

Awareness material to Religious Priests

on

Mind, Mental Health and Mental Illness

Mind

Mind emanates from a portion of the activity of the brain. It deals with Cognition (Intellect), Conation (Psychomotor Activity) and Affect (Emotions). One cannot see or touch Mind but only experience its functions.

Location of mind

Brain is the organ which carries out all the functions of the mind.

Functions of mind

Thinking, emotions, perception, control over one's talk and behaviour, decision making, problem solving, planning, Judgement, memory and intelligence are some of the important functions of mind.

Mental health

Mental health may be defined as

- a) Ability of a person to feel comfortable and live satisfactorily and meaningfully in any situation
- b) To make others comfortable and happy
- c) To live in harmony with others
- d) To improve his abilities
- e) To work for the welfare of the community at large.

. The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.

Mental illness

Causes of Mental illnesses

There are many reasons for an individual to suffer from mental illness. Abnormal changes in brain may lead to many types of mental illnesses, since, Brain is the seat of mind, any insult to Brain may lead to mental illnesses. The common causes are

- a) Biological factors
- b) Psychosocial factors

Biological factors

Genetic Factors,

Chemical changes in the brain ,

Infections of Brian,

Injury to brain,

Impairment in blood supply to brain

Damage to brain due to abuse of substances like alcohol, ganja, opium, sedatives and many other drugs,

Tumour of brain, Accidental poisoning causing damage to brain,

Abnormal electrical activities in the brain,

Accumulation of poisonous substances in the blood due to long term diseases if body organs like liver, heart and kidney, affecting brain

Psychosocial Factors

Improper child rearing practices, Bitter childhood experiences, Abnormal family environment
Pathological social situations May lead to defective development of mind, making the child vulnerable to mental illness.

Modern day stressful life due to stressors like failures, disappointment, frustration and conflicts in family, finance, occupation, sexual functioning, and social functioning in an individual due to poor coping skills, social skills and interpersonal skills makes a person vulnerable to mental illness.

Presentation of mental illness

Mental illness may present with Abnormal Thought, Disturbance in Emotion,
Unacceptable Behaviour, violating social norms, Defect in memory, Impaired judgement

Effect of mental illness

The above changes result in disturbance in day to day functioning of the individual and produce distress to the individual or to others or both.

Present status with regard to management of mental illness by the society

Like in case of Physical illness wherein, people approach Doctors of various Specialities seeking treatment and at the same time visit religious places of their choices and offer prayers. Society should adopt the same procedure, in case of mental illness.

But, unfortunately, due to ignorance, the family members of persons with mental illness fail to seek help from Specialist doctors dealing with treatment of Mental illness (Psychiatrist) and fully rely on religious mode of treatment. It naturally leads to worsening of Mental Illness.

Moreover, some of them believe that mental illnesses are caused by

- Black magic
- With craft
- Evil spirits
- God's curse
- Past bad deeds
- Bad luck
- Bad stars
- Excess sex

Due to this Superstitious belief system, the family members of mentally ill persons take the patients to magicians, mantravadis, and conduct elaborate rituals.

In addition, social stigma, exists even today, irrespective of social status and education, among the society and leads to delay in seeking treatment from Psychiatrists.

Consequences of faulty approach of mental illness by the society

Due to above negative approach, many persons affected with mental illness do not get right kind of treatment. In some occasions, the family members take the patient to the psychiatric facility after the disease gets worsened. As a result the individual affected with mental illness have pre mature death due to inter current physical illnesses or suicide. Sometimes, they may become harmful to others at the height of their illness. It amounts to negligence on the part of family and society at large.

Appeal to religious leaders regarding their role in helping the mentally ill people

. It is in this context, the roll of religious heads comes into play in a more distinctive form. Religious beliefs play a soothing effect in the management and rehabilitation of mentally ill people. Society mainly relies on their healing services and approaches them in greater numbers. Persons affected with mental illness and children with behavioural disorders accompanied by their families seek refuge in healing and faith centres. While the services rendered by them are not undermined, faith plays an important role in the treatment process and we have to acknowledge it.

Nevertheless the ultimate aim is treating and rehabilitating the mentally ill persons. In this process, we fervently request you that besides continuing your services to mentally ill people, you could kindly advice and guide the patients and their family members to go to the nearest Government hospital where psychiatric clinical services are available (List enclosed). In these hospitals the patients are evaluated, and the needed treatment protocol is provided. This advice and guidance you offer will be of great help to the patients / family members, making quick recovery. This is in addition to what you are providing them. You, please educate the family members of mentally ill persons that they should consult the Psychiatrists for the treatment and rehabilitation of mentally ill persons in addition to Religious mode of treatment, like what the people do for Physical illnesses. You will be doing a great service to the victims of mentally ill patients and their family members if you could create such Awareness in the Society.

Along with your healing touch, you ask and guide them as mentioned above. This is to supplement your effort and not to supplant them.

I hope you will understand the depth of the issue. Your action in the right earnest will bring relief to the persons and their families who come to you with hope and confidence.