in countries that are far from the equator. It is a unique kind of major depression that is triggered when there is reduced daylight during winter, fall, early spring months.

Schizophrenia disorder

This disorder is a highly complex complicated condition. It is still unclear to mental health authorities whether or not this condition is as a result of a single disorder or a result of a group of illnesses.

According to NIMH, schizophrenia develops in patients between the ages of 16 and 30 years. It leads patients to have fragmented thoughts and makes it difficult for them to process easy information.

Schizophrenia has a wide range of symptoms which include but is not limited to lack of motivation, delusions, hallucinations, withdrawal, flat feeling, thought disorders, and lack of motivation.



HOW CAN I MAINTAIN GOOD MENTAL HEALTH?

Good mental health is important. To preserve, maintain, and improve our mental health, five simple but practical steps can help you. These five steps must be followed by everyone to preserve and improve good mental health.

- Connect – strengthen your relationship with your friends, family members, colleagues
- Move - take part in any physical activity that allows you to move and stay healthy. You don't necessarily have to register with a gym, just walk, play sports you like, just move.
- Learn – never stop learning. Find new ways to learn as this improves your confidence level
- Be aware – always be conscious of your present moment, including your thoughts, feelings, body, and that of others.
- Care and serve – give back to others anytime you can. Always perform acts of kindness.

Don't let opportunities to do so pass you by. If there are no opportunities create one because caring and serving others has a great power to improve our moods and have a great positive impact on our mental health.

TREATMENT FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

It's not uncommon for patients to wonder - Can I recover from a mental health condition?

People can and do recover from mental health problems. Recovery from mental health problems is a journey and requires patience. It is not a quick fix situation. Please note that while recovery from mental health problems is possible, it does not always mean that you will get back to where you were before it all happened. Also, the journey to your mental health is not a straightforward one as you will have many bumps on the road. As mentioned before, it will require tons of patience, commitment, and support from you, your family, and friends. The recovery process will lead a normal life and will involve having you find your mechanisms for coping with life's challenges. For many people, recovery is all about keeping control of their lives despite the mental health problems they experience.

In addition to the five golden steps above that helps to preserve and improve our mental health, there are also factors that if we pay attention to, can aid the recovery process.

Some of the factors that aid a successful recovery include:

- **Responsibly** – recovery requires the development of your self-care skills and attitude
- **Good relationships** – another version of connecting. Emphasizes the need to have genuine support from your family and friends through the process.
- **Financial security** – a stable financial can lead to a quicker recovery process as opposed to none
- **Self-direction** – a picture of your life's masterpiece, your goals, visions will give you a sense of direction in life and will aid recovery as it reminds you of a purpose to live for.
- **An optimistic environment** – where you find yourself and the information you continuously feed your mind with is very important. Whether its work, family, friends, social media, pay attention, and choose carefully.

Every recovery process is unique and individual. This is why you must have a professional walk you through it. There are indeed common themes that can be seen in every condition; for the most part, each person's journey to wellbeing is unique and individual.

If you wouldn't want to visit a professional, check if there are any recovery colleges in your area.

These colleges offer a range of courses about mental health. These courses are open to all members of the public. Generally, the only condition is to be above the age of 16. These courses are delivered by specialists.

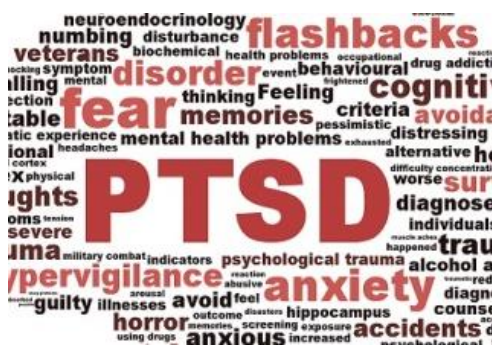
CHAPTER TWO

PTSD

What is PTSD?

Also referred to as shell shock, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a serious chronic mental disorder that may result when an individual directly took part or passively witnessed an extremely tragic or traumatic event. PTSD manifests in these people in form of persistent and frightening memories of the experience. This often leaves them feeling numb emotionally and fearful especially around people they love.

This mental health condition was first brought to public attention by US veterans after the civil war. Today it can result from several other traumatic incidents other than war experiences. Some of those traumatic incidents include kidnapping, violent attacks like rape, mugging, torture, surviving, or witnessing serious accidents like train wrecks or car accidents, a natural disaster like floods or earthquakes, even abuse. The event that triggers this condition is usually one that threatened the patient's life or the life of someone else.



These experiences remain with the patient and may replay in their minds intermittently as a person may be free of these recollections and nightmares for a long time and then experience them daily at other times. Patients relive these events mostly in form of persistent nightmares and flashbacks - which are disturbing recollections during the day.

PTSD is a complex condition that can lead to other mental health issues like depression, substance abuse, and/or anxiety. It can occur at any age including childhood. PTSD symptoms vary from mild to severe – patients can be irritated or have violent outbursts. While there is no specific order, symptoms seem to be worse if the traumatic event was caused by a person such as murder, suicide, abuse, as opposed to inevitable causes like floods or accidents. Severe symptoms may leave the patients unable to work or socialize.



DEVELOPMENT OF PTSD

How does PTSD develop? What causes PTSD?

As mentioned before, PTSD results in response to a traumatic event. The reasons why some people develop PTSD are still studied, but we know that certain biological, psychological, and social factors come to play. About 60 % of men and 50% of women experience a major traumatic event in their lifetime. The impressions of these events on people vary. Some people will have these symptoms in the days and weeks after the event while for others these symptoms are more severe and long-lasting.

SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

PTSD symptoms are classified into five categories which include: Experiencing a traumatic event, re-experiencing the event, engaging in avoidance, suffering from the experience, and an increase in arousal symptoms. This classification is according to the American Psychiatric Association (2013). Note that the primary symptoms of PTSD are based on experiencing a traumatic event directly or indirectly. The traumatic event always involves death, serious injury, and/or abuse.

Let's explore some of these symptoms in more detail.

Re-experiencing symptoms

These are symptoms that are associated with a person reliving the event after it has happened. Re-experiencing symptoms can manifest in so many ways but the most common is having disturbing memories of the traumatic event. PTSD is bad mostly because these memories are not controlled and often arise when the person is not expecting them. Also, these memories can be triggered by a reminder. For instance, when a motor vehicle victim sees another car accident or a rape victim hears or sees news about abuse, or a combat veteran hears a car backfire. All these are an instance that can trigger traumatic memories which then leads to emotional and physical reactions.

To these people, these memories feel so real that it appears as if the events are playing out again. Flashbacks cause extreme feelings of fear, helplessness, and horror that is very similar to the ones they felt when the event first took place.

Avoidance and numbing symptoms

People who have experienced traumatic events and are haunted by those experiences will avoid places or people or news reports that are likely to trigger those memories. The efforts people make to avoid the memory of the traumatic events are referred to as avoidance symptoms. Avoidance of sensory signals like sights, smells, sounds that can trigger those is also part of the symptoms of PTSD. Others may seek distracting activities or substances that will help them not to think about or remember those events.

Another extreme form of avoidance is numbing. This happens when PTSD patients are unable to express emotions or be in touch with their feelings in relation to others. This inability to feel any type of emotions towards others leads them to isolate themselves from others, and activities they once enjoyed (more on this later).

This also makes them abandon their goals and lose interest in some of the dreams they had for their lives. In some patients, this experience is forgotten, making it difficult for them to remember or discuss talk about important parts of the experience they witnessed.

Arousal symptoms of PTSD

Arousal symptoms of PTSD make individuals be constantly on guard for any perceived signs of danger after their experience. This causes them to always be hypersensitive and alert after the experience. This state known as increased-emotional arousal affects the individual's ability to sleep well, leads to a series of anger outbursts and irritability, and affects concentration and focus.

WHY DO PEOPLE DEVELOP PTSD?

While everyone faces the risk of developing PTSD after a traumatic experience, most people will not develop PTSD. The likelihood of developing PTSD is increased when any or some of the following conditions are met.

You are most likely to develop PTSD if you:

- Experienced a severe and potentially long-lasting traumatic event
- Were directly exposed or involved in a traumatic event as a victim or witness
- Were unable to play any role if could rescue you or someone you saw in danger
- Were severely damaged or injured during the event

Also, these are the persons who have a higher risk of developing PTSD:

- Young people
- Those who have experienced an earlier trauma
- Women
- Those who have an existing mental issue
- Those who lack any social support

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PTSD?

PTSD hardly ever occurs alone in an individual. Like most mental health disorders, it is very common for PTSD to be accompanied by conditions like depression, stress, anxiety, and/or substance abuse. The statistics are telling – over half the men with PTSD are known to excessively consume alcohol. Following the alcohol problem, the next most common condition that accompanies PTSD in men is depression, then conduct disorder and substance abuse.

The most common co-occurring problem in women is depression. Roughly half of the women with PTSD also battle depression. Women are also very likely to deal with anxiety, specific fears, and alcohol problem.

In general, PTSD makes it difficult for people to lead normal lives. Individuals with this condition face more social problems like unemployment, abuse in relationships, divorce or separation, have higher chances of being fired, are stigmatized socially, and so on. These social problems were brought to light by Vietnam war veterans, a majority of who had problems with employment, family, and other relationships, and increased incidents of violence.

People who have PTSD also experience a range of other physical symptoms.

TREATMENT FOR PTSD

Can PTSD be successfully treated?

Yes, using a combination of psychotherapy and medications PTSD can be successfully treated. The medications are for specific symptom relief like the accompanying depression, not a major

treatment route. The best treatment approach for people with PTSD is to seek out mental health professionals, or therapists who have adequate experience in the treatment of PTSD.

Trauma therapy is a type of psychotherapy that is widely used today for the treatment of PTSD. This treatment typically involves three phases: safety, review of the memories, and integration – which has to do with helping the person integrate their new knowledge and skills into their lives. Trauma therapy can be achieved using a combination of relaxation techniques, somatic therapies, EMDR, and exposure.

Treatment requires a trained and experienced professional because of the complexity that is involved in psychotherapy for PTSD. These sessions are not time-consuming and may take place once a week with a trained and experienced specialist. This does not rule out the option for group therapy or colleges, or support groups as some people benefit more from them. As treatment of PTSD continues, with time, the associated symptoms begin to decrease. While this varies, many people report that within a few months they experience symptom relief and significant recovery within a year or two.

HOW CAN YOU MANAGE PTSD?

Living with PTSD is tough. It can feel like being in a constant battle with your memories or thoughts.

Also, the treatment process is tough and requires support from friends and family to go through it.

PTSD treatment is not a quick fix and requires long term management. As mentioned earlier, significant recovery can take several months or years.

Due to this, trauma therapy for PTSD is usually supplemented with a holistic approach to lead a balanced and healthy lifestyle. A holistic and comprehensive approach to PTSD treatment will involve making changes to sleep hygiene, nutrition, relationships, work-life balance, exercise, to make the treatment long-lasting. It is not uncommon for medications to be introduced involved in the treatment as an adjunct to psychotherapy.

DO THE SYMPTOMS EVER GO AWAY?

In other words, how long does PTSD last?

The course of PTSD in individuals follows no clear path and varies depending on the individual. The form of the condition also changes with time in no specific order. PTSD is known to begin right after a traumatic experience has occurred, but in some individuals, the memories don't haunt them until many years later. Also, most people respond to treatment and show improvement after the first years, but some treatment may last over a lifetime.

Usually, PTSD in individuals involves periods of symptoms increase, followed by a response to treatment, then a decrease in symptoms; also some individuals who develop a chronic form may experience severe and long lasting symptoms.

CHAPTER THREE

TBI – Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic brain injury refers to trauma that disrupts or damages the brain physically or chemically. That may be as a result of a fall or a hit on your head or an object piercing your skull and getting to the brain. Concussions and TBI can be used interchangeably but a concussion is only one form of TBI.

Effects of Brain injuries are linked to more than five million people in the United States and about a third of that number sustain new brain injuries yearly. Any damage to the brain that affects a person physically, behaviorally, and/or emotionally is known as brain injury. Damages to the brain can happen at birth, or later from accidents, trauma, illness, and can be classified under traumatic and non-traumatic depending on the cause.

The effects of TBI spill over to every area of our lives, including our relationships. TBI can affect your ability to work tough. It can also make family life and the ability to form new connections very difficult. Like brain injury, TBI affects over 5 million Americans also.

According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, several 2.8 million Americans report TBI new cases each year, while 56,000 people die from it. Approximately 300,000 people are hospitalized as a result. Symptoms may include loss of taste or smell, disruption in sleeping habits, and inability to perform



tasks.

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TYPES OF TBI

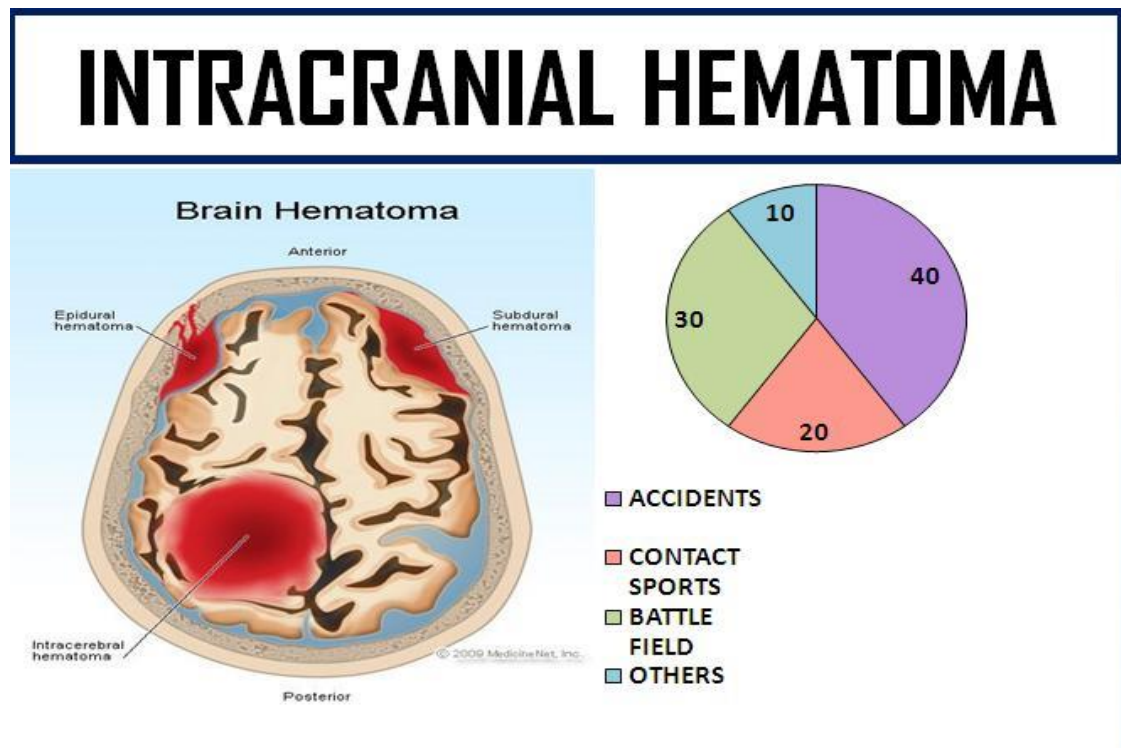
TBI can be classified under primary and secondary injuries.

Primary injury

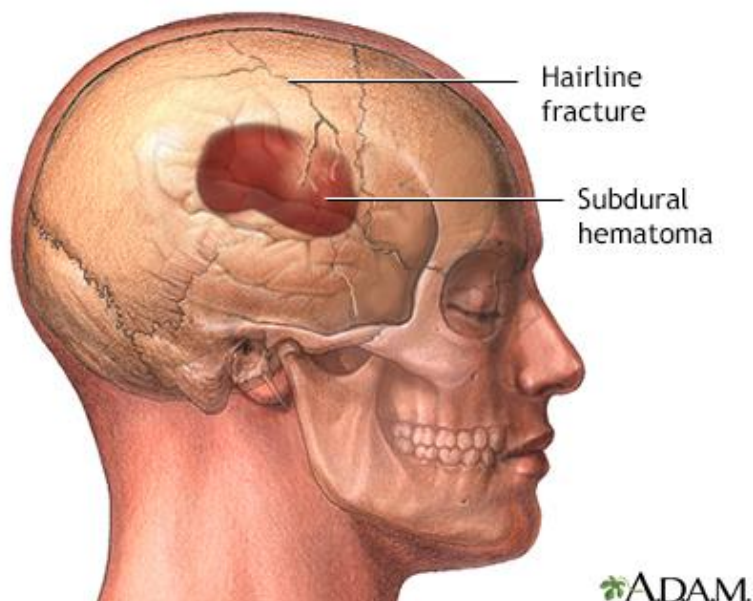
This type of TBI refers to an injury that was sustained when the traumatic event took place, such as:

- **Intracranial hematomas:** refers to the rupture of a blood vessel that leads to the collection of blood in brain tissue and empty spaces. Examples of intracranial hematomas include:

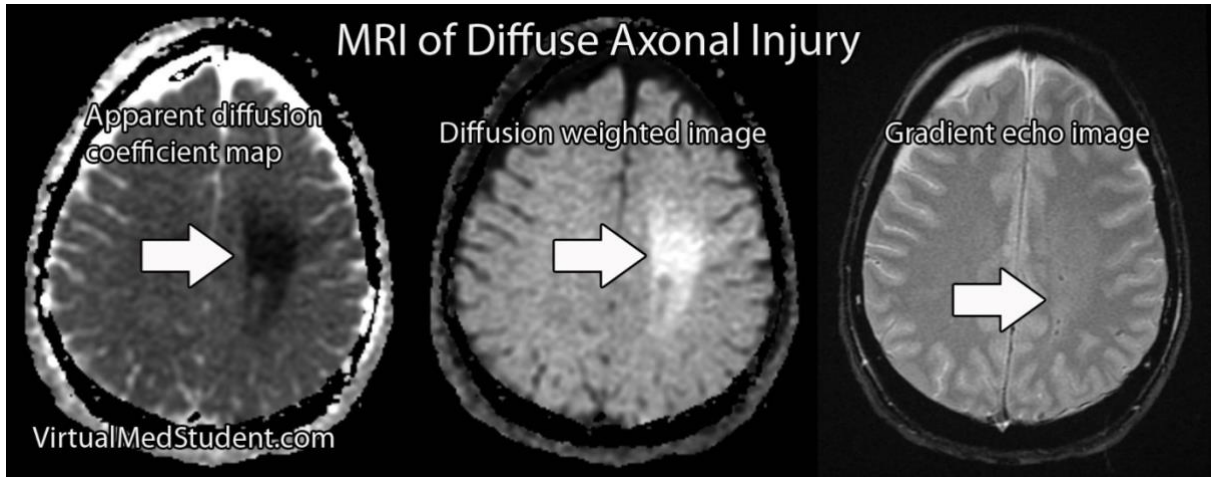
epidural hematoma, subdural hematoma, inter-cerebral hematoma, sub-arachnoids hemorrhage



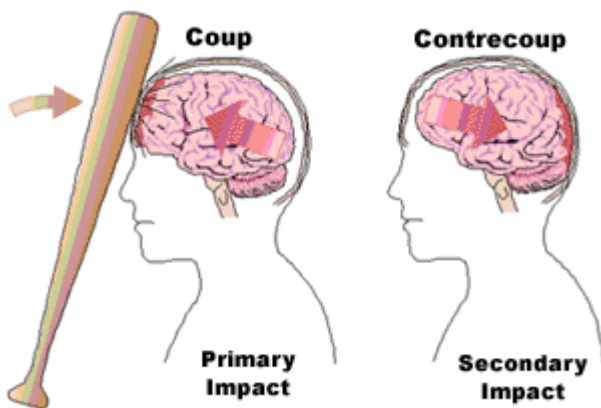
- **Skull fractures:** damage to the skull is dangerous because this will provide a window for infection or injury to the brain or both. The skull fracture may be linear, basilar, or depressed.



- **Diffuse axonal injury (DAI):** has to do with the injury to the brain that is related to rotational forces or violent stopping. This happens mostly as a result of twisting and tearing of the connections between cells of the brain.



- **Coup-counter coup/contusions:** this type of primary injury refers to a bruise to the brain tissue. This type of injury mostly occurs in a car motor accident where the head is propelled forward and moved back in deceleration.



Secondary injury

Unlike primary injuries that refer to physical damages to the brain at the time of the incident, secondary injuries have to do with metabolic and physiologic, or chemical changes in the brain that may begin at the time of the initial injury or event and last afterward say hours or days later.

Examples of secondary injuries include:

- Cerebral Oedema - resulting in increased intracranial pressure
- Hydrocephalus

- Ischemia
- Hypoxia and Hypotension

Before we close, let's look at an underlying and common mental condition that can exist on its own or usually accompanies other mental health disorders.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEPRESSION

Depression is the most common and prevalent form of mental disorder today. It is often referred to as the common cold of mental disorders. Almost everyone will be affected by depression at least once in their lifetime either directly or indirectly - through someone else.

Is depression just feeling down?

Depression still connotes a lot of grey area for most people as it is still unclear what it means to be depressed. Study and experience have shown that depression has to do with are more than just feeling down.



Many terms have been used to describe what we feel from time to time but getting hold and understanding when we face clinical depression presents tough challenges. Also, there is confusion surrounding the different types of depression that people face – biological, manic depression, unipolar depression, seasonal affective disorder, dysthymia, etc.

Although it is difficult to understand depression completely, we know for sure a number of the symptoms that are associated with the condition. Some of the symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad persistently
- Feeling anxious or empty
- Feeling helpless, flat, and pessimistic continuously
- Depression also manifests as persistent feelings of guilt, and worthlessness
- Avoidance of enriching activities and hobbies that you once enjoyed
- Depressions also lead to insomnia
- Depression can also lead to migraines and severe body pains

There are many other symptoms of depression.

TYPES OF DEPRESSION

There are many types of depression and different forms that depression can occur but the two most common forms of depression include:

- **Major depression:** this is a chronic form of depression whose symptoms persist throughout most of the day for at least 14 days. These symptoms affect your ability to carry on with normal daily activities like you're used to. It affects your ability to eat, work, study, sleep, and enjoy life. This form of depression can occur only once in a person's lifetime but more often, it can occur severally.
- **Persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia):** dysthymia is a more severe form of chronic depression disorder that can last for at least 2 years. During this period, a person will experience several bouts of major depression and episodes of less severe depressive symptoms.

Other forms of depressive symptoms are slightly different and may develop under unique circumstances.

Some of these forms of depression include:

- ✓ **Prenatal depression:** occurs in women who experience full-blown major depression during pregnancy or after delivery. When this occurs after delivery it is known as postpartum depression.
- ✓ **Psychotic depression:** as the name implies, this is a form of depression that occurs when a person has some form of psychosis such as delusions or hallucinations.
- ✓ **Seasonal affective disorder:** we've come across this form of the mental disorder before. This form of the disorder is characterized by specific seasonal changes. Usually starts in late fall and early winter and goes away during the spring and summer.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO DEPRESSION

Anyone can be affected by depression regardless of age, income, sex, location. People who appear so put together and seem to have everything going for them are also face the risk. However, certain factors tip the balance putting some individuals at more risk than others.

- ✓ **Genetics:** depressive tendencies can be inherited as some gene makeup are more inclined than others. For instance, one identical twin has a 70% chance of experiencing depression if the other already suffers it.
- ✓ **Environmental factors:** living conditions and surroundings also play a part. People who live in areas that are constantly exposed to violence, abuse, neglect, discrimination, or poverty are at more risk of being depressive, especially when they are exposed to other areas who have the things they lack and long for.
- ✓ **Biochemistry:** also different chemicals in our brains contribute to symptoms of depression. They can make some more resilient to depression and others more vulnerable.
- ✓ **Personality and attitude:** pessimistic people who have low self-esteem and are easily overwhelmed by boredom and stress are more likely to face depression than people who have the right attitude and are generally optimistic.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

Earlier we mentioned that feeling sad or down is not necessarily what depression means, it is just a symptom of depression. More interesting is the fact that some people who are depressed may not experience feelings of sadness at all. Having one or more of these signs or symptoms is not a guarantee that you are depressed, however, if it persists, you may want to see a therapist as soon as possible.

Let's look at some of the signs of depression:

- Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
- Loss of appetite and loss of weight
- Severe pains and ache, cramps, digestive problem. Most times the cause of these pains cannot be traced and do not go away with reliefs.
- Consistent Feelings of restlessness or irritability
- Loss of interest in enriching activities and hobbies you once enjoyed
- Thinking about death, feeling anxious, and flat
- Having difficulty concentrating, making decisions, and recollecting past events.
- Loss of energy, always fatigued, and slowness
- Difficulty sleeping or difficulty and not wanting to wake up

Depression is best treated and taken care of when it is noticed early. Once you observe any or some of these signs, seek help immediately by talking to a family member or a friend. If that doesn't improve your condition seek help from a mental health specialist with experience in dealing with depression.

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

We are all social beings wired to be around and depend on others and the universe for our survival.

While mainstream media has championed and celebrated the cause for independence in the different versions of the do-it-yourself sermons, it has led to more harm.

No doubt, there are periods where we just want to be alone and collect our thoughts but a study has shown that excessive loneliness can lead to a decline in our physical and mental health. Socially isolated people are less equipped to deal with stressful situations. Isolated people are more likely to feel depressed and may have difficulty processing information.

Isolation is worse when it is against your own will or choice. When one is compelled to do so, the impact becomes negative.

Also, the study has shown that lonely and isolated people have a lowered immune system and are more vulnerable to illness and viruses. The impact of social isolation can be seen more clearly among people who are physically isolated against their will. For instance, prisoners placed in solitary confinements are known to experience negative psychological effects that include increased feelings of anxiety and panic attacks, inability to process thoughts, and extreme paranoia. Prisoners placed in physical solitary confinements report having mental health issues long after the experience.

The negative impact of isolation is further exacerbated if this happens in an environment or space devoid of light. And one of the negative impacts living in darkness has is that it can affect our sleep cycles. And once that is altered we are more vulnerable to depression and fatigue. Alteration to our circadian rhythm has been linked to increased cancer risk, heart disease, and insulin resistance, as well as premature aging and diabetes.

Hallucinations are also part of the symptoms experienced by people placed in isolation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act as we cope with life. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood and aging. We all need to take mental health more seriously because it can cause a lot of damage.

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