

11 October 2023 □ In war-torn Yemen, mental health is often neglected. Limited access to mental health services means that only 120 000 of the estimated 7 million people in need of such support receive help.

### **Aisha's story** □



Aisha Mohammed, a 38-year-old with disabilities, has faced lifelong challenges with speaking and hearing. These difficulties led to her depression, causing her to isolate herself from society. Her sister, Azhar, who shared Aisha's story, would long to see her sister smile and engage easily in conversations.

Azhar shared that Aisha's mental health struggles began in childhood but worsened over time. Despite her family's efforts to provide a normal life, a traumatic incident at school, in which a teacher insulted and mistreated Aisha, triggered severe depression and social withdrawal. This incident had a profound and lasting impact on Aisha's physical and mental health.

At first, Aisha's family thought that what she was going through was solely physical in nature. They sought medical help, but doctors confirmed that her hearing impairment was untreatable. They provided medical earphones, but Aisha broke them during depressive episodes, and the family was unable to afford replacements.

Aisha's connection to her mother, who provided comfort, was irreplaceable; when her mother died, this deepened Aisha's depression. Despite her concern for her sister, Azhar hesitated to seek help owing to the fear of community stigma. But after consulting a doctor, she decided to bring Aisha to a WHO-supported mental health unit.

Aisha's diagnosis of depression led to 4 mental and psychological support sessions, followed by her enrolment in sign language courses at the Deaf and Dumb Association. Here, she discovered others facing similar challenges, and realized that she was not alone.

Two months of seeking mental health support transformed Aisha. She began to make friends and eagerly attend classes, and her communication skills improved significantly.

Azhar shared her joy in witnessing her sister's transformation. Aisha, once withdrawn and noncommunicative, now aspires to be positive, active and ambitious, bringing a newfound spirit to the family home.

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