

PERSONALITY DISORDERS

This is one of the most controversial psychiatric diagnoses. There are a number of categories of personality disorder that cover a range of attitudes and behaviour. The word 'personality' refers to the enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings and outward behaviour that are characteristic of an individual. Most people are flexible enough to be able to learn from past experiences and change their behaviour in order to cope more effectively. However, personality disorders are characterised by long lasting, inflexible and limited range of attitudes and behaviours which are expressed in a wide variety of settings and deviate from the expectations of that person's culture, causing distress to themselves and others. Having a personality disorder can make it difficult for sufferers to develop friendships, maintain stable partnerships and work co-operatively with others.

Personality disorders differ in the degree to which they disrupt the person's life or the lives of others and in the extent to which they can be treated. They often begin or become noticeable during adolescence or early adulthood. This inflexibility can be related to having suffered severe trauma in childhood. The sufferer should not be blamed for their condition.

Treatment

Personality disorders are difficult to treat because they involve long-term pervasive patterns of thoughts, feelings and ways of relating to people. More positive outcomes tend to be associated with personality disorders that are comparatively mild. However, research focussing on more severe personality disorders also suggests that over a period of years some people are capable of modifying and changing their outlook.