

## PERSONALITY DISORDERS

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Personality disorders are common, occurring in 10% of the general population and 40 - 50% of psychiatric in-patients. They are often missed or difficult to diagnose. **They are not mental illnesses but mental disorders, commonly comorbid with mental illness.**

**Personality traits** are prominent features of personality exhibited over a wide range of social and personal contexts. When traits become rigid, lead to significant functional impairment and/or emotional distress to the self, and/or others, it manifests as a **Personality Disorder**.

### Types of personality disorders:

#### **Paranoid personality disorder**

People with this disorder tend to unfoundedly suspect and believe that they are being deceived and exploited by others. Therefore they often bear grudges and perceive innocent comments as attacks on their character.

#### **Schizoid personality disorder**

Schizoid personality disorder is characterised by a pervasive detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of emotional expression, particularly interpersonally. A schizoid patient neither desires

nor enjoys close relationships, including being part of a family, tending to prefer solitary activities. They often experience little sexual interest or pleasure and have no close friends. They appear indifferent to the praise or criticism of others, and seem emotionally cold or detached.

### **Schizotypal personality disorder**

Schizotypal personality disorder is characterised by a pervasive pattern of social and interpersonal deficits marked by acute discomfort with, and reduced capacity for, close relationships as well as eccentric behaviour.

### **Antisocial personality disorder**

Antisocial personality disorder (also sometimes known as 'Psychopathy' or 'Sociopathy') is characterised by a pervasive behavioural pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others usually starting in adolescence. They thus do not behave according to social norms, and tend to be deceitful, impulsive, aggressive/irritable, reckless and pay no regard to the safety of self or others. They are irresponsible and remorseless. A diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder requires that the individual had marked behavioural problems before the age of 15 already..

### **Borderline personality disorder**

Borderline personality disorder represents a pervasive disturbance of interpersonal relationships, self-image and mood states. It is characterised by attempts to avoid rejection; unstable and intense interpersonal relationships; identity disturbance; impulsivity in sexual relationships, substance abuse, spending or eating (bingeing); repeated suicidal behaviour; ; chronic emptiness and inappropriate intense anger as well as stress-related paranoid ideas or episodes of feeling unreal or dissociated from reality.

### **Histrionic personality disorder**

Histrionic personality disorder is characterised by pervasive, excessive emotionality and attention seeking in various situations. The person experiences inner discomfort as soon as they sense that they are not the centre of attention.

### **Narcissistic personality disorder**

These people exhibit a pervasive pattern of grandiosity with a need for constant admiration. There tends to be a marked lack of empathy with others' needs and feelings. A sense of self-importance, fantasies of unlimited success, beauty and power and the idea that they can only be understood by special people may be apparent. They tend to show a sense of entitlement, are interpersonally exploitative and are often jealous of other people.

### **Avoidant personality disorder**

Avoidant personality disorder is characterised by a pervasive pattern of social inhibition, due to feelings of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to critical evaluation by other people. Because of fears of criticism or rejection these people avoid occupational activities that involve interpersonal contact. They also appear to be unwilling to become involved with people unless they are assured of being accepted.

### **Dependent personality disorder**

Dependent personality disorder is characterised by an excessive need to be taken care of, submissive or clinging behaviour, separation anxiety, indecisiveness, excessive need for advice and reassurance, and the need for other people to assume responsibility for major areas of their lives. They therefore find it difficult to disagree with other people for fear that they will be rejected or criticised.

## **Obsessive-compulsive personality disorder**

This disorder is characterised by the preoccupation with order, perfectionism, and control. This behaviour takes place at the expense of flexibility and efficiency. People with this disorder demonstrate excessive devotion to work and productivity and are often overly conscientious - such that they ignore their own (and their family's) needs.

### **Treatment of personality disorders in general:**

Personality disorder patients are often difficult to engage and maintain in a therapeutic relationship. They often present for help during a crisis, sometimes dramatically, because of self-harming behaviour (overdose, cutting, burning) or breaking the law. They may also present with complaints of depression or anxiety. There is a tendency for them to act out internal conflict through interpersonal behaviour as a manifestation of anxieties or conflicts they find difficult to verbalise. Therefore substance abuse, eating disordered behaviour and a range of risk taking aggressive or regressive behaviour may also occur.

Pharmacotherapy should never be seen as a potential cure and even symptom reduction is sometimes difficult to achieve. Comorbid conditions like anxiety or depression are common, and these may be treated effectively with medication.

Psychotherapy for personality disorders is a specialized field and should only be attempted by a trained professional.