

Facts about children with serious emotional disturbances (SED) and their families

Seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) is the description given to children who exhibit emotional, behavioral or mental disorders as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Act, including the following characteristics over a long period of time:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors.
- An inability to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

1 in 5 families with children with severe mental illnesses are forced to give up their children because they can't afford to pay for much-needed treatments and services.

1 in 3 parents responding to a survey by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill **said their children were in the juvenile justice system** because mental services were unavailable.

7.5 million children, or more than 12 percent of all children **under age 18, have mental disorders**, nearly half of which lead to serious disability.

13-15 percent of families responding to the survey said their **children were sexually or physically abused during stays in hospitals, residential treatment centers or jails.**

56 percent of parents said their **children's primary care physician did not recognize the child's serious mental illness.**

Nearly 50 percent of survey respondents feel shunned by neighbors and friends because of their children's illness.

50 percent of survey respondents said they were **blamed for their children's conditions.**

In 55 percent of families, one of the parents had to change jobs or quit to become their child's fulltime caretaker.

59 percent of parents feel pushed to the breaking point.

70 percent of parents reported that their **marriages had been severely stressed** by the experience of caring for a mentally ill child.

80 percent of families reported that **siblings were negatively affected** by a sibling's mental illness.

From a study for NAMI conducted by the Commonwealth Institute for Child and Family Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, "Families on the Brink: The Impact of Ignoring Children with Serious Mental Illness.

<http://www.nami.org/pressroom/990701.html> .