

MENTAL HEALTH:
MYTHS & MISINFORMATION

by Karlie Intlekofer, Ph.D.

For those who suffer from mental health issues, myths and misinformation are often barriers to seeking professional help. As a fitness professional, you can reach out to those who suffer in silence within the walls of your own facility — but only if you know what's fact and what's fiction when it comes to mental health.

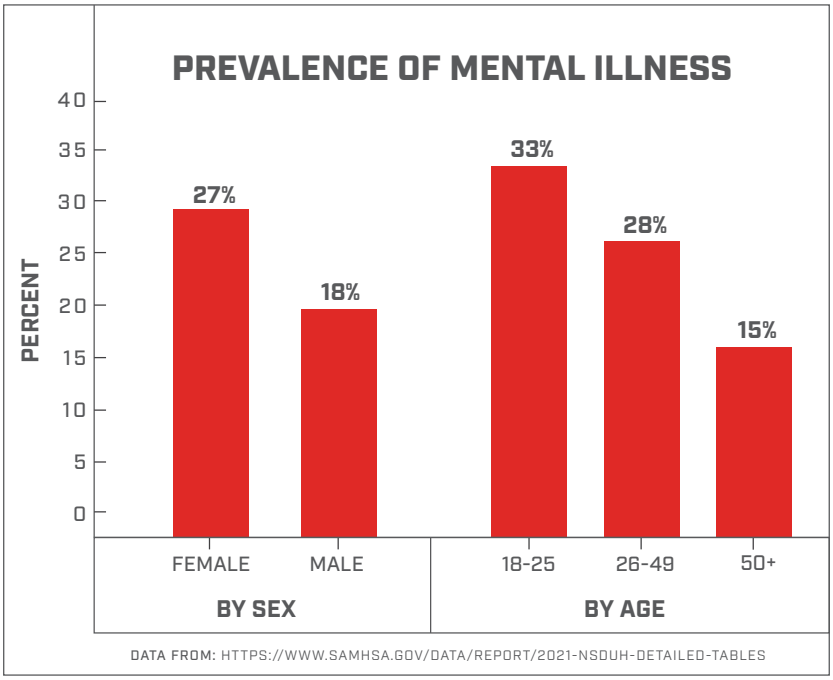
MYTH: Mental issues are rare and only affects a small number of people.

FACT: Many are reluctant to share their experience with others. About one in four (23%) American adults experiences mental health issues in any given year. Worldwide, small, persistent increases in mental health issues have been recorded since the 1970s.

MYTH: Mental health issues occur due to a lack of effort or willpower.

FACT: Mental health issues are not personal failings. Instead, these are legitimate medical conditions that require proper treatment and support.

Many mental health issues involve a loss of motivation and increased daily fatigue. Yet people with mental health issues often exert high amounts of effort simply to get through their day. The misconception that effort is lacking is no more valid than expecting a person to run after a broken leg. Blaming individuals can be harmful and may discourage them from disclosing symptoms or seeking help.





MYTH: Mental health issues are a form of attention-seeking behavior.

FACT: The decision to share one's experience with mental health is deeply personal. When someone is struggling, delays in seeking help stem from fear that their concerns will be invalidated by others. Instead of viewing disclosure as attention-seeking behavior, strive for empathetic understanding. As a fitness professional, this will help you provide social support to those in need.

MYTH: Only weak people need therapy or medication to manage mental health issues.

FACT: Fear of appearing weak has a significant impact on athletes and men in particular. This can prevent them from getting professional help. For example, most veterans (57%) with common mental disorders in the United Kingdom fear "being seen as weak" if they disclose their suffering to others, and most never get treatment. For similar reasons, young athletes are less likely than non-athletes to seek mental health support, even though they often have higher instances of mental health issues.

Help Spread the Truth

Just like any other health condition, people suffering from mental health issues can benefit from professional treatment. You can encourage the people in your facility get the guidance they need by opening the conversation and letting them know that it takes courage and strength to ask for help. By normalizing help-seeking behavior in your fitness facility, you can reduce the harmful stereotypes that hold people back.



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