

# Breaking the Stigma That Lies Behind Mental Health

## 1. Introduction

This article aims at educating individuals about mental health issues and raising awareness about mental health so as to break down the stigma that lies behind seeking mental health care. We often come across this phrase “Mental Health” but what exactly is mental health, how does one deal with mental health that is - how can one seek help/treatment for their mental health. Below is a brief yet compelling in-depth overview of what mental health is and the issues that lie around mental health.

## 2. Mental Health

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychosocial, and social well-being. It has a great impact on our thinking, feeling, and how we act. It is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a state of well-being in which a person can actually realise his or her own abilities, and how they cope with the normal stresses of life so that they can be productive in the communities they serve. Mental health is important in all of life, from childhood to adolescence and throughout adulthood.

### 3. Importance of Mental Health Awareness

Raising awareness about mental health can eliminate the stigma that lies behind mental health because people often feel like it is embarrassing for others to know that they have mental health issues. Therefore, they shy away and do not seek help. With mental health awareness people can do away with the preconceived ideas around seeking mental healthcare. By educating people on mental illnesses, its effects, and how it occurs can lessen the stigma around mental illnesses. Mental health is equally important to physical health due to the fact that you cannot be physically healthy without being mentally healthy as they go hand in hand.

### 4. Key Factors Contributing to Mental Health Issues

- Childhood abuse, trauma, and neglect,
- Experiencing discrimination and stigma,
- Financial constraints( living in poverty/debt),
- Grief,
- Stress,
- Physical health condition,
- Unemployment,
- Substance abuse,
- Domestic violence,
- Bullying,
- Genetics/hereditary,
- Being a long-term carer for someone,
- Trauma resulting from an incident,
- Head injury.

## 5. Reasons Why Few People Seek Mental Healthcare

Stigma plays an important role in hindering individuals to seek mental healthcare. People fear being judged by society. People are not aware that they have mental health issues and must seek help. Therefore, mental health awareness is significant in this regard. People are in denial and think that they do not need mental health care. People are scared of treatment (psychotherapy). They often do not feel comfortable opening up to a stranger.

## 6. Stigma Prevention

Talking openly about mental health is about mental health awareness campaigns or sharing personal experiences of mental health illness in order to fight the stigma, or educating ourselves and others. Make people aware of the equality between physical and mental care. Show compassion to the affected. Choose empowerment over shame. Be honest about treatment, let it be known that you are going for therapy instead of covering it up like you are going for physical care. Encourage others that going for therapy is not a weakness but rather it shows ownership and responsibility on one's well-being.

## 7. Importance of Seeking Help

Seeking mental health services is important because a professional therapist is best suited for the evaluation of the symptoms. It is essential for long-term well-being to:

- prevent the condition from worsening,
- maintain good working relationships,

- enhance productivity at school or work,
- decrease the risk of substance abuse and addiction

If mental health issues persist, one must not delay seeking help.

## 8. Mental Health Issues Signs

- Constantly feeling sad or down,
- Excessive fear or worries,
- Extreme feeling of guilt,
- Extreme mood changes,
- Withdrawal from the social world,
- Insomnia,
- Appetite changes

## 9. Mental Healthcare Tips

- Therapy,
- Talk about your feelings with those you trust,
- Exercise,
- Eat well,
- Drink sensibly,
- Keep in touch with friends and family,
- Ask for help,
- Take a break,
- Get enough sleep,
- Practice mindfulness

Martha Moagi, Polokwane, Limpopo, South Africa  
[marthamoagi16@gmail.com](mailto:marthamoagi16@gmail.com)