

October is NDEAM

By Sandy Murillo, The Chicago Lighthouse

October is National Disability and Employment Awareness Month. During the entire month, numerous organizations and advocacy groups throughout the United States hold events to promote and educate employers about hiring of people with disabilities. Below are what many consider to be five of the many reasons and benefits of hiring and including people with vision loss or other disabilities in the workforce.

NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH



1. **People with disabilities are reliable employees and have an overall higher job retention rate.**

Many studies have shown that people with disabilities take less absent days, and that they are more likely to stay on the job longer than non-disabled workers. Recently, The Chicago Lighthouse studied the retention rate of employees in its Illinois Tollway Customer Care Center, which employs people who are blind, visually impaired, disabled, and Veterans (as well as people without disabilities.) On average, the employees with vision loss or other disabilities and Veterans had a retention rate of 1.7 years. In contrast, the retention rate for employees without disabilities or that were not Veterans was only 0.9 years.

2. **Employees with disabilities are less likely to get into work related accidents.** Two studies, one from the Department of Labor Statistics during the 1940s and a more recent one from the DuPont company concluded that workers with disabilities had a significantly higher performance in the area of safety than their counterparts without disabilities. In other words, employees with disabilities are more aware and conscientious of safety in the workplace. Both studies looked at different types of jobs, including labor, operational, managerial, clerical and service areas.

3. **Businesses that hire people with disabilities may receive tax credits or other incentives.** Eligible businesses can receive certain tax credits to aid them in hiring and accommodating workers with disabilities. Many of these credits are awarded for expenses incurred in things like purchasing adaptive equipment for workers with disabilities, or covering the costs of any modifications needed to make the building accessible. You can read more about the different types of tax credits and eligibility requirements on this page from the IRS.

4. **Workers with disabilities will increase diversity in the workplace.** Both workers with and without disabilities benefit equally from a diverse work setting. By working alongside employees with disabilities, individuals who are not disabled will become more aware about how to make the workplace and other settings more inclusive and accessible to everyone. They might consider things they had never thought of before, such as the accessibility challenges faced by people with disabilities. Employees with disabilities can also teach their coworkers about creativity and other ways to solve problems or accomplish different tasks.

5. **People with disabilities are as capable as anyone else!** This is the most simple, but difficult reason for employers to understand about hiring workers with disabilities. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities has constantly hovered at or above 70 percent, even 26 years after the passage of the ADA. Unfortunately, employers often refuse to hire individuals with disabilities, simply because they believe we are not capable of doing the job, or because they are unaware about the many adaptive techniques and devices that are available and allow us to work. Like anyone else, we apply to jobs we believe we are qualified for and capable of doing. If employers have doubts about if or how we will do a particular task, chances are that we have already thought about it and found a solution.



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In 1999, the U.S. Surgeon General labeled stigma as perhaps the biggest barrier to mental health care; this stigma manifests particularly in a phenomenon known as social distancing, whereby people with mental issues are more isolated from others. Eradicating the stigma and social distancing of people with mental illness must be a top public health priority in order to improve worldwide mental health and reduce economic burden.



By Rick Denny, RN, Central Counties Services.

Stigmatization of people with mental disorders has persisted throughout history. It is manifested by bias, distrust, stereotyping, fear, embarrassment, anger, and/or avoidance.

"Stigma leads others to avoid living, socializing or working with, renting to, or employing people with mental disorders, especially severe disorders such as schizophrenia."

Source: Satcher, 1999, Chapter 1

What is mental illness and mental health stigma?

Mental illness is any health condition that involves an abnormal change in a person's thinking, behavior, or emotions. Mental illness can take many forms and can be classified as mild to severe. Mental illness is not a choice and is nothing to feel ashamed of. Mental illness is not a weakness in someone's personality or a character flaw. Mental illness is a medical condition just like diabetes and heart disease and it is treatable. Mental illness can affect a person regardless of their race, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or background.

Mental illness stigma is when someone views a person with a mental illness in a negative way because they have a distinguishing characteristic or personal trait that's thought to be a disadvantage (a negative stereotype). Unfortunately, in today's society, negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental illness are common.

MENTAL ILLNESS STATISTICS

- Approximately 20% of adults living in the United States experience some type of mental illness (Depression, Anxiety).
- One in 24 adults, or 4.1%, has a serious mental illness such as bipolar disorder, major depression, or schizophrenia.
- Approximately 41,000 American lives are lost due to suicide. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.
- Only 44% of adults with a diagnosable mental illness receive the necessary treatment.

Myths and facts about mental illness

Myth: If someone I know has or develops a mental illness there is nothing I can do for them.

Fact: Only 44% of adults and 20% of children with diagnosable mental illness receive the necessary treatment. By refusing to define someone by their diagnoses or using labels such as "crazy, weirdo, freak, etc., you or someone else can help influence someone to seek the treatment and services they may need.

Myth: People who have a mental illness are always violent and unpredictable.

Fact: Only 3-5% of violent acts can be associated with serious mental illness. In actuality, those with a mental illness are 10 times more likely to be the victims of violent crime. The vast majority of people who are mentally ill are no more violent than those without a mental illness.

Myth: Mental illness is caused by a personal weakness.

Fact: Mental illness, like any illness, is not the fault of the person who has it. Environmental and biological factors contribute to the development of mental illness. Environmental factors such as stressful job, a turbulent home life, and traumatic life events can make a person more susceptible to a mental illness. Biological factors, including genetic predisposition, biochemical processes, and brain circuitry, can also play a role.

Myth: People with a mental illness shouldn't work because they will drag down the staff.

Fact: Many people with a mental illness function quite well in the workplace. The actual problem is the prejudice against hiring people with mental illness, which leaves them feeling isolated and unwanted. This leaves them without a way to pay for the necessary treatment.

Myth: Mental illness is caused by having a weak mind. If you have a strong mind you won't have a mental illness.

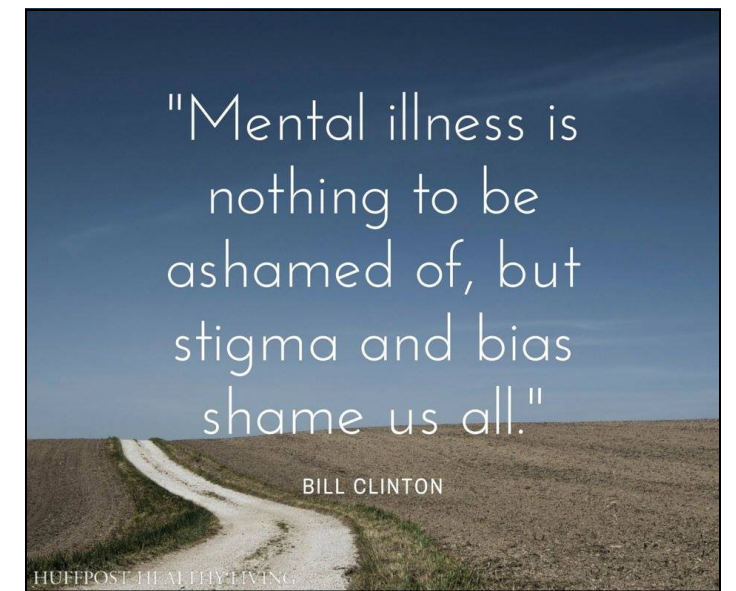
Fact: Mental illness has nothing to do with the "mental strength" of a person. Every person can be affected by biological, environmental, or psychological factors.

Myth: Mental illness is deeply connected to religion.

Fact: Mental illness affects the mind and has nothing to do with religion or religious beliefs. It is belief in mental illness myths that can worsen a person's mental illness and decrease the possibility of recovery.

It's a **disorder**, not a **decision**. Seven things you can do to stop mental illness stigma

1. Talk about mental illness. It's an illness, not a choice. Mental illness should not be a secret and as the saying goes, "We're only as sick as our secrets!"
2. See the person and who they are, rather than seeing them as their illness. Talk with them about family, interests, what they like or dislike, and try to receive them with an open heart.
3. Educate yourself about what mental illness is and share the information in this newsletter with people you know. If you hear someone use negative comments about those with mental illness respectfully challenge them on using stigmatizing language.
4. Choose your words carefully. As stated above, challenge yourself by not using stigmatizing language. It is not only hurtful to others, but it perpetuates the problem of stigma.
5. Encourage equality and advocate for mental illness reform. Write your local mayor's office and state legislators to request more funding for mental health programs.
6. Focus on the positive aspects of people. It's easy to focus on the negative aspects of others. Try to realize that everyone, in some way, can make a valuable contribution to society.
7. Push back on the criminalization of those with a mental illness. Talk to law enforcement officials, neighborhood watch groups, and legal experts on how imprisoning the mentally ill is not an effective solution.



When asked how they could help a mentally ill person know that they are accepted, 9 year-old Saira S. simply replied, "By being nice to them!"

13 year-old Kelly H. said, "Just be with her. Text her. Sit with her at lunch. Smile, or give her a hug. Show her you are there if she needs you. Tell her you love her."

What an excellent place to start ending mental illness stigma.

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