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Hearing Voices: training and simulated experience

Denise Beagley, M.Sc.
Training and Curricula Development Program Manager
ASU Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy
denise.beagley@asu.edu

"As a nation, it is up to all of us to know the signs of mental health issues and lend a hand to those who are struggling. . .

Shame and stigma too often leave people feeling like there is no place to turn. We need to make sure they know that asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it is a sign of strength."
Studies have found that between 4% and 10% of people across the world hear voices

part I: hearing voices
Voices can be male, female, without gender, child, adult, human or non-human

What are voices and who hears them?
- Hearing voices is often thought of as a symptom of a serious mental illness
- Research on the experiences of the general population shows that lots of people hear voices, and the majority of them are not mentally unwell
- It is a common human experience
Different Experiences

- People can experience unkind and threatening voices
- Voices can tell people to do dangerous or unacceptable things or try to control them
- People may hear a kind supportive voice
- Sometimes there may be more than one voice and they may talk or argue with each other
- People may believe that they are hearing other people's thoughts
- The voices may be louder or more frequent if they are feeling stressed
- They may hear or see things as they are falling asleep
- They may experience the voices as being in their head, or they may feel that they are coming from outside and heard through their ears like other sounds

However, there are clearly voice hearing experiences that can be very distressing and can disrupt our lives and ability to work, make friends, reach our personal goals...
strange or grandiose ideas
Inability to cope with problems and daily activities

Excessive anger, hostility, or violent behavior
Marked personalities changes
Excessive anxieties

Marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns

warning signs for mental illness
Thinking or talking about suicide or harming oneself
prolonged depression and apathy
abuse of alcohol or drugs

This foray into the uncanny is as close as most people come to experiencing auditory hallucinations or hearing voices, a condition that affects 70% of people diagnosed with schizophrenia and 15% of people diagnosed with mood disorders - such as mania or depression
Voices can be experienced in the head, in the ears, outside the head, in some other part of the body, or in the environment...

Possible Voices

- You did a bad job!
- You are a bad person!
- Overtime, you begin to have difficulty discerning between the statements
- You stink!
- You’re ugly!
- You should hurt yourself!
- You are smart!
Voices often reflect important aspects of the hearer's emotional state – emotions that are often unexpressed by the hearer.
part IV: path to wellness
delusions and hallucinations

- recognize and acknowledge that their delusions or hallucinations are real to them
  - don’t tell them there is no one there
  - don’t tell them you see or hear something that you don’t
- ask what the voices are saying to get an idea of what the person is going through and messages they are hearing
- realize that they may be overwhelmed

What can you do to help?

- undivided attention
- summarize/paraphrase/restate
- non-judgmental
- silence
- listen for real message
- empathic listening
- avoid becoming a precipitating factor
- don’t take it personally
- be proactive
Resources

- Intervoice: The International community for hearing voices
  www.Intervoiceonline.org

- New USA hearing voices network: Support groups for voice hearers and also trainings for leaders of support groups. www.hearingvoicesusa.org

- Hearing Voices Network, Manchester, UK (has links to other hearing voices networks and online groups): www.hearingvoices.org

- Voice-Hearers Support Group: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/voicehearers

- Hearing Voices Movement:
  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hearing_Voices_Movement


- National Alliance of Mentally Ill: http://NAMI.org

contact info

denise.beagley@asu.edu