



Borderline Personality Disorder:

A Most Misunderstood and Maligned Mental Illness

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a devastating mental illness that centers on the inability to manage emotions effectively. Heritability of this illness is estimated to be 68%.

The symptoms include: fear of abandonment, impulsivity, rage, bodily self-harm, suicide, and chaotic relationships. While some persons with BPD are high functioning in certain settings, their private lives may be in turmoil. Others are unable to work and require financial support.

Officially recognized in 1980 by the psychiatric community, BPD is two decades behind in research, treatment options, and family psychoeducation compared to other major psychiatric disorders. BPD has historically met with widespread misunderstanding and blatant stigma.

Prevalence

- BPD has a lifetime prevalence of 5.9% (approximately 18 million Americans)
- 20% of psychiatric hospital admissions have BPD
- 10% of persons who present for outpatient treatment have BPD
- 17% of prison inmates have this disorder

Suicide

- 10% of adults with BPD commit suicide
- a person with BPD has a suicide rate 400 times greater than for general public
- 33% of youth who commit suicide have features of BPD

Treatment Challenges

- no FDA-approved medication exists for BPD
- 38% of adults with BPD are prescribed three or more medications
- BPD co-occurs with other illnesses (e.g. 60% also have major depression)
- persons with other diagnoses may have undiagnosed BPD interfering with their recovery
- 50% of people with BPD are severely impaired in employment
- Many mental health professionals are reluctant to diagnosis and/or treat individuals with BPD

Growing Support and Awareness

- BPD Research Foundation and NIMH start collaboration to support research on BPD (2000)
- NAMI raises BPD to one of its priority populations in March 2006
- U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passes House Resolution 1005 on April 1, 2008, designating May as BPD Awareness Month
- U.S. Congressional Luncheon Briefing on BPD