# The truth behind stigma in mental illness

Allyson Boyer

Mental illness has been around for a long time, and has only recently started being understood. There are so many different illnesses that a lot of people aren't aware of. While awareness, diagnosis, and treatment of different mental illnesses have advanced, there are still a lot of aspects that many people have a hard time understanding. Mental illness as a whole is well known and researched, but people who have not dealt with mental illness don't always understand some of the issues that are connected to them. With today's awareness of mental illness, some people fake having an illness for sympathy or because they think having one would be fun. This creates a big stigma around the entire idea of mental illness and makes treatment and diagnosis for those that really need it much more difficult to obtain. This ability to get a diagnosis is not free to everyone, not all people with a mental illness can get diagnosed, it's a freedom that not everyone has.

When thinking about mental illness, society believes depression and anxiety is just being sad and stressed out all the time, but it is so much more than that. Oftentimes, if someone finds out their friend or family member is struggling with a mental illness, they will look down on them and feel pity. Sometimes, "someone (will) avoid you because the person assumes you could be unstable, violent or

dangerous due to your mental illness" (<u>Mayo Clinic</u>). Lots of people do this unintentionally, but some just don't know how to act around their friends for fear of upsetting them and making the illness worse. In the story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Stetson, she gets locked in her room by her husband, because he doesn't know what else to do with her. Instead of embracing the illness and getting her help, he locks her away from everyone, which makes her much worse than if he had let her be around everyone else. This discrimination against his own wife because of her illness eventually led to her insanity, losing all contact to other people. She was forced to stare at the wall day in and day out, eventually causing her reality to unravel, going from depression to mania as well, which is common for people who are unable to get the help they need.

Instead of facing their illness and getting treated, people push it to the side and unknowingly allow it to get worse. In some cases, it's family that separates a person from other people and the ability to get the treatment they need. Other times, people do this to themselves because they believe "(having a mental illness) is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help" (<u>Mayo Clinic</u>). This self inflicted stigma is dealt with a lot in teens and young adults because they don't always get told that it is okay to talk about it and to want to get a diagnosis.

A variety of mental illnesses come from a variety of different causes. Many kids develop them to try and cope with issues at home, bullying at school or online, and with their own thoughts. In many cases, people believe that they 'don't deserve treatment/diagnoses' because that's what their parents have told them when they've tried to talk about it. Parents often don't realize the effect they have on their kids when trying to talk to them about mental illnesses. Some parents get angry and don't care, saying that they have nothing to be mentally ill about. This toxic mindset can lead to kids getting worse because they begin to believe that what they are feeling isn't valid. Many peoples mental illnesses start forming as a child through years of abuse and trauma, either from home or somewhere else. Trauma can come in many forms and many don't realize until they look into it, "It can be emotional, verbal, physical, or sexual. Trauma can include dangerous, frightening, or extremely stressful situations or events" (Women's Health). Trauma can manifest itself as a lot of different things whether it be depression, anxiety, PTSD, and many others.

Not only do kids struggle with pressure or trauma from home, but if bullying is added on, their mental health may decline a lot more. According to research from 2011, " Adolescents involved in bullying are at a significant risk of experiencing psychiatric symptoms, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicidal ideation or acts… depression is one of the most prevalent mental health problems of

adolescence" (National Institutes of Health).  In the past when someone was dealing with bullying at school, they went home and it went away for a little. All the technology we have now encourages bullying to be continued at home or even to start online. On average, child helplines across the world "receive nine calls per day from young people who are suffering from being bullied, according to CHI" (The Guardian). Both bullying and abuse have major impacts on the mental health of kids all across the world.

With social media being the main form of communication for kids and teens nowadays, mental illness is present frequently. 50 years ago, mental illnesses were not as common or diagnosed. In today's day and age, "1 in every 5 people suffer with one or more mental illnesses" (NIMH). Social media platforms are good for reaching those who need help and show the signs. With this comes people faking illnesses because they think it "looks cool" or "seems like fun". Everyone relies on social media for everything, but "nothing reduces stress more effectively than eye to eye contact with someone who cares about you…prioritizing social media puts you more at risk for developing anxiety and depression" (HelpGuide). While social media is good for staying connected to people, it can severely decrease the mental health of many. Some individuals become dependent on social media, which can create severe anxiety or depression. Everyone is so reliant on social media and how everyone else is doing, they don't look at what's going on around them and they

focus on the likes and comments other people receive. Social media is both important in everyone's lives and a very destructive force in a lot of young kids' minds. Worrying about how many likes and comments people get on their posts have become more important than enjoying the lives they live.

Movies and TV shows don't always show the truth about how mental illnesses affect oneself. The way they are shown on TV is not always how it is. Eating disorders aren't just skipping a meal every now and then, depression isn't being sad a lot, OCD isn't always wanting everything to be perfect and organized and clean, and anxiety isn't getting a little bit anxious before a test. Many people claim to have a mental illness because "there is an overriding 'mental illness is cool!' narrative… as long as it's 'the arty kind of mental illness" (Treatment Advocacy). With the way it is presented in the entertainment industry, many people are starting to claim having one for the 'clout' because they see their favorite characters dealing with them and want to be 'just like them'. For people who actually suffer with a mental illness, seeing others post on social media about their 'illness' can be very stressful because they deal with so much that society doesn't realize.

The reality behind a lot of mental illnesses is not as glamorous as people make it out to be. What people don't know about depression is the feeling of not

being able to shower for weeks because you just can't get yourself to get in, not even being able to get out of bed some days because you physically can't. Living constantly with the fear of stigma towards you from people you love when you try and talk about it and dealing with suicidal thoughts and needing to self harm all the time even when nothing is wrong in order to feel something. Losing hair all the time and making yourself throw up because it's the only way to feel worth something due to an eating disorder. Not eating enough and constantly feeling dizzy or out of energy but not allowing yourself to eat because you feel like you don't deserve to.

Mental illness goes a lot deeper than many people realize. It comes from trauma, abuse, bullying, and it gets rooted as so many different versions whether it be depression, anxiety, eating disorders, they are all part of the bigger picture. The stigma surrounding it and the media's influence are all major factors in how people react to the idea of mental illness. With this constant pressure to just 'be okay' no one will get better, we need to do better in order to help them.

## Work Cited :
In order of appearance ~

Mayo Clinic :

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/in-depth/mental-health/art-20046477

Women's Health :

https://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/abuse-trauma-and-mental-health#:~:text=Trauma%20can%20affect%20how%20you,traumatic%20stress%20disorder%20(PTSD).

National institute of Health : https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3926772/

The Guardian :

https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/may/23/10-years-bullying-data#data

NIMH : https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml

Help Guide :

https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm

Treatment advocacy :

https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/fixing-the-system/features-and-news/2854-do-we-glamorize-mental-illness

Introduction  Go over the different topics going to be discussed.

Body paragraph #1 Stigma behind it, why people look down on mental illnesses.

Body paragraph #2  Bullying and abuse and its effect.

Body paragraph #3 Social media's effect.

Body paragraph #4 Glamorization in tv and movies

Body paragraph #5  The reality behind different mental illnesses.