



Mental Health America Attitudinal Survey June 2007

Part IV: Understanding of and Attitudes
Towards Mental Illness

Executive Summary

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Mental Health America (formerly known as the National Mental Health Association) is the country’s leading nonprofit dedicated to helping all people live mentally healthier lives. With our more than 320 affiliates nationwide, we represent a growing movement of Americans who promote mental wellness for the health and well-being of the nation.

About the Survey

The “Mental Health America Attitudinal Survey” was conducted by International Communications Research, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone and the Internet from October 10 to November 1, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 3,040 respondents age 18 and older. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 1.75%.

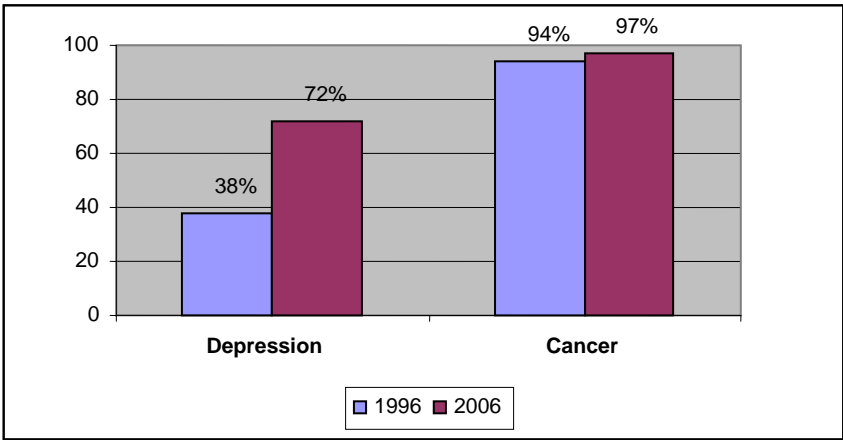
“Part IV: Understanding of and Attitudes Towards Mental Illness” is the fourth in a series of releases from the Mental Health America Attitudinal Survey. Previous releases focused on Americans’ stress and coping, holiday pressures and equality in mental health insurance coverage.

Note about the Survey

“Understanding of and Attitudes Towards Mental Illness” was designed to compare against a 1996 Mental Health America survey, “American Attitudes About Clinical Depression and Its Treatment” and set new benchmarks. Comparison of public attitudes over the 10-year period between surveys shows continuing progress in Americans’ understanding and acceptance of mental health and other behavioral health issues. Most notably, more Americans see depression as a health problem rather than a personal weakness.

However, public acceptance of depression and, especially other mental health issues (i.e., bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcohol and drug abuse and suicide) still lag behind that of other health issues, such as diabetes and cancer.

Comparison at a glance:



In 1996, a Mental Health America survey showed that only 38 percent of Americans viewed depression as a health problem versus a sign of a personal weakness. Meanwhile, 94% saw cancer as a health problem. Ten years later in this survey, nearly three-quarters of respondents know that depression is a real health problem (72%), and 97% see cancer as a health problem. This represents an 89% improvement.

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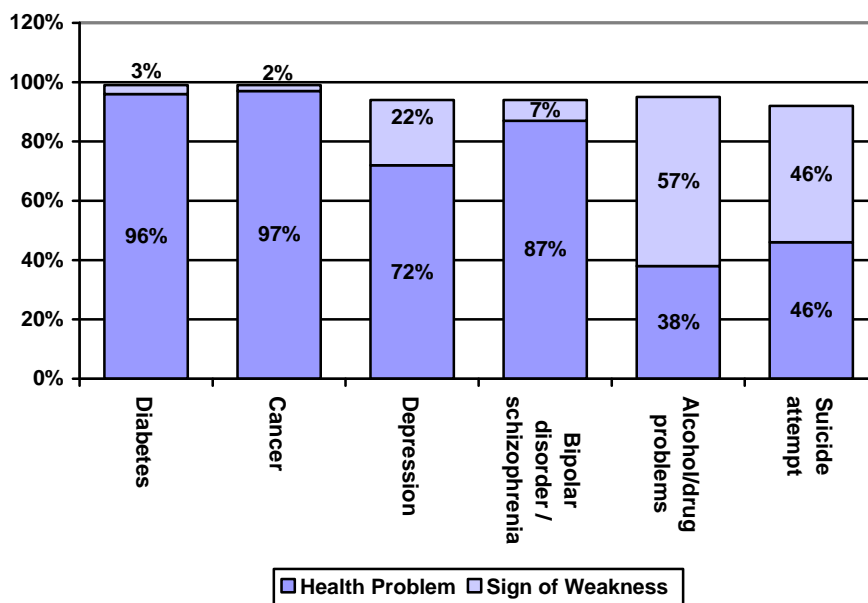
This summary provides details on survey respondents' knowledge, perceptions, comfort levels and behaviors.

PERCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE OF HEALTH PROBLEMS

Mental Health Problems: Emotional Weakness or Health Conditions

The following table captures Americans' perceptions of mental health-related conditions versus other health conditions.

Which of the following do you think of as health problems, and which do you think of as signs of personal or emotional weakness?



Overall, the behavioral health conditions most thought to be a sign of weakness were alcohol or drug problems (57%) and suicide attempts (46%).

Nearly a quarter of Americans see depression as a sign of weakness (22%), followed by bipolar disorder and schizophrenia (7%).

97% and 96% percent of Americans view cancer and diabetes, respectively, as health problems – not weaknesses.

Knowledge of Mental Health Issues

Overall, 64% of Americans have a good understanding of mental health issues including such topics as children’s mental health, prevalence of mental illnesses, behavior of people with mental illnesses and suicide.

Eight-nine percent correctly believe that people with mental illnesses can be productive members of society, and 79% correctly believe that most people with mental illnesses are not violent.

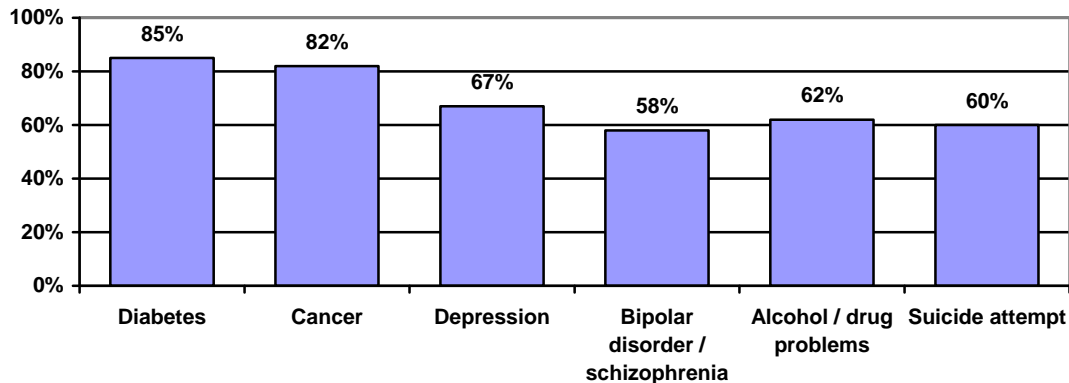
Unfortunately, most Americans greatly underestimate the occurrence of suicide: 63% of Americans believe homicides vastly outnumber suicides. In fact, suicide deaths (over 30,000 each year) consistently outnumber deaths attributable to homicide (18,000) by a ratio of three to two – with most suicides attributable to untreated depression.

COMFORT LEVELS

The following tables show the percentages in total, related to how comfortable survey respondents felt about sharing experiences related to the stated conditions.

Sharing Personal Health Conditions with Friends and Co-Workers

If you or someone close to you experienced (INSERT) would you feel comfortable sharing this with friends or co-workers?



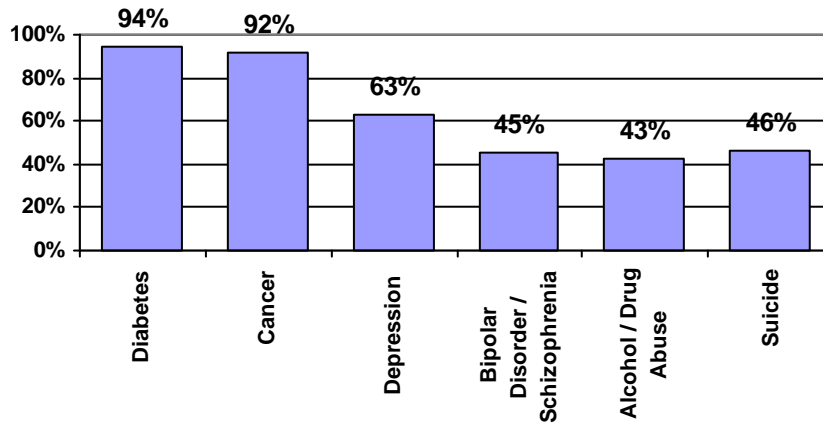
If Americans were to experience one of the health problems above, they would feel less comfortable sharing experiences mental health-related issues than other health issues.

Over two-thirds of respondents (67%) would feel comfortable sharing experiences with depression, though fewer would feel comfortable sharing experiences with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (58%), alcohol or drug problems (62%) or a suicide attempt (60%). Eighty-five percent of respondents would feel comfortable sharing the fact that they experience diabetes with friends or co-workers, and 82% were comfortable discussing cancer.

Interacting with People Receiving Treatment for Health Conditions

The survey queried Americans’ comfort interacting with people receiving treatment for mental illnesses, as well as cancer and diabetes through a number of different relationships (e.g., friend, neighbor, co-worker, significant other, teacher of school-aged children, elected official). In general, respondents had a higher comfort score with diabetes and cancer than for mental health issues.

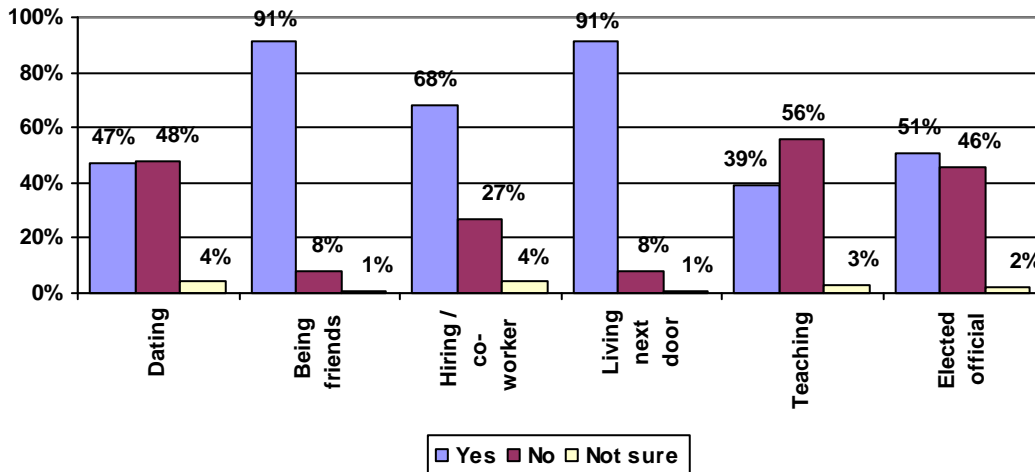
For people who are receiving treatment for (INSERT), would you be comfortable interacting with them?



While 94% and 92% feel comfortable interacting with someone with diabetes and cancer respectively, 63% felt the same way about someone with depression, 45% for someone with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, 43% for alcohol or drug abuse and 46% for suicide.

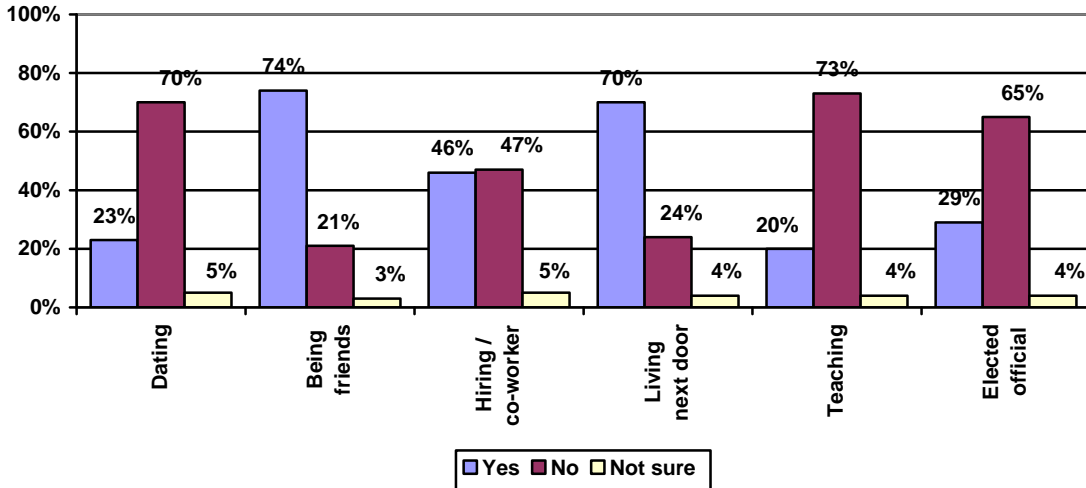
Relationships – Depression

For people who are receiving treatment for DEPRESSION, would you be comfortable (INSERT)?



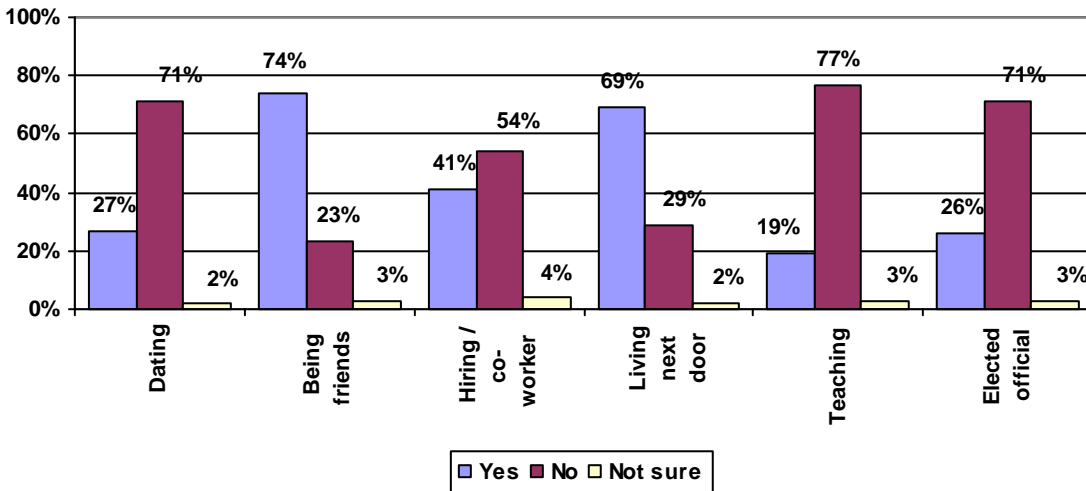
Relationships – Bipolar disorder or schizophrenia

For people who are receiving treatment for bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, would you be comfortable (INSERT)?



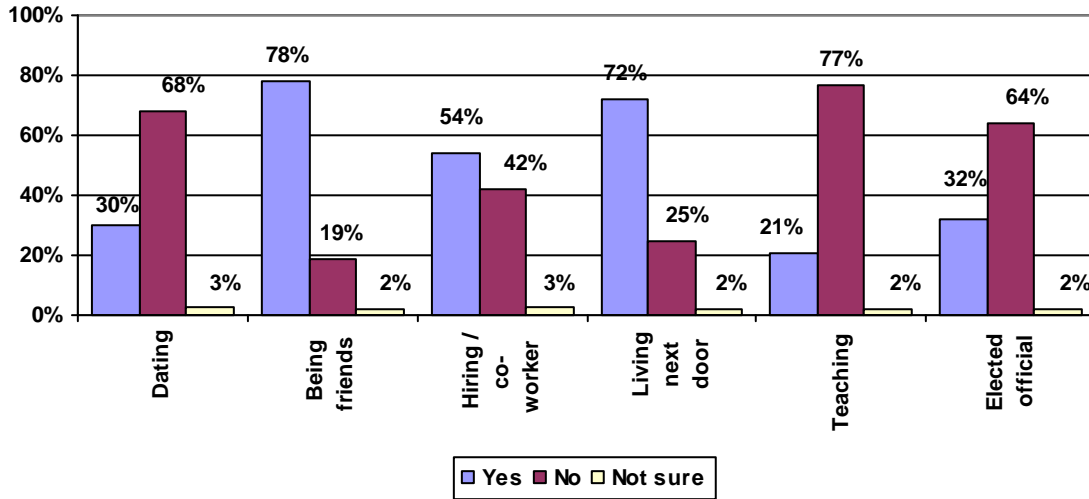
Relationships – Alcohol or Drug Problems

For people who are receiving treatment for alcohol or drug problems, would you be comfortable (INSERT)?



Relationships – Suicide Attempt

For people who are receiving treatment for suicide attempt, would you be comfortable (INSERT)?



OPTIMISM: PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES VS GENERAL PUBLIC

Individuals who have personally experienced a mental health condition are significantly less hopeful or optimistic than those without such experience. This is most prevalent about their own future. They also worry about aging healthily.

Hopefulness by having experience with mental illness

While most Americans are highly optimistic, individuals who have personally experienced a mental health condition are much less hopeful or optimistic.

