

500 words

## WHY EXCLUDE THE MENTALLY ILL?

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Intro

## WHY DON'T WE CARE FOR THEM?

I am honoured to participate in this competition and I appreciate WHO for promoting mental health at school level.

My memories take me back to seven years ago, when I spent my summer holidays with my grandparents, as my parents were abroad. In their neighbourhood, I used to see a shabbily dressed yet physically healthy man wandering in the street, muttering to himself and shouting at anyone who crossed his path. Children used to throw stones at him, enjoying his torment and agony. He used to run after them and abuse them, shouting threats. I was very afraid of him and at times could not sleep. As I tossed and turned in my bed, I troubled over the condition of this man. I remember asking my grandparents to leave that house and neighbourhood and stay with my aunt. One day, my grandmother insisted to know the reason behind my wails, and I told her of my wails fears. She then told me that his name was Aldus Salom, and he was a normal man just like anybody else. But he lost his mental balance after a horse-carriage accident in which he lost three of his family members. I remember innocently asking:

uncle

"Why can't he be helped?" My grandmother explained that since people were afraid of his behaviour, the family members had abandoned him. My heart cried out for this man, and I shed many tears of sorrow. I persuaded my uncle to take him to a safe place, where he could be protected from hurting himself and others.

Overwhelmed with emotions, I remember offering all the little spending money I had for paying any expenses for his treatment. Through this gesture, he understood the importance of the matter for me and took him to a mental health specialist at a nearby hospital.

Six months later, when I went again to my grandparent's house, I was in for a surprise. On Friday, when I went to offer prayers, I saw Mr. Avdus Salam, looking healthy and well in the mosque.

I spoke with him and found him to be a new man. Then my uncle told me that he gets an injection every 2 weeks and he has, through proper treatment, become a useful member of the community. And it was then that I realized, that through proper treatment and care, mental illness can be cured.

The images of this experience have haunted me since then, and I resolved that when I grow up I will become a doctor.

and help people like <sup>him</sup> you. I was motivated to look around for material about mental illnesses. When I tried to consult technical books used at higher levels, I could not understand the advanced terminology and my questions remained unanswered. I continued to search for these in a vast array of books that I came across, but had almost given up hope of finding answers to my questions. When the teacher announced the slogan: 'Stop exclusion, dare to care', and told us of the WHO World Mental Health Day brochure, it rekindled a flame inside my heart, and my eagerness to know more about mental illnesses was restored.

One matter that puzzles me and I fail to understand has always troubled me. People feel very sorry if someone develops physical illness and sympathize with them. Everyone would want to help them and be kind to them, offering every comfort. But mental illness, which is so common these days, does not receive any attention by the Govt. & the society. People perceive that mental illness is due to individual's own faults and misdeeds, and is therefore self-inflicted. There is, therefore, a negative opinion and image in the community about the mentally ill.

The dimensions and aspects of our being are our emotions, thinking, personality and behaviour. Mental illnesses affect these very dimensions. Then what is the

fault of the mentally ill? Like a patient with chest illness cannot help coughing, similarly a mentally ill cannot help to think, behave and act the way he does. Remembering that man, I conclude that if the brain does not work, the rest does not matter much.

I understand that majority of mental illness could be treated with drugs and care. Why can't we give them access to care, more care, better care? When I grow up, I plan to launch a campaign for the demystifying and destigmatization of care for the mentally ill. I will conduct a research to find out what really causes mental illness, and finally answer the question John Ford asked in 1629,

"Tell us pray, what <sup>devil</sup> is this melancholy that turns Men into monsters."

My suggestion is that to get the message across to the people of countries with lower literacy rate, the slogan should have been: "Stop fearing, start caring and changing minds."

I end with the English translation of a few verses of our national poet, Allama Iqbal:-

"Oh man,  
The conqueror of the final frontiers of space,  
The deep delved heart of yours,  
Stays unexplored - as yet,  
The veil on the inner being of those you  
belong to,  
Stays unrippled - as yet,

Oh you, the Alexander of stars,  
The dark avenues of your slums,  
Await, a ray of hope,  
Unendingly though - as yet.

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