

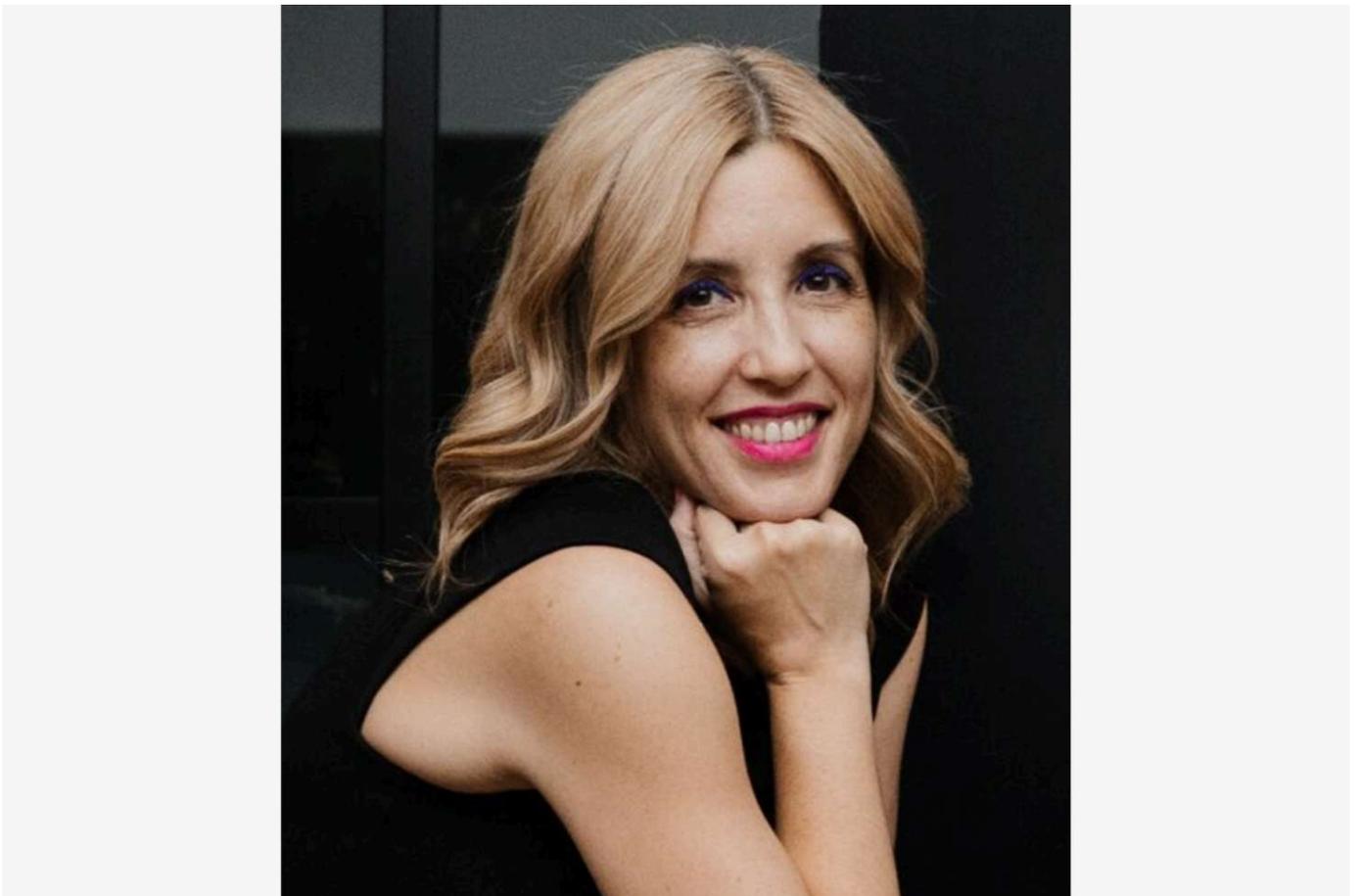
[https://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/psychotic-disorders-more-common/article\\_2bb9ea76-5ec0-428d-999e-2887b41d653c.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/psychotic-disorders-more-common/article_2bb9ea76-5ec0-428d-999e-2887b41d653c.html)

ONTARIO

# This Hamilton woman isn't hiding her schizophrenia. Here's what she wants you to know, with psychotic disorders hitting earlier ages

A Canadian Medical Association Journal study found that people born more recently are being diagnosed with psychotic disorders more often.

Updated 7 hrs ago | Feb. 4, 2026  



Samantha Mercanti, pictured during a graduation ceremony after earning an MBA from McMaster University, has lived with schizophrenia for more than two decades. She is an author, businesswoman and advocate for mental health.

@amandasarahcherish

---

**By Omar Mosleh Staff Reporter**

Samantha Mercanti isn't scared to talk about her schizophrenia on the first date.

It doesn't always end well.

But for the Hamilton businesswoman, it's an important part of her life journey. And she hopes her acceptance and willingness to talk about mental health can encourage other people to do the same.

The importance of talking openly about the illness, recognizing symptoms and accessing treatment in the early stages is underscored in a recent study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, which found that people born more recently are being diagnosed with psychotic disorders more often and at earlier ages than previous generations.



**CANADA**

**Ontario teens' soaring rates of mental distress may be tied to cannabis, report says**

---

Psychosis is a symptom of various psychotic disorders, marked by a disconnection from reality, which can sometimes include visual or auditory hallucinations and delusions. But it can also result from other health conditions, or be triggered by substance use, traumatic brain injuries or high levels of stress and anxiety.

### **Psychosis rates rising in recent generations**

The [study](#), led by researchers at ICES, North York General, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, and Bruyère Health Research Institute, found that diagnosis rates for psychotic disorders have increased for those born in the 1980s or later, and have risen with each subsequent generation.

For example, the total number people diagnosed with a psychotic disorder by age 30 increased by 37.5 per cent for those born between 1990 to 1994 compared to people born between 1975 and 1979. Individuals born in 2000 to 2004 were estimated to have a 70 per cent greater rate of new diagnoses compared to the same 1970s time period.

The scale of the increases by birth cohort was higher than what researchers expected, said Dr. Daniel Myran, Gordon F. Cheesbrough Research Chair in Family and Community Medicine at North York General, scientist at ICES and co-author of the report.

He said it's likely that part of what they're seeing is linked to improvements in the delivery of care, such as early intervention programs, specialized clinics and better recognition of early symptoms of psychosis.

“But for a couple of reasons, that's not the whole explanation,” Myran said. “The scale of the increases are so large, for what is thought to be a quite stable disorder, that I do not think that we're going to find that there's one thing” causing this.

“It's not just that people get diagnosed earlier, it's that each birth cohort has more psychosis than the previous one.”

### **What's driving the increase?**

Psychotic disorders are largely driven by genetics, but there are social and environmental factors that can increase risk. Advanced parental age is associated with a higher risk of psychosis for the child, Myran said, and there is good evidence that people are having children later in life.

Other possible drivers, which have increased in recent generations, include socioeconomic stress, adverse childhood experiences and substance use, especially cannabis, psychedelics and certain stimulants.

For reasons that aren't entirely clear to scientists, living in an urban environment also increases the risk of developing a psychotic disorder.

“That could be due to social segmentation, overcrowding, pollution or a lack of social cohesion,” said Kelly K. Anderson, Canada Research Chair in Public Mental Health Research, and an associate professor at Western University who was also involved in the study.

### **Recovering from psychosis**

Mercanti has been living with schizophrenia for more than two decades. She wants people to see it's possible to live a full, healthy and happy life with any mental health condition, especially with early intervention and treatment.

She first experienced psychosis when she was 20, while studying for exams in her first year of university. She started seeing rings of light around doors, hearing strange voices and laughing uncontrollably.

She said she wasn't taking good care of herself at the time, and the lack of exercise, poor diet, insufficient sleep and stress from school sent her into a downward spiral.

Mercanti recognized something was wrong and was able to get help at a relatively early stage of her illness. She remembers being gripped with fear and uncertainty after being picked up from university by relatives.

"The worst day of my life, when I was driving home in that car ... actually ended up becoming the best day of my life," Mercanti said, as she realized she desperately needed help.

She still faced many obstacles. When she failed a science course while juggling school and trying to manage her symptoms, a school official told her she would likely never graduate. After she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, she says a doctor told her parents to "mourn" their daughter — that the person they knew wasn't coming back.

Today she holds three degrees, including an MBA, is close with her family and stable on medication. Treatment was crucial in her recovery, but she also credits exercise, therapy and family support.

For a time, Mercanti put her romantic life on hold to focus on her education, career and wellness. She said it wasn't until she got back into the dating world that she noticed "how deep-rooted the stigma actually was."

"One of my advisers in business said don't tell people until the fourth date," Mercanti said. "And I was like, really? I would just tell people in the beginning."

She started speaking publicly about her illness in 2008. One memory that stands out is speaking to a gymnasium full of teenagers, who listened in stunned silence, before breaking out into applause.

"It kind of made me realize that I have a pretty decent story," Mercanti said. "I just want people to recover and to have the same joy I have."

Mercanti has written a book titled "Embracing Schizophrenia." Bringing it up on dates is sometimes still awkward.

But in some ways, it's also a useful screening method; she says she wouldn't want to be with someone who rejects her because of an illness.

"It does kind of hinder my dating life a little bit. But in the end, I would never change a thing."



Omar Mosleh is a Toronto-based reporter covering social issues for the Star. Reach him here: [omarmosleh@thestar.ca](mailto:omarmosleh@thestar.ca).

## Related Stories

---



Mental health is plummeting in Toronto. Here's what we can do to solve a 'wicked' problem

---



Researchers ranked Canada's most harmful drugs. Why alcohol is No. 1 — and how the drinker isn't the only victim

---

[REPORT AN ERROR](#)

[JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS](#)

[ABOUT THE STAR](#)

---