



10 October 2014 - Imagine your body is full of buttons, and some of those buttons result in schizophrenia if somebody comes and presses them enough times, and in the right sequences.

That is one way of describing the causes of schizophrenia, a complex and poorly understood group of mental disorders, affecting more than 21 million people worldwide. Nobody has been able to pinpoint one single cause for schizophrenia, and stigma around the illness remains widespread.

Do you believe schizophrenia is about people with multiple personalities? If the answer is yes, you may indeed be in a broad majority, but that doesn't mean the answer is correct. This is one reason why the [World Mental Health Day](#) observed on 10 October every year, wants to assert the facts and dispel myths.

Schizophrenia is not a 'split personality' - it's the [perception](#) of the world that splits in the mind of a schizophrenic. Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that affects the way a person acts, thinks, and sees the world. But misinformation and lack of knowledge about the illness has led to a lack of understanding around it, meaning many suffering do not seek the support they need.

Today, however, researchers are slowly making progress towards understanding the causes of the illness, improving treatment and finding cures. Experts believe several factors are generally involved in contributing to the onset of schizophrenia – hence the comparison to cracking a code of a sequence of buttons.

In the past it was difficult to find physical evidence of neuronal damage in people with schizophrenia, and the cause of the disease was often attributed to patients' environment and psychology. The problem was seen as the mind, rather than the brain. And in many parts of the world, a person suffering from schizophrenia was – and still is - easily labelled as possessed or cursed, and is often shunned by the community. 90 % of people with untreated schizophrenia live in the developing world.

“People with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia also die on average between 10 and 25 years earlier than the general population”, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in his message. “Yet that can change. Schizophrenia is treatable. It does not have to mean a life sentence of isolation and poor physical health. Appropriate mental and physical health care, along with regular monitoring and psychological and social support can make a profound difference. So, too, can the recognition by society at large that people with schizophrenia and other severe mental disorders have equal rights and deserve understanding and assistance.”

Related links:

WHO: [Living with schizophrenia](#)