

## **Changing the Future of Stigma; Bipolar Disorder in 2020**

Bipolar disorder is a brain illness that causes unusual fluctuations in a person's mood (Weinreb, 2013). However, as Weinreb notes the mood fluctuations that bipolar sufferers experience are sometimes so severe that it can impact their work performance, school activities or day to day living. But the good news is that while the illness is chronic, bipolar disorder can be treated so that persons with the disorder can lead healthy, happy lives and be the best that they can.

The problem is that persons diagnosed with mental illness including bipolar disorder are usually fearful of exposing their illness because they feel they might be rejected. This is a form of stigmatization. According the Mayo Clinic's website, stigma is when someone is judged based on a personal trait such as having bipolar disorder. The fear of stigma can actually prevent persons suffering with the illness from receiving treatment which can worsen their situation. Therefore, it is extremely critical that everyone works together to eliminate all forms of stigma towards persons with bipolar disorder.

According to Lindon (2011), there are two types of stigma which are public stigma and self-stigma. Public stigma involves the views of the public towards, in this case, the person with bipolar disorder. Additionally, self-stigma is where the person with the illness believes the negative views about persons with the illness and as a result suffers from low self-esteem and despair. A person who suffers from both types of stigma would undoubtedly be unable to cope with the situation unless there is professional help and loved ones around to show their support.

Today, more persons are being open about suffering with bipolar disorder because in the workplace, human resource managers are learning to deal with such cases in a professional manner and are teaching their workers how to handle situations involving persons who have the illness. Recently, a well-known actress, Catherine Zeta-Jones, revealed that she has bipolar disorder and was seeking treatment for it. Furthermore, an example of a school program that assists school students in Germany with mental illness is called “Crazy? So what!” The aim of this programme has been to reduce preconceptions towards people with mental illness by providing additional information on the subject. Those who suffer from mental illness are also afforded the opportunity to speak out about it and have the assistance of counsellors. Thus far, the programme has been so successful that it is being expanded to other age groups.

With more groups like this and the International Bipolar Foundation working towards promoting research in mental illness including bipolar disorder, it is hoped that there would be a reduction and possible elimination of bipolar disorder in the future. Indeed, as persons around the globe educate themselves about bipolar disorder through opportunities like this essay contest by the International Bipolar Foundation, certainly by 2020 the stigma associated with the illness would have been a thing of the past.

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