

What is a Personality Disorder?

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Putting The Pieces Together

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What is a Personality Disorder?

Everyone has personality traits. These are the usual ways that a person thinks and behaves, which make each of us unique.

Personality traits become a personality disorder when the pattern of thinking and behaviour is extreme, inflexible, and maladaptive. They may cause major disruption to a person's life and significant distress to the person or others.

Personality disorders begin in childhood or adolescence and persist through adulthood.

The prevalence of personality disorders is not firmly established and varies for different personality disorders. Borderline personality disorder is experienced by about one in 100 people.

While personality can be difficult to change, with appropriate treatment and support, people with personality disorders can live full and productive lives.

Providence Care Mental Health Services Personality Disorders Service

The Personality Disorders Service provides specialized care to non-psychotic individuals suffering from personality disorders who tend to experience intense and distorted thoughts and feelings and engage in self-destructive and socially inappropriate behaviours that are long-standing, hard to change, and affect many aspects of their lives.

The service provides assessment, treatment, community consultation, and education. The service has a strong community orientation and works closely with other health care professionals.

Understanding Borderline Personality Disorder and What Causes It

Understanding borderline personality disorder is particularly important because it can be misdiagnosed as other disorders, particularly mood disorders.

People with borderline personality disorder are likely to have:

- ◆ Rapid mood swings
- ◆ Inappropriate anger or difficulty controlling anger
- ◆ Chronic feelings of emptiness
- ◆ Recurrent suicidal behaviour, gestures or threats, or self-harming behaviour
- ◆ Impulsive and self-destructive behaviour
- ◆ A pattern of unstable relationships
- ◆ Unstable self-image or sense of self
- ◆ Fear of abandonment
- ◆ Periods of paranoia and loss of contact with reality when stressed

It is well established that the tendency to develop borderline personality disorder runs in families.

There is some evidence that borderline personality disorder may be related to a biological component in the brain.

Childhood abuse, neglect, and separation from caregivers or loved ones are believed to be major contributing factors, particularly sustained and severe abuse.

Women are more likely to be diagnosed with borderline personality disorder than men.

What are the Main Types of Personality Disorders?

There is a wide range of personality disorders. All of them involve a pervasive pattern of behaviour, which means that the characteristic behaviours and thoughts are evident in almost all aspects of a person's life.

Three Clusters of Personality Disorders

Cluster A - odd/eccentric

- ◆ ***Paranoid personality disorder*** is a pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others, such that their motives are interpreted as hostile or malicious.
- ◆ ***Schizoid personality disorder*** is a pervasive pattern of detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of expression of emotions in interpersonal settings.
- ◆ ***Schizotypal personality disorder*** is a pervasive pattern of social and interpersonal deficits marked by acute discomfort with reduced capacity for close relationships. It is also characterized by distortions of thinking and perception and eccentric behaviour.

Cluster B - dramatic/emotional

- ♦ **Antisocial personality disorder** is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others.
- ♦ **Borderline personality disorder** is a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, moods, and control over impulses.
- ♦ **Histrionic personality disorder** is a pervasive pattern of excessive displays of emotion and a desire for attention.
- ♦ **Narcissistic personality disorder** is a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or actual behaviour), need for admiration, and lack of empathy.

Cluster C - anxious/fearful

- ♦ **Avoidant personality disorder** is a pervasive pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation.
- ♦ **Dependent personality disorder** is a pervasive and excessive need to be taken care of, which leads to submissive and clinging behaviour and fears of separation.
- ♦ **Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder** is a pervasive pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and mental and interpersonal control, at the expense of flexibility, openness, and efficiency.

Co-Occurring Mental Health Problems

Personality disorders often co-occur with other mental disorders. Harmful alcohol and other drug use often co-occurs with personality disorders, particularly borderline and anti-social personality disorder. This makes treatment more complex, and effectively managing alcohol and other drug use is important.

What Causes Personality Disorders?

Personality disorders develop in childhood and the thoughts and behaviours become increasingly ingrained in adulthood.

Some personality disorders are more common in men (i.e. antisocial personality disorder) and others are more common in women (i.e. borderline personality disorder).

Many people with a personality disorder seek help only after years of distress, if at all. This contributes to our lack of knowledge about their causes and development.

Different causes appear to be associated with the different types of personality disorders. However, like most mental disorders, the causes appear to be a combination of genetic factors, biochemical factors, and individual, family and environmental factors.