Why we wrote this report: Changing society’s whole approach to psychosis

Anne Cooke
EXCLUSIVE INVESTIGATION

1,200 KILLED BY MENTAL PATIENTS

Shock 10-year toll exposes care crisis
The stereotype

Someone who has psychotic experiences is:
• Different from normal people...
• Because his brain is damaged or different, probably because of his genes.
• He is a SCHIZOPHRENIC, who is not understandable, is dangerous, has no legitimate voice and requires control through drugs which target the brain disorder.
‘Schizophrenia is a devastating brain disorder’

Zyprexa.com
The end of compulsory mental illness thinking
What do we really know?
• Someone says they hear voices
• Someone says they believe something that other people find strange
• Someone appears out of touch with reality
The idea of mental illness: advantages
The social meaning of mental illness
The social meaning of mental illness

“The often violent and irrational behaviour of schizophrenics frequently sparks fear in others”

“£1m probe into deadly instincts of mentally ill”
Psychological Effects of the idea of mental illness
Hopelessness

‘I felt like I’d been given a life sentence’

Jonny Benjamin
'All I knew was what I read in the papers – that people with schizophrenia are violent and incapable of recovery'
Am I Still Bipolar? Emerging from the Shadow of the DSM

Fay Thomas
So why am I excited? I’m excited by the fuss over the DSM and by the breathtaking possibilities within the charge that psychiatric diagnoses lack validity. If mental illness is not primarily caused by biology, I’m left wondering if I’m a fairly normal person after all? What if I’m someone who was extremely distressed at times or someone who just has bigger moods than most? That seems a bit like saying that some people tan more easily in the sun than others. And so what if they do?

It might mean that my family was like many other families, except that we were stressed. Most of us were distressed and two of us got labels. Certainly the crisis-cross double-bind communication within my family could have driven anybody mad. Perhaps, more tellingly, we couldn’t talk about our distress and it had to be hidden. Well-functioning middle class people weren’t expected to behave that way. While our genes may have made ‘madness’ more likely is that really so bad?

If psychologists are right that the primary causes of mental illness are psychosocial rather than biological, my family narrative can be rewritten. We can emerge from our closets of shame and take our rightful place on the continuum of acceptable human experience.

That possibility feels good, but it can’t erase the fact that my family has been shamed and defamed by psychiatric diagnosis. Our lives, historical and present, are forever affected by it. We have felt different. We have felt defective and unacceptable. We felt that our genes were inadequate and shouldn’t be reproduced. We felt that our diagnoses had to be hidden because others might think us dangerous or unpredictable. At times, we felt so ‘other’ that we had to hide our experiences even from one another. We lived with secrets and silence that reached into every corner of our lives.

Our communications were difficult and inauthentic as a result. My parents would bring me gifts when I was in hospital and take great care to ensure that I had all that I needed. My long-suffering husband was chastised by my mother for not ‘doing enough’. We would speak about everything but the fact of my being there. Neither parent ever breathed the words of my diagnosis to me. We discussed the weather, interest rates, the neighbour’s dog... Everything but the reason why I was periodically unable to function. That both their children were ‘mentally patients’ was a deep source of shame and guilt.
Misplaced Certainty

‘We know what you need’
Misplaced Attention

UNCOMFORTABLE?
Imagine how a child must feel. 40 million children suffer child abuse each year worldwide.

Work Together
REPORT
CHILD ABUSE

DADDY'S LITTLE SECRET
HELP ME

HOMELESS
PLEASE HELP

HOMELESS
Prevention
Understanding Psychosis and Schizophrenia

Why people sometimes hear voices, believe things that others find strange, or appear out of touch with reality, and what can help

Edited by Anne Cooke
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