



# The “S” Word”

## Split Mind or Split Personality?

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and electrophysiological tests have demonstrated that people with Schizophrenia have abnormalities in brain structure and function. And there is indisputable evidence of genetic vulnerability for Schizophrenia.

### Impact Of Schizophrenia On Daily Life

The effects of the illness can be devastating, both for the individual and those around him or her. During an acute episode, the sufferer can be consumed by their experiences, thereby disrupting work and daily activities. At other times, they can worry about reoccurrence of an episode. Consequently, a dent in confidence and motivation can impair initiatives and desires. Paranoia and suspiciousness can distant them from loved ones. Also, misuse of drugs and alcohol is common, being an attempt to self-medicate, or relieve symptoms.

### Warning Signs

In early phase of illness, the symptoms can come on slowly, and even seem harmless at first, like having trouble sleeping or concentrating. Other seemingly benign warning signs are:

- ◆ Social withdrawal
- ◆ Deterioration of personal hygiene
- ◆ Inability to cry or express joy

**T**he word *Schizophrenia* is over a century old, yet it makes many people uneasy. Schizophrenia comes from the Greek roots *schizo* (split) and *phrene* (mind), to describe the fragmented thinking of people with the disorder. However, there is a fundamental misunderstanding by the public, that it is an illness of split personality, demonstrating prejudice and misconceived notion that those with Schizophrenia are unpredictable and dangerous.

Unhelpfully, the media, public and even the clinicians have used the word to describe violence and disturbance. Unsurprisingly the ‘S’ word comes with a stigma which acts as a barrier for individuals seeking help, due to fear of being judged on pre-formed notions.

Consequence – a delay in treatment, unnecessary suffering and poorer outcome of an illness. Notably, this is a treatable condition from the outset, and majority recover the ability to function socially, relate to others and integrate in community, besides returning to work and employment.

Indeed, genuine interest in alleviating human suffering and empathic approach is the key to understanding this complex disorder of the mind.

### Possible Causes Of Schizophrenia

There is evidence that the symptoms are manifestations of brain pathology rather than disturbed psychological development or bad parenting. Studies involving brain imaging

Schizophrenia is a disorder or illness of the mind that affects how you feel, think, behave and perceive the world. Clinically, it is listed under the category of a psychotic disorder. "Psychotic" means out of touch with reality or unable to separate real from unreal experiences. Loss of touch with reality and fragmentation of thinking mainly occurs during an active acute phase of illness or long term untreated individuals



- ◆ Flat and expressionless gaze
- ◆ Odd or irrational statements
- ◆ Extreme sensitivity to criticism
- ◆ Strange use of words or way of speaking
- ◆ Hostility or suspiciousness
- ◆ Inappropriate laughter or crying, and depression

Importantly, psychosis also occurs in medical conditions (such as brain tumour, epilepsy, thyroid problems, alcoholism and illicit drugs misuse, etc), therefore, must be ruled out before diagnosing schizophrenia.

### Treatment

Gone are those days when individuals with psychosis were locked in asylums situated away from the cities. With advent of effective antipsychotic medications in the 50s, advances in understanding the illness, earlier diagnosis and treatment, the options for successful treatment and normalisation (i.e. re-integrating individuals back into their normal lives) has been possible, and the outcome for the disorder continues to improve.

The most effective treatment approach would be an integrated care plan involving a combination of medication, psychotherapy (talking therapy), and targeted social intervention including confidence building, assertiveness, and engaging in meaningful activities and support networks.

Importantly, education and support for the family will reduce caretaker's burnout and ultimately minimise risk of reoccurrence of the illness. A mindful and person-centred approach will enable the sufferer with better control of their symptoms/difficulties, gain greater independence, and lead fulfilling lives.

### Diagnosis

The diagnosis of Schizophrenia depends on the presence of a pattern of difficulties or symptoms. They are categorised as positive (psychosis and disorganisation) and negative (mainly to do with motivation and effect) symptoms.

- ◆ Positive symptoms include seeing or hearing things that don't exist (hallucinations), believing that others are trying to harm you or fear of being constantly watched (delusions), disorganised behaviour such as withdrawing from others and inability to care for one's self and speaking in a strange or confusing way.
- ◆ Negative symptoms include lack of motivation, apathy, loss of interest and reduced energy levels. Symptoms should be present for several weeks or months.

### Prevalence Of Schizophrenia

It affects 1 per cent of the population. Symptoms often begin to manifest in young adulthood; sometimes start later for women. Illness can be periodic or continuous depending on the extent of difficulties or delays in treatment received.

According to WHO, Schizophrenia is one of the leading causes of disability (years of life lived with disability) in 15 to 44 year olds in the world. Between 20 to 50 per cent of patients with Schizophrenia attempt suicide, and an estimated nine to 13 percent commit suicide. The risk of suicide is high in people with Schizophrenia, especially during psychotic episodes, during periods of associated depression, and in the first six months after they've started treatment.