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‘Critically discuss the key issues associated with the diagnosis
and classification of mental illness in contemporary mental
health and counselling

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This essay will be addressing the key issues that are associated with the diagnosis and classification of mental illness in contemporary mental health and counselling. Throughout this essay it will be highlighting and critically analysing how mental illness is diagnosed and classified within the contemporary mental health and counselling, it will start by discussing signs and symptoms that are related to these mental illness and referring to the DSM 5 to see what it says, It will also explore how diagnosing or classifying a mental illness has an effect on the person and look into the issues surrounding it, It will be addressing the appropriate way to deal with these mental illness's even addressing the serve forms of psychological distress and what appropriate way that should be dealt with as well as addressing all these factors it will then look into what it is like in the counselling room considering the factors above. This will be done by looking into what psychological interventions are used during counselling sessions and looking more into the prescribed medication for these mental illnesses and how it may affect the therapeutic relationship and even the process of counselling, this will be compared to how it could be different if they weren't on medication during counselling.

Firstly there are many mental illnesses that anyone could develop, to start with it will just be addressing a few of them explaining their signs and symptoms and just giving an overview of these different mental illnesses. The term mental illness also is known as mental health disorders umbrellas various mental health disorder's, the world health organisation is also known as WHO describes what mental health illness means and what sort of mental illness's falls into this category:

Mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems, with different symptoms. However, they are generally characterised by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others. Examples are schizophrenia, depression, intellectual disabilities and disorders due to drug abuse. Most of these disorders can be successfully treated. (WHO, 2020)

As stated in the quotation from WHO, mental disorders or illness's are all related to the abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviours and relationships with others which is why people are left struggling with these issues when they have no support or medication. A few disorders that come under this definition are disorders such as depression, mood disorders, personality disorders, psychosis, substance use disorder, eating disorders and anything that affects someone's thoughts, behaviours or emotions as stated from WHO (2020).

The NHS Direct Wales (2019) states that the people that would be most affected by mental health disorders are those who have poor living conditions, the disabled, homeless people, offenders meaning those who have been in prison or have been involved in crime and people who are from ethnic minority groups. This isn't to say that people who are not under these categories can still suffer from mental health disorders, as anyone and everyone can be affected.

The first mental health disorder that's going to be addressed is Personality disorders, according to the DSM-IV-TR (1952) it structured the different types of the personality's into 3 categories, these were odd/eccentric, dramatic/emotional and anxious/ fearful, these categories are still the same in the DSM 5 (2013) which was published 61 years later. In these categories such as the first cluster A odd/eccentric the disorders that are seen here are paranoia, schizotypal personality disorder and schizoid, second cluster B includes narcissistic personality disorder, anti-social, borderline and histrionic and finally, in cluster C the disorders that are seen here are dependent, obsessive-compulsive personally

disorder and avoidant. With these 3 clusters under personality disorder there are many signs and symptoms which can occur some are similar and some are very different, but being under one of the categories it narrows the disorder down and for someone who is suffering from personality disorder it could help them understand it more, which will be looked into more detail later on in the essay.

Another mental health disorder that is going to be explored is schizophrenia, according to the DSM 5 (2013) if a person is experiencing more than two or more symptoms of schizophrenia for a month then they will be diagnosed with the mental health disorder, some of these symptoms include delusions, disorganised speech meaning frequent derailment or incoherence, hallucinations, grossly disorganised or catatonic behaviour and negative symptoms meaning diminished emotional expression or abolition, although for someone to be diagnosed they must at least have either delusions, hallucinations and disorganised speech if they have one of these symptoms as well as the others then they will be diagnosed.

An additional mental health disorder that people wouldn't think of being under this category is substance misuse this mental health disorder is usually comorbidity with other disorders, according to the national institute on drug abuse (2018) out of 20.3 million adults with substance use disorders 37.9% of them had mental health disorders and amongst 42.1 million of adults with mental illness 18.2% of them had substance use disorders, so as pointed out here it shows that in most cases there is substance misuse along with mental illness which in accordance substance misuse is then seen as a mental health disorder. The signs and symptoms for this disorder are more of different branches of different types of substance misuse, according to the DSM (2019) there are 10 different categories under substance misuse and these are drugs, opioids, caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, hallucinogens there's a perpetrate category linked with this one such as phencyclidine, cannabis, inhalants, sedatives, hypnotics, anxiolytics, stimulants such as amphetamine, cocaine and other stimulants and unknown substances.

As stated from Dahlgren, G. and Whitehead, M. (1993) diagram mental health disorders can be caused by many factors in someone's life, many factors go into someone developing these mental disorders, to name a few that are shown on the diagram is firstly the one that is the biggest factor is general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions, environmental is one of the biggest causes as also said previously addressed by NHS direct Wales it states about the people who may be the most affected by a mental illness which one factor is the environment, an environment that someone is living in can have a massive effect on their well being if it is not a positive environment that that person is going to develop signs and symptoms of a mental health disorder.

Diagnosing a mental health disorder for someone who is suffering from mental health could go either way for them, some people may feel relief once they have had their diagnosis as they may not like the feeling of not understanding what is going on for them emotionally or physically and would just like answers so they can then act on or know how to feel or some people may feel the complete opposite and would have preferred to not have a diagnosis or 'label' as some people see it as being 'abnormal'. The DSM-5 has 157 diagnoses of mental health disorders and as stated by the DSM-5, "DSM is intended to serve as a practical, functional, and flexible guide for organising information that can aid in the accurate diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders." (DSM-5, 2013, p.41). Without the help of the DSM-5 to diagnose mental health disorders, it would be quite difficult to get the right and accurate information for people who are suffering from a disorder. As well as the DSM 5 the ICD-10-CM stands for International Classification of Diseases, Tenth

Revision, Clinical Modification and is published by WHO and is very similar to the DSM 5 where clinicians used this book to identify diagnoses and symptoms in the US.

Referring back to diagnosing and there having positives and negatives of being diagnosed for different people one of the positives for someone who may be struggling with issues that they have no idea why and what is going on for them mentally, giving them the diagnosis of their issue makes this person accepted in society as without a diagnosis or label as some say society doesn't know how to react to these people accurately without having some sort of explanation, so by having a diagnosis for mental health disorder it doesn't just help the person suffering it also explains to society and helps them understand the person a lot more. This gives the patient "a mantle for his [sic] distress that society will accept" (Cassell, 1976)

As well as society understanding the personal issues, it also helps the person have comfort and reassurance of know what it is they are feeling after their diagnosis, they may feel a sense of community from seeing people go through the same as them and can support each other and now they can get access to services which will be beneficial to them.

However even though when someone is diagnosed with a mental health disorder society, yes do have an understanding of why someone may be acting a certain way due to their mental health disorder and it does have its positives however even when society knows this information there are some negatives. People start to treat these individuals differently and put a label on them or even put them into groups and outcasts of society just because of their diagnosis, "This can have a profound effect on their quality of life. For this reason, diagnostic labels should be used with caution, and do not indicate the severity of illness" (The Fundamental Facts, 2007). As well as the stigma of society it also has consequences on the person suffering from the illness and after the diagnosis, some start to play the sick role, they start to have a loss of personal meaning as this diagnosis takes over them, discrimination and they may experience social exclusion.

There are some cases people suffer from the diagnosis of their mental health for years after their diagnosis, some people live with their disorder for all their life, this isn't too do with it being untreatable it is related to patients not getting the treatment needed " in 2011, only 59.6% of individuals with a mental illness including such conditions as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder reported receiving treatment." (Corrigan et al., 2014), this shows that the other 40.4 per cent did not go and receive the treatment needed, which may end up with them living the rest of their lives struggling with their issues. There could be several reasons why these people have not gone and received treatment but in most cases, the reason is still the stigma that goes with having a mental health disorder, as well as other factors such as race and economic status, "The relationship between race and mental health service use is at least partly mediated by socioeconomic status, with some poor ethnic-minority groups at greatest risk for low rates of treatment (Alegria et al., 2002)."

Nevertheless, for those who do decide to receive treatment for their mental health disorders many different treatments are on offer, there is talking therapy which consists of many subcategories which the person can decide for themselves which therapy they feel will work best for them, as well as getting some advice after diagnosis of which one they could be best suited to but again it is all down to the client, here are just a few different therapies that are on offer, Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), Arts therapy, Emotion-focused therapy, EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing), Person-centred therapy, Play therapy, Gestalt and solution-focused therapy.

Most people who are struggling with their mental health it is thought that they will first go to their GP for help and support, however according to the mental health foundation

It is estimated that only about a quarter of people in Britain with a mental health problem receive ongoing treatment, either because they have not gone to the doctor at all, have been misdiagnosed by a GP, or have refused treatment. (Mental health foundation, 2007, p45)

For someone who is suffering from a mental health disorder some will self-referral their self for counselling, some will be on a waiting list but then pull out, some will go to the GP and prefer medication instead of talking therapy. Mostly if they were to go to their GP regarding their mental health issue the first protocol is not to refer the patient for counselling its more than likely that prescribed medication will be given out first, this is shown from the mental health foundation

According to an online survey by the Mental health foundation, of those visiting their GP with depression, 60% were prescribed anti-depressants, 42% were offered counselling and 2% were offered exercise therapy. (Mental health foundation, 2007, p50)

As shown above, regarding the 60% of people were prescribed antidepressants instead of counselling, is a big number considering only 42% were offered counselling this could be down to several reasons and one of them is that there is not enough mental health support for this growing number of people. However, people tend to be on these medications for numerous years and as shown by the BACP

An increasing body of evidence and expert opinion suggests that, in many cases, long-term use of psychiatric drugs not only exacerbates existing mental health conditions but may also trigger new ones. (BACP, 2017)

This could have a big impact on the person taking these medications but also it can affect the counselling sessions if these people were to attend counselling as well as antidepressants as there are some side effects and can make people act differently compared to normal. One of the side-effects that someone could experience is drowsiness and anxiety, someone who is coming for counselling experiencing these side effects is going to find it quite hard to concentrate and get the best out of their counselling, it can affect the therapeutic relationship which without this it is very difficult for the client to open up and trust their counsellor.

To conclude many issues are surrounding the diagnosis and classification of mental health illness, throughout this essay it has shown how diagnosing or labelling someone with a mental health disorder can have a surrounding of issues such as the stigma of the mental health disorder and society having a big impact and treating these people unfairly or on the other hand it was shown how by society knowing more about someone's diagnosis it enables them to understand more of what is going on for that person and show more of an understanding. It has also drawn attention to how more antidepressants are provided to people who are suffering compared to how much counselling is offered, this is an issue that leads to people then becoming reliant on the antidepressants and ended up on them for years which could then cause more underlying issues. So overall there is a balance of how diagnosing can be beneficial to the person suffering and the society around them but also it can harm the person quality of life and becoming an outcast.

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