

Mental Health Month – May 2004
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Mental Health Matters in Your Life

May 2004 is designated Mental Health Month by the National Mental Health Association. This year, mental health professionals want even more people to know that caring for their minds as well as their bodies helps keep them productive, healthy and happy in all aspects of life: at work, at home and at school. So, we need to send our message louder than ever that **Mental Health Matters: In Your Life.**

Each year, more people suffer from mental health disorders, according to statistics, yet many people who struggle continue to go unreported and untreated. Perhaps seeking help for mental health is still stigmatized in people's mind and other factors, such as a decrease in the percentage of employers who offer insurance coverage for mental illnesses, also contribute to the chronicity of mental health disorders. Depression is a major public health problem that affects up to 6 million American men and 12 million American women annually. Eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating, affects 5-10 million women and girls and 1 million men and boys in America. And an estimated 2.5 million Americans have bipolar disorder, however, the actual number may be 2-3 times higher since as many as 80 percent of people with this illness go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

Additionally, in a town that is home to at least 5 college universities, Santa Barbara has a community of college students who may very well be suffering from depression, anxiety disorders or an eating disorder. In 2002, a study done at UCLA claimed that the number of freshman who report below average emotional health has been on the rise since 1985. Also, the suicide rate among males between the ages of 15 and 24 has nearly quadrupled over the last 60 years, and the rate among females in the same age group has doubled.

These are just a few of the startling statistics related to mental health concerns affecting our community today. As a mental health professional in Santa Barbara, I urge people who may suffer or know of people who suffer from debilitating mental health problems to seek professional help. The treatment success rates for such disorders as depression is more than 80 percent, 70-90 percent for panic disorders and 60 percent for schizophrenia. These success rates surpass those of other medical conditions, such as heart disease, which is 45-50 percent.

Several resources are available in Santa Barbara, including the local affiliate chapter of the National Mental Health Association.