

# ABSTRACT

Perhaps you or someone you know has struggled—or is currently struggling—with a mental health disorder. If this is the case, you are not alone...

Despite considerable advances in medical care, along with heightened public awareness of the topic, issues involving stigma, prejudice, and discrimination continue to exist as one of the main contributors to America's mental health crisis.

## EDUCATION IS KEY

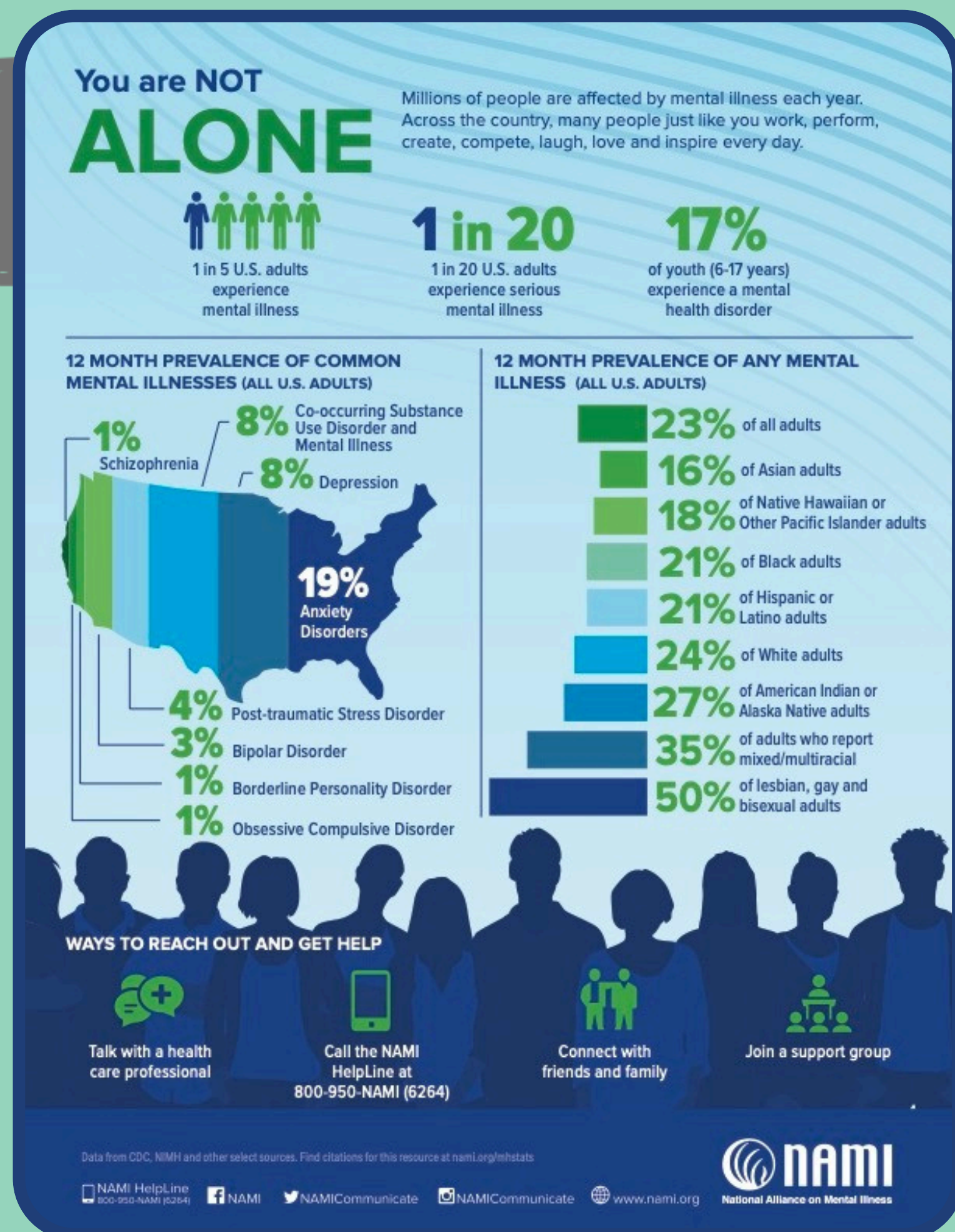


# AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Directly or indirectly, both internally and externally, and with no regard to demographics, mental illness (and the stigma that surrounds it) can affect virtually everyone. With respect to research intentions, however, I chose Oregon State Hospital (OSH) as my target audience.

OSH is a state-funded and -operated facility that strives to inspire hope, promote safety, and support rehabilitation—ultimately helping patients recover from their illnesses and return to their communities.

Regarding possible solutions to the problem at hand, I believe that OSH could serve as an "educational platform," so to speak—a means through which more accurate information may be shared (and spread).



# THE PROBLEM

Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination can be subtle or obvious, but no matter the magnitude, they can lead to harm.



LACK OF UNDERSTANDING → NEGATIVE ATTITUDES ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

## THE EFFECTS

For those with mental illnesses, stigma can contribute to:

- Lower self-esteem
- Worsening symptoms
- Reluctance to seek help
- Reduced likelihood of staying with treatment

Other harmful effects include social isolation and difficulties with relationships—mostly due to the lack of understanding by family, friends, coworkers, and others. Stigma may also lead to fewer opportunities for work, school, or social activities, or trouble finding housing.

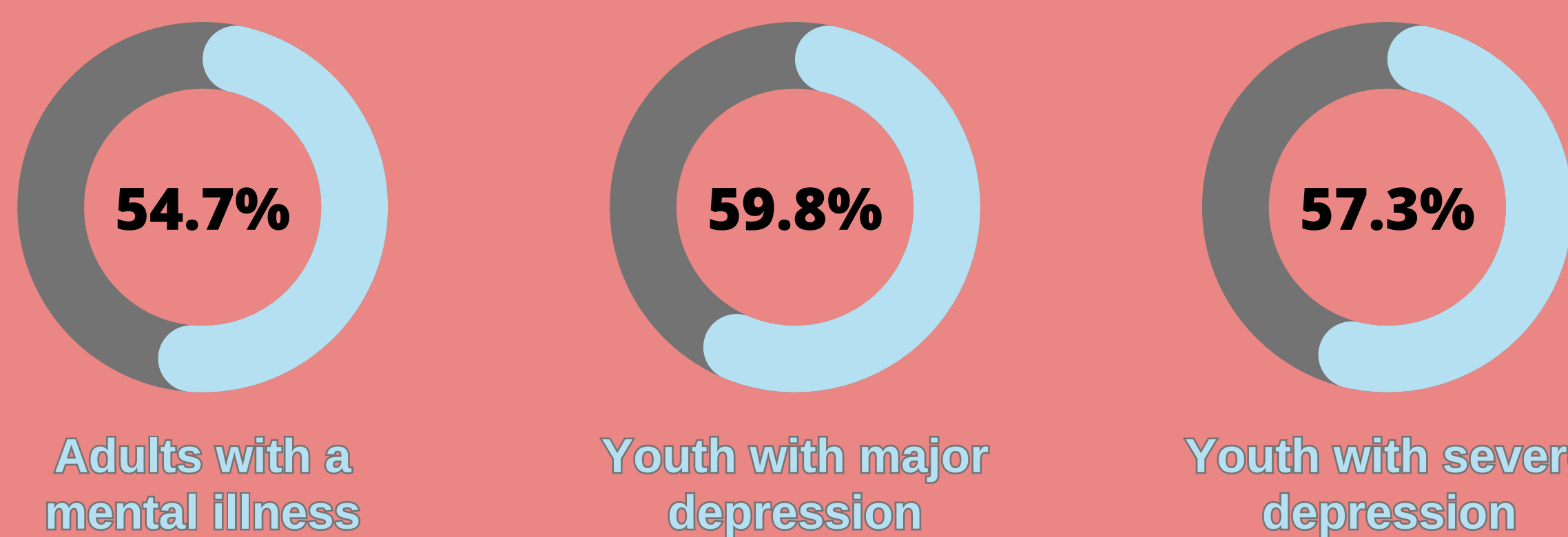
Stigma can show itself in the form of bullying, physical violence, or harassment. It can also be woven into the workings of the healthcare system (e.g., health insurance that does not adequately cover the necessary treatments for those with mental illnesses).

Finally, it can create the negative belief—especially for those already suffering—that success is impossible, that their situation cannot be improved.

For some, the problems are debilitating, severely impairing their ability to navigate life's various situations—at home, at work, in relationships, and in solitude—and leaving little hope for relief.

And what's more...

## OVER HALF OF THOSE SUFFERING DO NOT RECEIVE HELP FOR THEIR DISORDERS



Since the turn of the millennium, suicide rates have increased by more than 50% among America's youth.

In 2021, at least 7,000 people between the ages of 10 and 24 died by suicide—and millions more considered, planned, or attempted it—making it one of the year's top three leading causes of death for this age group.

# ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

My minor in mass communication served as advantageous in that it provided valuable tools for better understanding the "public" aspect of this issue—effective research strategies, comprehensive knowledge of public relations and the media's role in society, and methods for approaching communication barriers.

In regards to my target audience, it was important to focus on mass communication concepts more specifically related to attitudes—how different opinions and feelings about mental illness are influenced, motivated, and changed.

**COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY**  
(thoughts vs. actions)

**SOCIAL JUDGMENT THEORY**  
(latitudes of acceptance)

## EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP

- Brings attention to the problem and encourages others to reevaluate, reconsider, and react
- Highlights the important facts and statistics on mental illness in general, as well as the harmful effects of stigmas and the various suggestions for improvement
- Provides a means through which others may gain a clearer understanding of the topic, and thus, build a truthful foundation on which to base their judgments



While there may never be a cure for mental illness itself, there is plenty of room for positive change—especially in how it is viewed and managed.

People with mental illness are marginalized and discriminated against in various ways, but understanding what that looks like (and how to address and eradicate it) can make a difference. Even the smallest efforts can be effective in helping to close some of these gaps—and, when built upon, can alter the ripple affect altogether.

Ultimately, by dispelling common myths and misconceptions, arming more people with the appropriate knowledge, and encouraging compassionate responses, the mental health stigmas that prevent so many individuals from speaking up and getting help may finally begin to crumble...