

Dangerous myths about mental illness

People with a mental illness have had a high profile recently. Last week, a man with a mental illness murdered a policeman. More recently, Rene Rivkin, took his own life. Unfortunately, the hysteria associated with these violent incidents perpetuates the view that people with a mental illness are always violent or suicidal. This is simply not true.

People with a mental illness are often just ordinary people living with a manageable illness. When diagnosed correctly and treated appropriately, many people with a mental illness can get well, and stay well.

By learning what works, and what does not work, people with a mental illness can learn to manage their illness. Staying well often involves friendship, local community, laughter, dog walking, sun light, diet, medication, exercise and sleep. The challenge is to control the illness so that symptoms of mental illness - depression, psychosis, mania, anxiety - do not interfere with our day-to-day life.

While suicide and psychosis remain more newsworthy than stories about people getting on with their day-to-day lives, most people in the community will remain frightened and misinformed about mental illness. It is not until we realise that people with a mental illness can not only get well, but also stay well, that attitudes towards the so-called 'mentally ill' will begin to improve.

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