

Researchers examine schizophrenia coping strategies for individuals with high-level careers

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New research shows that people who have schizophrenia can still live independently, pursue higher education or hold down a demanding job – and many do just that, living full and productive lives.

"These findings will be useful for creating new interventions to help a wide range of individuals with [schizophrenia](#) cope with symptoms," said John Brekke, the Frances G. Larson Professor of Social Work Research at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work.

Brekke co-authored the first-of-its-kind study published in *Psychiatric Services*, which examined [coping strategies](#) for people with schizophrenia who are managing high-level careers.

Researchers at USC and at UCLA's David Geffen School of Medicine conducted up to three interviews each with 10 men and 10 women with schizophrenia from the Los Angeles area. All of them continued to have some psychotic symptoms even as they were employed in professional, technical or managerial occupations.

Numerous strategies

Findings indicated the interviewees had adopted numerous coping strategies to prevent and deal with symptoms, including avoiding stressful situations, staying away from alcohol and drugs, and taking their prescribed medications. Those interviewed also said they try to interact with people who are supportive and non-judgmental, and that they use various strategies to help them reason through problematic thoughts and whether those thoughts are based in reality.

They also mentioned spirituality, exercise and diet as ways they prevent or deal with psychiatric instability, said UCLA research psychologist Amy Cohen, the study's first author.

Some individuals reported that calm, soothing places help them cope; others said they preferred to seek out more activity. Some said jobs and educational activities could be distracting, but others said school or career help by providing a sense of belonging.

Daily difficulties

Even with the various coping strategies they employ, about half of those surveyed reported having difficulty managing their daily lives, not having felt close to another person within the prior week and experiencing recent hallucinations or delusions—all characteristic of the disorder.

Prior studies have shown that half to two-thirds of people with schizophrenia will significantly improve or fully recover, enabling them to live fulfilling and productive lives.

"There is a widespread misunderstanding that individuals with schizophrenia are violent and dangerous, often homeless, and beyond help," Cohen said.

More information: Amy N. Cohen et al. How Occupationally High-Achieving Individuals With a Diagnosis of Schizophrenia Manage Their Symptoms, *Psychiatric Services* (2016). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ps.201600031](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201600031)

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