

Nature, Nurture, and Mental Health

Part 1: The Influence of Genetics, Psychology, and Biology

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Glossary of Mental Health Terms

Agoraphobia

- A type of anxiety disorder that is characterized by intense fear of being in situations, such as crowded places like shopping malls or metro stations, where escape can be seemingly difficult, or help might not be readily available

Alexithymia

- A personality trait characterized by the subclinical inability to identify and describe emotions experienced by oneself
- A broad term to describe problems with feeling emotions. This term loosely translates to “no words for emotion.” While not well-known, it’s estimated that 1 in 10 people has it.

Anxiety

- A feeling of general unease or nervousness that can range from mild to severe and have physical symptoms like sweating and increased heart rate
- The fearful anticipation of further danger or problems accompanied by an intense unpleasant feeling (dysphoria) or physical symptoms

Anxiety disorder

- A mental health disorder characterized by extreme and/or unwarranted anxiety that affects the individual’s ability to function normally

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

- A neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, which are pervasive, impairing, and otherwise age inappropriate; sometimes displaying difficulty regulating emotions or problems with executive function

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

- A neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave

Bipolar disorder

- A mental disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, concentration, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks

Body dysmorphic disorder

- A distinct mental disorder in which a person is preoccupied with an imagined physical defect or a minor defect that others often cannot see. As a result, people with this disorder see themselves as "ugly" and often avoid social exposure or turn to plastic surgery to try to improve their appearance.

Depression (major depressive disorder (MDD))

- A mood disorder caused by an imbalance in brain chemicals, characterized by intense feelings of sadness and isolation
- A type of mood disorder characterized by low or irritable mood or loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities over a period of time

Developmental language disorder

- A neurodevelopmental impairment in the processing of linguistic information that affects a person's ability to receive and/or express language involving persistent difficulties in the comprehension or production of spoken, written, sign language, or other forms of language

Dyscalculia

- A term referring to a wide range of difficulties with maths, including weaknesses in understanding the meaning of numbers, and difficulty applying mathematical principles to solve problems

Dyslexia

- A general term for disorders that involve difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols, but that do not affect general intelligence

Dyspraxia

- A developmental neurological disorder that impacts a person's ability to plan and process motor tasks affecting movement and coordination

Dythymic disorder

- A mental and behavioural disorder, specifically a disorder primarily of mood, consisting of the same cognitive and physical problems as depression, but with longer-lasting symptoms; also known as persistent depressive disorder (PDD)

Eating disorders

- A mental disorder defined by abnormal eating behaviors that negatively affect a person's physical or mental health
- Types include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant restrictive food intake disorder, other specified feeding and eating disorder, pica and rumination disorder

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)

- A mental health disorder that produces fear, worry, and a constant feeling of being overwhelmed and is characterized by excessive, persistent, and unrealistic worry about everyday things

Mental disorders

- Health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning (U.S. surgeon general)

Mental health

- The capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity

- A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (WHO)

Mental illness

- The term that refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders (U.S. surgeon general)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

- A chronic mental illness that compels the sufferer to practice obsessive rituals, with the feeling that these behaviors will prevent negative events or emotions

Panic disorder

- An anxiety disorder characterized by unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms that may include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, or abdominal distress

Personality disorders

- A group of mental illnesses that involve long-term patterns of thoughts and behaviours that are unhealthy and inflexible, causing serious problems with relationships and work. People with personality disorders have trouble dealing with everyday stresses and problems and often have stormy relationships with others.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

- An anxiety disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event such as sexual assault, warfare, traffic collisions, child abuse, domestic violence, or other threats on a person's life

Schizophrenia

- A serious mental illness in which the affected experiences delusions, hallucinations and often severe disordered thinking

Self-harm

- The act of purposely hurting oneself, as in cutting the skin or scratching, hitting, or burning parts of the body

Separation anxiety disorder

- An anxiety disorder in which an individual experiences excessive anxiety regarding separation from home and/or from people to whom the individual has a strong emotional attachment (e.g., a parent, caregiver, significant other, or siblings)

Social phobia

- An intense, persistent, and chronic fear of being watched and judged by others that can affect work, school, and other daily activities, and even make it hard to make and keep friends

Tic disorders

- Disorders characterized by tics, which are sudden twitches, movements, or sounds that are done repeatedly and involuntarily (e.g., Tourette's syndrome)