

WHAT IS SCHIZOAFFECTIVE DISORDER?

Affecting about 3 million Americans, schizoaffective disorder has features that resemble both schizophrenia (psychosis) and also serious mood (affective) symptoms. People who experience more than two weeks of psychotic symptoms in the absence of severe mood disturbances—and then have symptoms of either depression or bipolar disorder—may have schizoaffective disorder.

COMMON SYMPTOMS :

MANIA AND DEPRESSION (see opposite page)

PSYCHOSIS, defined as the loss of contact with reality, usually involves:
Delusions or the belief in things not real or true • Hallucinations are hearing or seeing things that are not real • Disorganized speech expressed as an inability to generate a logical sequence of ideas • *Check out NAMI Minnesota's guide to understanding psychosis! www.namihelps.org/NamiUnderstandingPsychosisBooklet.pdf*

Source: nami.org

MARIA'S STORY

Peer Specialist Coordinator, Attorney

MY MILITARY CAREER ended when I was kicked out of the army for being gay. At the time, my mania and depression were no longer manageable or useful. I became edgy and neurotic at full blown manic and non-functional and sullen at full blown depression. My world began to fall apart and my delusions started to take a paranoid bend. I became afraid that everyone knew what a failure I was and would see me as the horrible and rotten human being I really was. I drank and drugged to hide from these fears but then would live with the guilt of my boozing and drugging behavior.

Finally, I reached out for help and found a psychiatrist who would treat me even though I was still drinking. Although the medication he prescribed had the paradoxical effect of causing voices, they did stabilize my moods. I also began talk therapy to learn to manage my PTSD and addiction issues. At age 30, I finished my law degree and at 32, began my path to sobriety. At age 43, I finally found the correct medication that would deal with my delusions and mood swings without causing voices.

Now at 12 years of sobriety and over 20 years of mental health recovery, I finally feel that I have reached a point of strong recovery. I have dedicated my life for the last fourteen years to working with individuals who are in their darkest days of mental illness and helping them find their path to recovery. No other work could be more rewarding or fulfilling.