

Many Americans Know Little About Mental Illness - A Recent Survey

Many Americans (44 percent) know little about the symptoms, causes and treatments for mental illnesses, but 84 percent agree that they would benefit from knowing more about the warning signs of such disorders, says a survey released Tuesday by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

"The consequences of this gap in knowledge are quite serious," Dr. Carolyn Robinowitz, president-elect of the APA, said in a prepared statement. "About one in five Americans suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder during any given year. This means few families are untouched by a mental illness. All families will benefit from understanding how these disorders can impact their lives.

One-third of the respondents mistakenly thought that emotional or personal weakness is a major cause of mental illnesses, and nearly as many said they believed old age is a major cause. However, mental illness is caused by genetic and environmental factors, traumatic events, and other physical illnesses and injuries that have psychiatric side effects, the APA said.

The survey also found that 31 percent of adults said they wouldn't seek treatment for mental illness for fear of what other people would think.

Robinowitz noted that common mental illnesses can be successfully treated in most cases. "Left untreated, mental illnesses can take an enormous toll on family life, the workplace, and society as a whole," she said.

Mental disorders account for four of the 10 leading causes of disability in the United States. The economic burden of depression alone in the U.S. in 2000 was an estimated \$83 billion.

Source: American Psychiatry Association: