

## Delusional Disorder

- What is meant by the terms 'mental health' and 'mental illness'?

The term 'mental health' is defined by WHO (World Health Organisation) as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." This positive approach to defining mental health can be seen as a definition for being 'mentally healthy', however, given the WHO's constitution that "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." We can see why they have taken this approach and begin to understand the term 'mental health'.

The term 'mental illness' is more conclusive than the term 'mental health' in that it refers to disorders or conditions that affect your mood, thinking and behaviour. A mental illness is more severe than a mental health problem and often is more on going which is why there are clinical guidelines to diagnose mental disorders and mental illnesses. The two main classification systems are the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) and the ICD (*International Classification of Diseases*).

- Description of Delusional Disorder

Delusional disorder is a serious mental illness in which an individual cannot differentiate what is real from what is imagined. One of the most prominent features of this mental illness is the presence of delusions, delusions are fixed beliefs in something untrue. A lot of people who suffer from delusional disorder experience delusions that are possible in the real world, these are known as non-bizarre delusions (e.g. Being followed, deceived, unfaithful partner, loved from a distance by a celebrity or famous person for example). These delusions are usually result of misinterpretation or perceptions or experiences, often not true at all or highly exaggerated interpretations of reality.

There main symptoms of delusional disorder are non-bizarre delusions which is the most obvious symptom, hallucinations that are related to the delusion and an angry and/or low mood.

Delusional disorder generally doesn't affect how an individual might socialise and function, unlike other psychotic disorders that may have delusions as a symptom. However there can be cases of people becoming so engrossed with their delusions that it does impact their lives in a negative way.

- Prevalence of the disorder

Delusional disorder is slightly more common in women than men and often occurs during middle to late life. That said the actual disorder itself it quite rare compared to other disorders where a symptom is delusions such as schizophrenia.

- Identifiable causes of the disorder

Because delusional disorder is one of many psychotic disorders the exact cause is not yet known, however genetic, environmental/psychological and biological avenues have all been researched.

From a genetic point of view, delusional disorder does happen to be more common in people who have or have had family members with the disorder which suggests that it may be passed on from parents to their children.

Looking from an environmental/psychological perspective also shows signs that delusional disorder can be triggered by stress with alcohol and drug abuse another factor that could contribute to the condition. Isolation or those with poor visual and auditory sensory also appear to be more vulnerable to developing the disorder.

Finally from a biological stance, research into how abnormalities in the brain may play a part in developing delusional disorder. Irregularities in the functioning of the regions of the brain that control perception and thinking could possibly be linked to developing the symptoms of delusional disorder.

- Treatments for the disorder

Delusional disorder is most commonly treated through psychotherapy which is a type of counselling and medication. The disorder can be very difficult to treat because individuals who suffer from the disorder often have poor eye sight and/or don't believe that they suffer from the disorder. The type of psychotherapies that can help treat delusional disorder are:

- **Individual psychotherapy** this helps the person suffering to realise the actual situation which their perception of has become distorted.
- **Cognitive-behavioural therapy** this can help the person change their thought process which may lead to troublesome feelings and/or delusions
- **Family therapy** this can help with families dealing with a loved one with the disorder, which helps the family members contribute to a better result for the individual suffering.

Anti-psychotic medication is also used when attempting to treat people suffering from delusional disorder.

- Two support organisations for people suffering from the disorder

Because delusional disorder is quite rare there isn't specific organisations where people suffering can receive support unlike more common mental illnesses or mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. However organisations who assist and counsel people suffering from mental health issues include *Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia inc.* and *Grow*. These organisations help people with mental illnesses overcome and/or recover from mental illness.

<http://www.mifa.org.au/>

<http://www.grow.org.au/grow-program/>

- References

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