



Question of the Month: Mental Illness Epidemic—Clinical Fact or Artifact

This article was taken from *Contexts* magazine, volume 5, no. 1, winter 2006.

“Do half of all Americans suffer from mental disorders at some point during their lives? Or do surveys misdiagnose the distress that is a normal part of everyday life?” These are the questions sociologists Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield set out to answer in their recent research. Below is an excerpt from their study.

“According to large, community-based research studies that the media report with great fanfare, alarming numbers of Americans suffer from mental disorders. The most frequently cited study, the National Comorbidity Survey, claims that half the population suffers from a mental illness at some point. Moreover, these same studies show that few people diagnosed as mentally ill seek professional treatment.

Policy discussions, scientific studies, media reports, advocacy documents, and pharmaceutical advertisements routinely cite such figures to show that mental disorder is a public health problem of vast proportions, that few sufferers receive appropriate professional treatment, that

untreated disorders incur huge economic costs, and that more people need to take medication or seek psychotherapy to overcome their suffering. Awareness of large numbers of untreated, mentally ill people in the community has reshaped mental health policy, justifying efforts to address this “unmet need for treatment”—for example, by training general practitioners or public school personnel to screen for and treat mental disorders.

Despite their rhetorical value, the high rates are a fiction; the studies establish no such thing. In fact, the extraordinarily high rates of untreated mental disorder reported by community studies are largely a product of survey methodologies that inherently overstate the number of people with a mental disorder. The inflated rates stem from standard questions about symptoms with no context provided that might distinguish the normal distress experienced in life from genuinely pathological conditions that indicate an underlying mental illness. Both get classified as signs of disorders. Moreover, because people experiencing normal reactions to stressful events are less likely than the truly disordered to seek medical attention, such questions are bound to inflate estimates of the rate of untreated disor-

ders...

...The exaggerated rates of mental disorder in community surveys do not mean that untreated psychiatric disorders are not a significant problem. Nor do they mean that people who experience normal distress may not sometimes benefit from drugs or psychological treatments. It does, however, contribute to a pervasive medicalization of many problems that we might view more constructively as expectable results of social circumstances.

Community surveys could more adequately separate normal responses to stressful situations from mental disorders by including questions about the context in which symptoms develop and persist. Interviewers could ask, for example, if symptoms of depression emerged during periods of intense stress and disappeared as soon as these crises were over. The decision not to include contextual criteria in community surveys may involve not only the efficiency and practicality of decontextualized, standardized methods but also resistance to change by groups that benefit from the reported high rates of mental illnesses.”

Read the full article at http://www.contextsmagazine.org/pdfs/06CTX0501_019-023.pdf

Upcoming Events

International Education Week	Nov. 12-16
Thanksgiving Break	Nov. 21-25
Last Day of Classes	December 5
Final Exams	December 7-15th

Quote of the Month:

“Social movements are at once the symptoms and the instruments of progress. Ignore them and statesmanship is irrelevant ; fail to use them and it is weak.”

Course Offerings in Sociology for Spring 2008

The spring schedule is set and you'll want to be sure to check out all the course offerings available in sociology.

SOC 230: Principles of Sociology

MWF 12-12:50pm Dr. Lori Brown

It's back for another semester — the sociology course that uses Harry Potter to understand sociological concepts and ideas.

SOC 260: Cultural Anthropology

MW 3:30-4:50pm Dr. Julie Flowerday

Understanding the power of culture in shaping our lives depends upon knowing the ways of life displayed around the world. This course introduces students to the discoveries of anthropologists as they have lived among preliterate and preindustrial people, and as they apply their signature methodologies to culturally distinctive communities in today's world. Comparing how a range of cultures address the challenges of social existence sets the stage for enlightening dialogue. Dr. Flowerday is an anthropologist from UNC-Chapel Hill with field experience in Pakistan.

SOC 280: Applied Sociology

TTH 11-12:20pm Dr. Lori Brown

This course is an introduction to the application of sociology to a range of 'real life' problems and issues so that students gain an understanding of how to practice sociology in all future careers or occupations. The sociological perspective is applied in a way that is grounded in community based education/service learning. Students will participate in class exercises and organized community focused activities that meet identi-

fied community needs and then reflect on these in such a way as to gain a broader appreciation of the discipline of sociology and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

SOC 340: Aging & Retirement

MW 2-3:20pm Dr. Carrie Cokely

As the elderly population increases, what challenges do these individuals face and what impact do they have on our society? Students in this course will examine the physical, psychological, and sociological dimensions of the aging process in order to gain insight on these questions. Topics include retirement, poverty and old age, Social Security and Medicare debates, long term care and end of life decisions, and comparisons between the United States and other industrialized countries around the world.

SOC 337: Corrections

TTh 9:30-10:50am Dr. Maria Febbo-Hunt

Got time? Spend it studying corrections! As the old adage goes, "Don't do the crime, if you can't do the time". This statement is reflective of a society's views on punishment. In this course, we will spend time examining the conflicting philosophies of punishment and the practices used to "correct" deviant, delinquent, and criminal behavior throughout America's history. We will also dedicate the semester to examining the corrections components of the criminal justice system, police, attorneys, judges, parole boards, and probation officers, and the role each plays in shaping the "time" and the place (jails, prisons, community corrections, and aftercare programs) in

which convicted offenders "do their time".

SOC 420: Gender & Society

TTH 2-3:20pm Dr. Carrie Cokely

What does sex have to do with gender? What does gender have to do with social systems? This course explores these questions by looking at the ways in which sociologists have theorized and written about gender. Students will explore what it means to understand gender as a social and cultural construct as well as the impact that these constructions have on the lived experiences of individuals in society.

SOC 441: Selected Topics—Juvenile Delinquency

MWF 11-11:50am Dr. Maria Febbo-Hunt

Juvenile delinquency and 108 years of juvenile justice. Did you know that at one time, juveniles were treated no differently than adults under the law? I was not until the 1899 that a separate system of justice was created to handle juveniles. Today, there is a trend towards treating juvenile offenders (who commit more serious crimes) as adults. Have we come full circle? Is there still a need for a system of juvenile justice? This is one of the many topics we will cover this semester. What is delinquency? This course will expose students to the nature and extent of juvenile delinquency, giving students a clearer grasp of the importance of the historical, political, and social contexts in which juvenile delinquency is defined, committed, and sanctioned. We will discuss the major theories and examine the current research on juvenile delinquency to address these questions.

Volunteers and Donations Needed for Special Populations Dance

This message is from Sociology minor, Jessica Caro, who is chairing the Special Populations Dance this year.

Every year the Psychology Club hosts the Special Populations Dance for individuals with both physical and mental disabilities. This event is something that our guests look forward to every year. We ask that Meredith students attend the dance to mix and mingle with the guests. We also ask that Meredith students bring their male friends with them so that our female guests have men to dance with as well. The dance will be held November

17th from 7:00-10:00 p.m. The theme this year is a 50's Sock Hop, so dress accordingly.

In addition, to donations of refreshments, disposable cameras, and money that will be accepted up until the day of the dance, we also need donations of time in helping to set up, staff the refreshment tables, and clean up.

For those who plan to attend the dance, it is important that you come to the next Psychology meeting. It will be all about the dance and we will

discuss what to expect at the dance and how to handle certain situations that you may feel uncomfortable in. The date of this meeting is tentatively set for Tuesday, November 13 at 6:00 p.m. in Ledford 101. Keep your eye on Enews, as this date and time may change.

Please come join us in our night of fun and revelry, you won't regret it! This event qualifies as a convocation/cultural event in general education. Full participation and "Personal-Academic-Civic" write up required. *Funding received from SAF.*