

Young Of Age, Ailing In Mind

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Mental health issues are a real and growing concern. However the stigma and prejudice associated with mental illness acts as a huge barrier in accepting the problem, and worse, seeking help. Associated morbidity and mortality is higher than in the general population. Despite this, most countries are investing far too little in care for mental health.

Prevalence Of Mental Disorders

Many forms of mental disorders are more common in women than men. Manifestation may vary but there is evidence that women tend to internalise their problems while men often externalise. In other words, mental disorders in women may present predominantly with cognitive and emotional symptoms whilst men manifest with behavioural problems including aggression, violence and substance misuse. For example, men may respond to stress with antisocial behaviour and alcohol misuse, whereas women may respond with dysphoria (feelings of anxiety, restlessness and dissatisfaction).

Factors Attributed To Mental Illness, Especially In The Young

- ◆ A positive family history of mental health problem increases individual vulnerability.
- ◆ Environmental factors such as abuse (physical and sexual), neglect, impoverished upbringing and discontinuous care can impair psychological and personality development. It contributes to coping deficit and poor resilience, and predisposes one to emotional problems, either immediately or in later life.
- ◆ Adolescence and young adulthood can be a stressful time due to the many challenges one has to deal with – going through puberty, meeting expectations, moving from school to university, adapting to peer pressure and coping with new feelings and relationships.
- ◆ Academic stress is one of the main causes of mental stress in this group. It may be internally induced by the fear of failure and/or externally imposed through family and society by imparting a sense of shame and guilt associated with lack of success.
- ◆ Some resort to substance misuse,

which can complicate matters.

Signs and symptoms of mental disorder can vary, depending on the particular disorder and other factors. Typically, symptoms can affect thoughts, emotions and behaviour. In depression for example, the symptoms may include:

- ◆ Persistent low mood for two weeks,
- ◆ Loss of interest in activities
- ◆ Tiredness
- ◆ Reduced energy
- ◆ Insomnia
- ◆ Poor appetite
- ◆ Weight loss
- ◆ Impaired concentration and memory
- ◆ Loss of libido.

People suffering from depression or mental disorders would be:

- ◆ Withdrawn
- ◆ Physically and mentally slowed
- ◆ Isolated
- ◆ Pessimistic
- ◆ Feel a sense of hopelessness
- ◆ Feel a sense of worthlessness
- ◆ Low on confidence and self-esteem.
- ◆ Have suicidal thoughts – expressed

or demonstrated with an attempt to end life

◆ Show signs of self-neglect

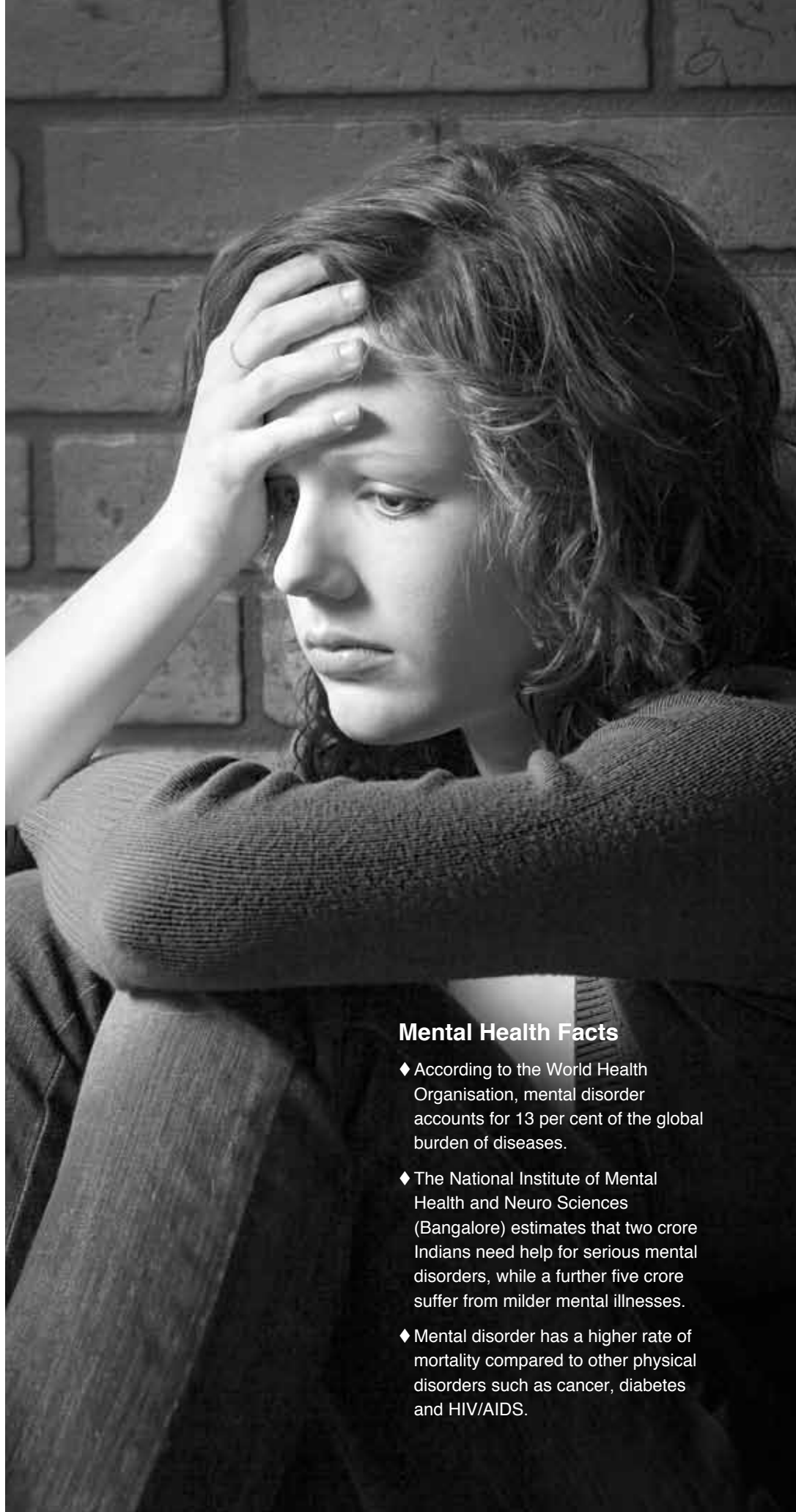
Their functioning whether at home or school or work place will be affected.

In other conditions like schizophrenia, one may display disorganised thoughts, misinterpreted fixed belief (delusions) and hallucinatory experiences. Many patients become frustrated with the symptoms or side effect of medicines and this manifests in the form of irritability and hostility. Behaviour is often uncharacteristic.

Where alcohol and drugs are involved, there may be specific features of dependency or withdrawal symptoms and/or an escalation of symptoms of pre-existing mental disorder. Sometimes symptoms of a mental disorder may appear as physical problems.

Treatment

Mental disorder is common and easily treatable provided the individual seeks early help to become aware of the nature and degree of the problem, and address underlying causes. Treatment may include the combination of medication, psychotherapy (talking therapy), and lifestyle advice/changes. It is established that the above treatments together are more effective than when used in isolation. Psychotherapy and counselling to raise awareness, insight and personal growth amongst the young, can play a more important role. The enormity of this problem warrants an awareness programme, systematic intervention and treatment approaches.



Mental Health Facts

- ◆ According to the World Health Organisation, mental disorder accounts for 13 per cent of the global burden of diseases.
- ◆ The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (Bangalore) estimates that two crore Indians need help for serious mental disorders, while a further five crore suffer from milder mental illnesses.
- ◆ Mental disorder has a higher rate of mortality compared to other physical disorders such as cancer, diabetes and HIV/AIDS.