

## 8. PERSONALITY DISORDERS

**8.1 Antisocial Personality Disorder:** According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 7.6 million American adults suffer from antisocial personality disorder. According to some critics, the DSM diagnostic criteria are too focused on behaviors commonly displayed by those with antisocial personality disorder, such as fire-setting, cruelty to animals, and difficulties with authority figures. Because of this, it is possible that the prevalence of this disorder has been overstated. Regardless of this possibility, these behaviors often lead to major difficulties in many life areas, including work and personal relationships and the disorder is often linked to criminal behavior.

### Symptoms of Antisocial Personality Disorder

Individuals with antisocial personality disorder:

- May begin displaying symptoms during childhood. Such behaviors include *fire setting, cruelty to animals, and difficulty with authority*.
- Often have *legal problems* resulting from failures to conform to social norms and a lack of concern for the rights of others.
- Often *act out impulsively* and fail to consider the consequences of their actions.
- Display *aggressiveness and irritability* that often lead to physical assaults.
- Have difficulty feeling *empathy* for others. This inability to consider the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of other people can lead to disregard for others.
- Display a *lack of remorse* for damaging behavior.

### Treatments for Antisocial Personality Disorder

- Those with antisocial personality disorder *rarely seek out treatment on their own*. Individuals generally receive treatment only after some type of altercation with the legal system.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy can be useful in helping individuals gain insight into their behaviors and to change maladaptive thought patterns.

- Effective results usually occur only after *long-term treatment*.

**8.2 What Is Borderline Personality Disorder:** According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, an estimated 30.8 million American adults experience symptoms of at least one personality disorder. Borderline personality disorder affects approximately 2 percent of these individuals, mostly young women. Borderline personality disorder impacts the regulation of emotions, leading to unstable moods, poor self-image, and difficulty in relationships with others. In addition to this, borderline personality disorder is linked to self-injury and suicide.

### **What is Borderline Personality Disorder?**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), borderline personality disorder is:

*"a serious mental illness characterized by pervasive instability in moods, interpersonal relationships, self-image, and behavior. This instability often disrupts family and work life, long-term planning, and the individual's sense of self-identity."*

### **Symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder**

Individuals with borderline personality disorder:

- Experience a **pervasive pattern** of unstable interpersonal relationships and have difficulties with moods and self-image. Impulsiveness is also extremely common.
- Often have **intense episodes** of anxiety, depression and irritability lasting from a few hours to several days.
- May direct anger outward in the form of physical aggression, but **may also engage in self-destructive behaviors** such as drug abuse, eating disorders or suicidal gestures. These behaviors are often intended to manipulate others.
- Usually have **poor self-identity** that leads to overly intense relationships with others. These interactions are generally filled with conflict, and the individual

with borderline personality will vacillate between idealizing other people and undervaluing them.

- Tend to become angry and frustrated when other people fail to meet unrealistic expectations.

### **Treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder**

- **Therapy is often effective** in many patients, especially treatment that utilizes cognitive-behavioral approaches. The goal of the therapist is to help the client learn to be more aware of other people's perspectives.
- **Psychiatric drugs** such as antidepressants are often effective, both alone and in combination with psychotherapy. Antipsychotic medications are sometimes used in cases involving distorted thinking patterns.

**8.3 Histrionic Personality Disorder** : According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, an estimated 30.8 million American adults experience symptoms of at least one personality disorder. Histrionic personality disorder affects approximately 3.8 million (1.8 percent) adults in the United States. The disorder is characterized by shallow emotions, attention-seeking, and manipulative behavior.

### **Symptoms of Histrionic Personality Disorder**

- **Display excessive but shallow** emotions and attention-seeking behaviors. These individuals are constantly "performing" in order to gain attention.
- Experience fleeting moods, opinions, and beliefs. They are also very suggestible and quick to respond to fads.
- Generally **need others to witness their emotional displays** in order to gain validation or attention.
- Often display **exaggerated symptoms of weakness or illness** and may use threats of suicide to manipulate others. Also, many suffering from histrionic personality disorder use sexually provocative behaviors to control others or gain attention.

## Treatments for Histrionic Personality Disorder

- Individuals suffering from histrionic personality disorder are often **difficult to treat**. They often seek treatment only when the disorder is causing major problems or stress.
- **Psychotherapy** can be effective. Group therapy is not recommended since the individual tries to seek attention from group members and exaggerates symptoms.

**8.4 Avoidant Personality Disorder:** Avoidant personality disorder is characterized by a chronic and pervasive pattern of distorted thought, emotion, behavior, and functioning. This type of personality disorder is thought to affect approximately one-percent of adults in the United States. Individuals with this disorder are also more prone to anxiety disorders, including agoraphobia and social phobia.

## Symptoms of Avoidant Personality Disorder

Individuals with avoidant personality disorder typically experience:

- Extreme shyness
- Sensitivity to criticism and rejection
- Low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy
- A desire for closeness with others but difficulty forming relationships with people outside of immediate family.
- Avoidance of social situations, including those related to school or work.

## Treatments for Avoidant Personality Disorder

Avoidant personality disorder is most often treated using psychotherapy. Because individuals with avoidant personality disorder are extremely shy and have difficulty with interpersonal communication, group therapy is generally not recommended. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is often very effective in helping individuals overcome shyness and develop new skills and behaviors.

Anti-anxiety medications and antidepressant drugs are often used to help individuals succeed in psychotherapy. While these drugs can help those with

avoidant personality disorder succeed in therapy, medication alone is not a recommended treatment for avoidant personality disorder.

**8.5 What Is Narcissistic Personality Disorder:** According to a study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, approximately 30 million American adults are affected by at least one personality disorder. The DSM-IV reports that narcissistic personality disorder affects an estimated 1-percent of these individuals. Narcissistic personality disorder is characterized by an exaggerated self-image, a lack of empathy, and self-centeredness.

### **What is Narcissistic Personality Disorder?**

Narcissistic personality disorder is a pervasive disorder characterized by self-centeredness, lack of empathy, and an exaggerated sense of self-importance. As with other personality disorders, this disorder is an enduring and persistent pattern of behavior that negatively impacts many different life areas including social, family, and work relationships.

Narcissistic personality disorder is thought to be less common than other personality disorders such as borderline personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and histrionic personality disorder. Narcissistic personality disorder is estimated to affect 1-percent of the adult population in the United States and is more common among men than women.

### **Symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

Narcissism is a term commonly used to describe those who seemed more concerned with themselves than with others. It is important to distinguish between those who have narcissistic personality traits and those suffering from narcissistic personality disorder. Those with narcissistic personalities are often seen as arrogant, confident, and self-centered, but they do not have the exaggerated or grandiose view of their own abilities that characterizes narcissistic personality disorder.

The DSM-IV identifies the following symptoms:

- An exaggerated sense of one's own abilities and achievements.
- A constant need for attention, affirmation and praise.

- A belief that he or she is unique or "special" and should only associate with other people of the same status.
- Persistent fantasies about attaining success and power.
- Exploiting other people for personal gain.
- A sense of entitlement and expectation of special treatment.
- A preoccupation with power or success.
- Feeling envious of others, or believing that others are envious of him or her.
- A lack of empathy for others.

An official diagnosis can be made by a qualified mental health professional, and requires that the individual exhibit 5 of the 9 symptoms identified in the DSM-IV. Practitioners must also rule out other psychiatric disorders in order to make a diagnosis.

People with narcissistic personality disorder are typically described as arrogant, conceited, self-centered and haughty. Because they imagine themselves as superior to others, they often insist on possessing items that reflect a successful lifestyle. Despite this exaggerated self-image, they are reliant on constant praise and attention to reinforce their self-esteem. As a result, those with narcissistic personality disorder are usually very sensitive to criticism, which is often viewed as a personal attack.

### **Causes of Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

While the exact cause is unknown, researchers have identified some factors that may contribute to the disorder. Childhood experiences such as parental overindulgence, excessive praise, unreliable parenting, and a lack of realistic responses are thought to contribute to narcissistic personality disorder.

### **Treatments for Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

Individual psychotherapy can be effectively used to treat narcissistic personality disorder, although the process can be difficult and time consuming. It is important

to note that people with this disorder rarely seek out treatment. Individuals often begin therapy at the urging of family members or to treat symptoms that result from the disorder.

Therapy can be especially difficult because clients are often unwilling to acknowledge the disorder. This difficulty in treatment is often compounded by the fact the insurance companies are focused on short-term treatments that minimize symptoms such as depression and anxiety, but ignore the underlying problems.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is often effective to help individual's change destructive thinking and behavior patterns. The goal of treatment is to alter distorted thoughts and create a more realistic self-image. Psychotropic medications are generally ineffective for long-term change, but are sometimes used to treat symptoms of anxiety or depression.