

- (iii) environmental factors;
- (iv) physical injuries (e.g. a brain injury);
- (v) the abuse of substances such as drugs or alcohol;
- (vi) early life experiences (e.g. abuse or neglect); and
- (vii) social factors.

Environmental factors include severe or prolonged psychological trauma, such as:

- (i) exposure to war, famine or incidents of violence; or
- (ii) the experience of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.

Social factors include interactions and relationships with others in both personal and work lives. Strong support networks (i.e. close, supportive family, friends and co-workers) protect people from the impact of stressors. Hostile, unsupportive social environments (characterized by bullying, violence, harassment, and rejection) can result in high levels of distress and the development of mental illness.

1.8 How is a diagnosis of mental illness made?

For a diagnosis of an illness to be made, a certain number of symptoms, from a longer list of possible symptoms, must be present. This means that not every person diagnosed with a particular mental illness will have exactly the same symptoms as others diagnosed with the same illness. An important implication for workplace accommodation is that that two people with the same diagnosis may not have the same functional limitations, and therefore may need different accommodations.

Example: Persistent sadness is one of the symptoms of depression. However, in order for a diagnosis of depression to be made, a number of other symptoms (such as loss of pleasure, sleep disruption, or decrease in self-esteem) must also be present for a minimum of two weeks.

Professionals with training in mental health and skills in diagnosis (e.g. physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists) are in the best position to determine if a person has a mental illness. In diagnosing mental illness, health professionals in Canada and the U.S. use the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which is the diagnostic tool published by the American Psychiatric Association. The most recent version of the DSM, published in 2013, is the Fifth Edition and is often referred to as “DSM-5.”⁹ For each disorder, the DSM-5 lists all of the criteria which must be met in order to make a diagnosis of a mental illness.

Diagnosing a mental illness is complex and time-consuming. It usually requires documenting a complete history (sometimes from other people as well as the patient), performing a mental state examination, and carefully observing a person’s behaviour during the interview. Two other issues make the process of diagnosis more challenging. First, although the accuracy and reliability of diagnosis is high, it is not 100 percent. Second, because there is overlap in symptomatology between different diagnoses, it can take more than one assessment to develop a conclusive diagnosis. For example, the symptoms of psychosis may be quite evident in one interview, but the precise nature of the underlying disorder may take weeks or even months to determine.

1.9 What expertise do different mental health professionals have (e.g. psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, employee assistant program counsellors)?

Physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists have training and expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. Treatment may be provided by any of these professionals, as well as by social workers and EAP counsellors. Treatments for mental illnesses may include medications (which can be prescribed only by physicians, including psychiatrists) and psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which may be carried out by a range of professionals – including

9 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).