

Fact or fiction? — answer key

1. One person in 100 develops schizophrenia.

True. One per cent of the general population develops schizophrenia.

2. A person who has one or both parents with mental illness is more likely to develop mental illness.

True. Mental illness can be hereditary. For example, the rate of schizophrenia in the general population is one per cent. This rate rises to eight per cent if one parent has the disorder and to 37–46 per cent if both parents have it. One in 10 people in the general population has experienced depression, compared to one in four for people whose parents have experienced depression.

3. Mental illness is contagious.

False. Mental illness is not contagious. Heredity can, and often does, play a factor in the development of the disease.

4. Mental illness tends to begin during adolescence.

True. The first episode of a mental illness often occurs between the ages of 15 and 30 years. Early intervention is currently thought to be one of the most important factors related to recovery from mental illness. Embarrassment, fear, peer pressure and stigma often prevent young people from seeking out help.

5. Poor parenting causes schizophrenia.

False. Childhood abuse or neglect does not cause mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. However, stressful or abusive environments may seriously impair a person's ability to cope with and later manage the illness.

6. Drug use causes mental illness.

True and False. Alcohol and other drugs sometimes play a role in the development of some symptoms and disorders, but do not usually cause the illness. However, long-term drug and alcohol use can lead to the development of drug-induced psychosis, which has many of the same symptoms of organic mental illness. Alcohol and drugs are often used as a means to cope with the illness, although using alcohol and drugs can make the symptoms of mental illness worse.

7. Mental illness can be cured with willpower.

False. Mental illness is associated with chemical imbalances in the brain and requires a comprehensive treatment plan.

8. People with mental illness never get better.

False. With the right kind of help, many people with a mental illness do recover and go on to lead healthy, productive and satisfying lives. While the illness may not go away, the symptoms associated with it can be controlled. This usually allows the person to regain normal functioning. Medication, counselling and psychosocial rehabilitation are treatment options that can help people recover from mental illness.

9. People with mental illness tend to be violent.

False. People who experience a mental illness acutely sometimes behave very differently from people who do not. While some of their behaviours may seem bizarre, people with mental illness are not more violent than the rest of the population.

10. All homeless people are mentally ill.

False. Although studies have shown that between 17 and 70 per cent of people who are homeless have mental illnesses, it is clear that being homeless doesn't automatically indicate a mental illness.

11. Developmental disabilities are a form of mental illness.

False. Mental illness is often confused with developmental disabilities, even though the two conditions are quite different. Mental illness does not affect an individual's intellectual capacity, whereas developmental disabilities do. However, people with developmental disabilities are more susceptible to developing mental illness.

12. People who are poor are more likely to have mental illness than people who are not.

False. Income is not a factor in overall rates of mental health problems. However, people with lower incomes experience slightly higher rates of depression. People who live with major mental illnesses often end up in lower social classes because the illness may interfere with their ability to hold a job.

True & False Answers

1. Schizophrenia is a rare illness. **[False]**
Schizophrenia strikes one in one hundred people, world-wide.
2. Schizophrenia is a brain disease. **[True]**
Brain imaging techniques (MRI and PET) show there is a change in structure and functioning of the brain.
3. Schizophrenia generally strikes older people. **[False]**
The age of onset is usually between 15 and 25 years of age.
4. More males than females develop schizophrenia. **[False]**
Males tend to contract the disease at a younger age than females but the illness is distributed equally between the two sexes.
5. Schizophrenia is caused by poor parenting. **[False]**
The cause of schizophrenia is not known. However, it is definitely an organic (physical, biological) disease and is the fault of no one.
6. Schizophrenia is caused by street drugs. **[False]**
Schizophrenia is not caused by street drugs. Some researchers believe, however, that street drugs can precipitate schizophrenia in an individual who has a predisposition to develop the disease.

7. People who have schizophrenia are usually violent and dangerous. **[False]**
People who have schizophrenia tend to be vulnerable, fragile people. If violent, the violence is most often directed towards themselves: suicide.

8. People with schizophrenia have multiple or split personalities. **[False]**
People with schizophrenia are split from reality, rather than having a multiple or split personality.

9. Schizophrenia can be successfully treated. **[True]**
Schizophrenia cannot be cured, but the symptoms can be treated.

10. More hospital beds in Canada are occupied by people with schizophrenia than any other medical illness. **[True]**
Schizophrenia represents 8% of the hospital beds in Canada, more than for any other diagnosis.