

Commentary: What can be done about mental illness?

By **Tristan Jackson**

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Writer Tristan Jackson discusses mental illness, the effects it can carry and how many people don't get the help they really need

As a result of the most recent school shooting to make headlines at Parkland High School in Florida, the country has been left divided once again. The left wants better gun control laws, while the right is calling for better mental health services.

Personally, I don't understand the divide. Why not both? I think any rational person would agree that if both occurred, there would be less school shootings as a result.

In all honesty, I know nothing about guns, so I'll leave that argument for people who do. Mental health, on the other hand, is something I believe I'm well versed in.

Mental illness is a disease. You are ignorant if you think differently.

Mental illness can be cured, and in the cases that it can't, it can be well managed. You can seek therapy for mental illness, and in many instances people who experience mental illness can take medication to lighten the effects.

But in the same breath, just as it can be cured, it can kill. Suicide is the 10th highest cause of death in the U.S., with roughly 45,000 people taking their own life each year.

That sure sounds like a disease to me.

It doesn't stop at suicides either. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 43.8 million Americans suffer from mental illness in a given year. That's over 18-percent of the U.S. population.

In today's age, mental illness is an epidemic. And in my opinion, it is responsible with a lot more issues in our society than what people might realize.

The way I look at it, premeditated murder and rape are a result of something "off" in someone's brain. No one in a correct state of mind can commit these kinds of atrocities.

I do not want to excuse the people who do those things, as premeditated murder and rape are two of the most truly evil things a person can do. But, I think if mental health was properly treated, a lot of the issues we face in society would be reduced as a result -- including those.

We live in an imperfect world, where as nice as no murders, no rape, and no mental illness sounds, it's simply a pipe dream.

But we can do more to prevent it. If people think AR-15's are a problem, let's do something about it. I personally think mental illness is ignored too often because there is a stigma around it, created by the people who do not fully understand it.

Those who don't fully understand the effects often don't view mental illness as a legit-

imate concern, and feel as though people are able to just "get over" their issues.

Don't get me wrong; there are plenty of cases where kids, and even adults, use mental illness as a tool to seek attention, and don't really need treatment. But I feel as though the real cases are too important to ignore even the slightest signs a person may need help.

I've always had the same opinion on mental health. As someone who lives with family members who struggle with mental illness, I've seen the effects first hand.

However, parents who have never experienced it themselves usually do not know how to handle a child who may suffer from mental illness. Unfortunately, kids who suffer from mental illness often are not taken seriously.

Mental illness does not discriminate. Young or old. White or black. Rich or poor. Man or woman. It can affect anyone.

As prevalent as mental illness is, according to the Association for Psychological Sciences (APS) only 59.6-percent of people who are affected seek treatment. Of the 15 million children who are affected, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) only 7-percent of them receive the treatment they need.

Personally, I lost my dad when I was nine, and I couldn't imagine going through that without the counseling I received. But I think the help I received is a perfect exemplification of the problem.

No kid is taken seriously until something traumatic happens. It comes back to parents not knowing how to handle a kid with mental illness, or them simply not caring.

Mental health services are supposed to be covered under the Affordable Care Act, but a lack of mental health professionals has also made it difficult for people looking for help.

With all of that said, I don't have answers. I'm not a politician whose job is to figure out the world's problems, and I won't pretend I know how to fix this problem. All I know is that it would be beneficial to every person in this country if mental health services were more readily available and taken seriously.

I couldn't care less about politics -- my only interest is people being able to live happy and fulfilling lives.

We're a long way from where we need to be as a society when it comes to mental health services, but I hope one day every person who needs help will be able to get it. Everyone deserves to be happy.

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Mental Health Statistics

- Approximately 1-in-5 youth aged 13-18 (about 21.4-percent) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point during their life.
- In the U.S. 1-in-5 adults experience mental illness in a given year. (43.8 million people)
- Among the 20.2 million adults in the United States who experienced a substance use disorder, 50.5-percent, which is 10.2 million adults, had a co-occurring mental illness.
- About 6.9-percent of adults in the United States -- 16 million -- had at least one major depressive episode in the past year.

If you need help or need somebody to talk to, contact the number below:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-8255

Stigmas of mental illnesses

By Tomi Clark

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A school. A trigger of a gun. And the person behind the bullet. With mass shootings, the assumptions that are frequently associated with those who stand behind the trigger are typical:

1. Mental illness causes gun violence
2. The crime can be prevented with psychiatric diagnosis
3. The shooter is troubled, deranged and lonely

What is at the forefront of your mind when somebody mentions ‘school shooter’? Is it that the shooter is mentally disturbed and that is what drove them to burst?

Links between gun violence and mental illness have been the center of misconceptions, but labeling it as a misconception is only based on what you believe.

Abstractly, not only does mental stability come to mind when speaking of school shooters, but it brings to light other stereotypes and anxieties associated with gun violence.

More importantly, though, it brings up the ultimate question: Where is safe?

The stigmas of mental illness

The stigmas surrounding school shooters are only implications.

Do you picture someone who harbors telltale signs of loneliness, failing grades, a secret vendetta, a broken family, and a history of mental illness?

From what is broadcast on the news, people tend to develop bias prejudices toward the mentally ill, and profile them as mass murderers. Thus, they make generalizations on the spectrum of the argument at hand.

The presumption that all mentally ill have a burning passion to shoot up schools just because of their mental state is only an implication. What did the mentally ill do to incur the wrath of harsh judgment and cruel discriminations?

Frankly, anyone can be an anomaly who commits the crime.

The assumptions that link gun violence and mental illness stem from some place, but where? Any correlation between the mental illness and gun violence is a fallacy, because not everyone who is mentally ill is going to conduct a shooting.

Anyone, not only those labeled as “sick”, has the capability to gain access to a weapon (whether by legal or illegal means), walk onto a school campus, and begin shooting at random. But the stigmas perpetuate the direction that all mentally ill are belligerent, and are simply waiting in the shadows, ready to strike.

Mass shootings are a conundrum, and all society aspires to do is understand, and know how to prevent them. The first group of people in line to blame are those who have mental health issues, even if they do not act or show signs of erratic behavior.

The notions that proclaim mental illness as being the sole reason for any mass shooting, or that advanced psychiatric surveillance could prevent a shooting, is sensible because denouncing a substantial amount of the population on a topic as grand terror scale as this is unfair. And while the shooter may have personal turmoil or mental instability, throwing blame on an entire group of people is where the line is drawn.

No school is infallible and grand scale shootings are inevitable, but discriminating and associating murder mentality with all mentally ill is unjustifiable.

This is an extensive and imperative topic at hand, and in the end it’s in your hands to decide what you deem the reasons for mass shootings are.

Celebrities who have overcome their illnesses

Kid Cudi:

The singer and actor has six studio albums and has been featured in popular shows like *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Come-dy Bang! Bang!*. Cudi has also struggled with depression and suicidal urges, checking into rehab in October of 2016.



Lady Gaga: The singer and songwriter has five albums, including one platinum album. Gaga also suffers from PTSD, the result of a rape that occurred when she was 19.

Prince Harry:

The son of the late Princess Diana, and the grandson of Queen Elizabeth struggled with PTSD and depression after the death of his mother when he was 12 years old. The royal family member went through an intense mental break in his late 20s.



J.K. Rowling:

The famous author of the well-known series Harry Potter and her countless book awards, she had struggled with severe depression after her divorce. Following that, Rowling fell into a downward spiral of depression and suicidal urges.