

# ***May is Mental Health Month***

## ***Facts about Mental Illness and Violence***

### **The vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent**

- Mental illness alone does not lead to violence (Elbogen and Johnson, 2009).
- The majority of people who are violent do not suffer from mental illnesses (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).
- A person's mental health status contributes very little to the overall level of violence in society (Monahan, John, 1992).

### **Other factors contribute to violence**

For people with mental illnesses, violent behavior appears to be more common when there are other factors. These include substance abuse or dependence, a history of violence, juvenile detention, physical abuse, being a crime victim, getting divorced, or losing a job (Elbogen and Johnson, 2009).

### **People with mental illness are more likely to be victims of crime**

- The relationship between mental illness and violence is greatly exaggerated in the minds of the general public (Institute of Medicine, 2006)."
- People with psychiatric disabilities are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violent crime (Appleby, et al., 2001). People with severe mental illnesses are 2 ½ times more likely to be attacked, raped or mugged than the general population (Hiday, et al.,1999).

### **The link between mental illnesses and violence is exaggerated by the media**

- At least one-third of news stories about mental illness focus on violence (Wahl, et al. 2002).
- Most news accounts portray people with mental illness as dangerous (Wahl, 1995).
- Characters in prime time TV portrayed as having a mental illness are depicted as the most dangerous of all demographic groups: 60% were shown to be involved in crime or violence (Mental Health America, 1999).

### **What can I do to reduce stigma and bias?**

- Help educate others that most people who suffer from a mental disorder are not violent — there is no need to fear them.
- Embrace people with mental health conditions for who they are — normal human beings experiencing a difficult time, who need your open mind, caring attitude, and helpful support.
- Learn more about fighting stigma at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

Resource: [Mental Health Reporting](#) (University of Washington)

*For more information, contact: The Office of Consumer Partnerships - [dbhrconsumerpartnerships@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:dbhrconsumerpartnerships@dshs.wa.gov), or the [Washington Recovery Help Line](#) at 1-866-789-1511.*

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