



DIALOGUES



A NEWSLETTER FROM CONVERSATIONS-
CENTRE FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

OCTOBER 2021 • ISSUE 4 • VOLUME 1



Artwork by Nirmala Aurad (MAE2021)

MENTAL HEALTH IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD

The theme for World Mental Health Day 2021 is "Mental Health in an Unequal World". The World Federation of Mental Health (WFMH) has chosen this theme since the pandemic has highlighted inequalities related to class, caste, gender, sexual orientation, mental health conditions etc. Such inequalities have an impact on our mental health and in order to spread awareness on this, we have put together articles, artwork and poetry exploring the intersection between mental health and inequality contributed by the members of our community and our team, along with events conducted on campus to commemorate mental health month.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Contributions by Students and Members of Azim Premji Foundation

- Artwork by Nirmala Aurad (pg. 1)
- Caged by Savitha Elumalai (pg. 2)
- 'That's Easy for You to Say' by Vikas G. (pg. 3)
- Artwork by Raghvendra Vanjari (pg. 3)
- From Equality to Health by Dinesh M. (pg. 4)
- Art Can Fail its Artist by Raisha Kashyap (pg. 6)

Features from the Conversations Team

- Veda's Visual Verses (pg. 9)
- Swati's Storyboard (pg. 13)
- Soumitra's Sagas (pg.15)
- Kavitha's Korner (pg. 16)
- Lakshmi's Lens (pg. 17)
- Prarthana's Picks (pg. 19)

Mental Health Awareness Week on Campus (pg. 20)

Quarterly Mental Health Calendar (pg. 21)

Applications for Peer Support Team 6 (pg. 22)



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM STUDENTS & MEMBERS OF AZIM PREMJI FOUNDATION

CAGED

by Savitha Elumalai (UG 2021)



When there is no visible cage of iron or lock and key
within my range of view,
Why are you still confined in?
Confined within that invisible barrier that you put yourself
up to block your ardour for everything!

It is painful to watch you locked up, enclosed within,
bent over to represent something and someone you are
not....

You are the rays that bring sunshine to us....
You are a fragrance that promises to linger for memories
sake.....
You are the only music that can reach us through this
vacuum around us.....
So wake up..!
Get out of the cage and bring us this jubilation, atleast to
us, if not for yourself..!!

'THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY'

by Vikas G (MAD2021)

"That's easy for you to say" - I'm sure most of us have either said this out loud, or at least in our heads. Rightly so, the world is not an equal space, and it is only human to experience envy, or even annoyance when we witness these inequalities. However, we could still certainly try our best to make the world as equitable as possible, starting with our own inner circles.

Here are a couple of ways in which we could acknowledge the differences in one's privilege and be allies for those who require our support:

TRY AND GAUGE THE PRIVILEGES YOU MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE

This could be as simple as being a man and being allowed to go for a walk alone at night. One such inequality that prevails locally, and internationally is the unsafe nature of simply existing as a woman. Acknowledging this vast disparity that exists, when it is one that nearly half of the world population experiences, should be an eyeopener, and a proper gateway towards the various other inequalities that exist in society. Especially ones that we aren't aware of, which we will get to in the next point.



Artwork by
Raghvendra Vanjari
(Azim Premji Foundation)

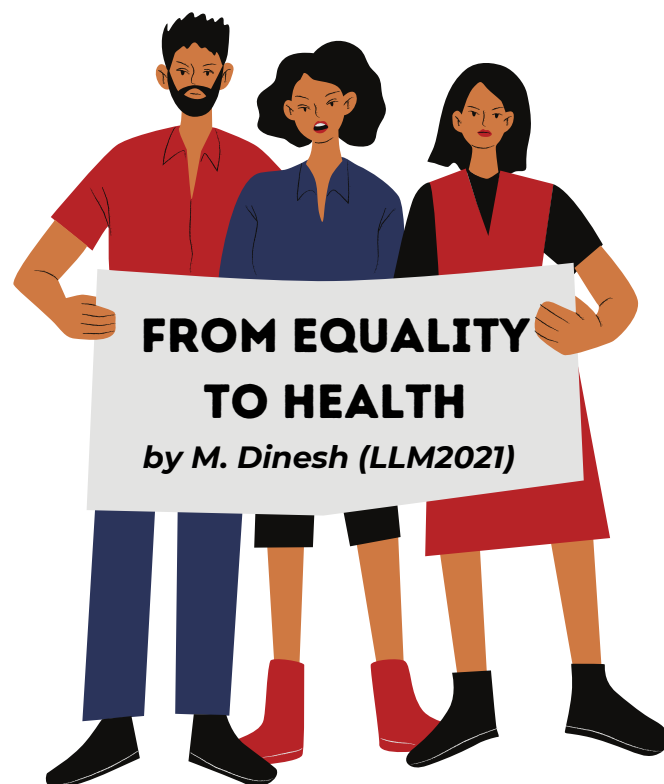
NOT EVERYONE HAS THE SAME LIVED EXPERIENCES AS YOU - LISTEN!

Lived experiences are nothing but first hand accounts of experiences people have lived through, and this is most important to acknowledge when people who have been systematically discriminated against share their stories. It is very important to listen, and at the very least not discount anything someone is sharing. Once we have this simple, but effective realisation anchored into our minds, the increased empathy you display should hopefully make your way back to you in some form or another.

While practicing the above mentioned pointers could certainly help with reducing the stigma amongst those suffering with mental health problems, it is nothing but just a step in the right direction - there's still a long way to go. Some equalities, especially those that lay in financial roots where people are not blessed with generational wealth, shall continue to persist. The past year certainly displayed the social, as well as financial constraints that people go through to access basic amenities, and unfortunately quality mental health continues to be one that is accessible to very few people in today's world.

As certain sections of society could afford the practice of self care and therapy in these trying times, the majority of the population had a family to feed and livelihoods to tend to. However, all is not that bleak. The very fact that there is a platform, and a day dedicated to addressing these inequalities is another step in the right direction towards dealing with a problem which is, in my opinion, deep rooted in systemic apathy.

We are not alone, and there is always someone to reach out to. We can do our bit by guiding people who may require help in the right direction, by spreading awareness about the benefits of self care as well as other mental health services such as counselling and therapy.



If we start off from an opposite standpoint, by asking where the equal world is and how it looks like, it doesn't seem to move anywhere further. Is it about easy access to sedatives and hypnotics that can serve as a heal-all? Or is it about human ideologies founded on some other beliefs that are subject to times of change.

WHO's (World Health Organisation) definition on mental health goes as follows:

"Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

These carefully worded statements are not just limited to the health sciences. Every stream of learning is meant to facilitate equality in one or the other way. After all, this has been the UNDP's (United Nations Development Program) objective, be it in the name of sustainable development goals or millennium development goals.

Every word has a mine of meaning in it, from realizing one's abilities, working productively, contributing to their community or managing stress. A level playing field in society is the cornerstone for realizing the above said objectives. As it further guarantees equal space for everyone with mettle to shine through. Is this only an academic and political euphoria of utopian dream or can it also translate into practicality?

There seem to be selective answers in accordance with our biases. It seems like we take an extremely maximalist standpoint where we either say everything is pathetic or all is beautiful; and it is hard to figure out a golden-mean anywhere. In a constant kerfuffle of views, reason disappears before it becomes a word and gains sound. Mere legislation without enforcement or budget estimates without actual expenditure to confront the issues at hand, serves to little avail.

Mental health is also about social and economic well being of the working classes . One need not tend towards some sort of ideology to say that inclusivity propels progress.

And the idea of inclusivity isn't confined to class, caste or gender, it's about concerted effort in every sphere of human endeavour. It needs a space for change and conversation that is devoid of rhetoric as the idea of rhetoric always seeks for instability more than sanity.

Issues of inequality in different forms have long existed, even in societies with objectives of equality. But the pursuit of equality has brought in betterment even if not equality in its entirety.

We are drowning in a world of information, with greater complexities, there is a constant change in the definition of equality itself. For example, the digital divide in the times of the pandemic. Not everyone has access to technology and it's know-how. Policies of the governments are always slow to catch up not necessarily because they are slow, but problems always come before solutions . Like signaling systems only came after accidents.

Hope to see a better tomorrow in terms of lowering inequalities and greater opportunities; as it always happens, tomorrow is waiting to call today wrong.



ART CAN FAIL ITS ARTIST

A fictional short story

by Raisha Kashyap (UG 2021)

LINKIN PARK'S CHESTER CHARLES BENNINGTON TAKES HIS OWN LIFE AT 41, LEAVES MILLIONS IN SHOCK

"It hurts all of us to know that you saved so many lives, yet we couldn't save you..."

The dark blanket parts slowly as my pupils brave blinding light. My inked arms flinch, cutting a Tyndall through the warm sunlight. Wasn't Ambien supposed to render a heavy night, yet all I feel is lighter than ever before - as if I escaped gravity. My eyes wander to the wall clock that reads half past six in the morning. A night owl they'd called me but this morning I realized, a little dawn was all I needed.

By the view of my scattered compositions, stacked DVDs and empty guitar stands, I know I am standing in my studio. A wall is lined top to bottom with granite shelves, stacked with thousands of platinum records, vinyls, trophies and Grammys. Photographs of Linkin Park tours, where I stood between the crowd, shirtless, drenched in sweat, high on adrenaline, oozing with passion, feeling invincible. A crowd of thousands chanting my name almost like it was their religion.

Just as I begin to walk ahead, I hit something and it goes rolling through the floor, clinking all the way until

friction hits hard. It is last night's Stella Artois. My conscience makes me go numb. Relapse is part of recovery, I tell myself - hour by hour, hour by hour.

I am not accustomed to the silence that prevails inside the room. If anything, my visceral resonates with the metal of madness. I am a rockstar. Silence, not screams, is deafening to me. Cutting through this deafening ambiance is the flutter of pages - calendar pages hanging beside the dream catcher. I am instinctively drawn to this source of sanity. And oh, it is one of those few dates I used to circle in red - it is July 20th, Cornell's 53rd birthday. Chris Cornell, SOUNDGARDEN's frontman and a great friend, was the yin to my yang. He was joy and pain, anger and forgiveness, love and heartache all wrapped up into one. My heart ached immeasurably when last May, instead of writing lyrics for my friend, I had to pen a farewell I could never bid. I couldn't imagine a life without him in it and I still can't. Why did he do it?

The grief of loss is so overbearing that I can't stand it anymore and I dash out in convulsion to my hole. As if smacked square in the face, I go breathless. While I gasp for air, a wave of shudder engulfs me as I see it. There in the middle of my bedroom hangs a body that looks more alive than it ought to be. His eyes are nearly bulging out and the head distorts at an ugly angle. The structure is now bones hanging onto muscles and muscles hanging onto a rope. His aging scars prominent and his tattoos spill cold fire. My mind

perplexes me with the same question - why did I do it? Because it is me.

On the bedside cabinet lay a full-grain leather-bound diary. A layer of dust coats my journal's cover, subtly complaining of the ignorance I've shown towards it for the past few months. At my lowest and highest, I've confided in it more than I ever could in the people around me. I don't even notice my fingers trembling until I glide them along the dog-eared edge and flip the cover. The initial entries were what you'd best describe as a bunch of doodles done by an eight year old kid, who hadn't yet learnt to put his anger into words. A half skull, a torn page, fire, shattered glass, anything which symbolized violence or pain, was sprawled across the pages, which had now acquired a yellowish tint. I skip a few pages, skimming through the doodles - amidst which I get a glimpse of my adolescent self - before my eyes land on some written entries.

Sometimes a full page, sometimes just a few lines. None of them dated.

Page 12:

*Sometimes, things just seem to fall apart
When you least expect them to
Sometimes you want to pack up and leave behind
All of them and their smiles
I don't know, what to think anymore
Maybe things will get better
Maybe things will look brighter
Maybe, maybe*

Divorced parents, an emotionally unstable father in whose custody my sobriety went haywire and sexual abuse by a friend when I was seven until thirteen, tell me about nightmares.

Page 48

*Do I trust some and get fooled by phoniness
Or do I trust nobody and live in loneliness?*

Page 73

*There's something inside me that pulls beneath the surface
Consuming, confusing
This lack of self-control I fear is never ending*

My life is falling apart in many ways. Getting divorced. It's like I have no control over myself in terms of drugs and alcohol. I am able to write about it, sing about it, those words have sold millions of records, I won a Grammy, I made a lot of money but it's not cool to be an alcoholic — it's not cool to go drink and...it's cool to be a part of recovery.

Page 106

*Pretending someone else
can save me from myself
This sounds like an apology. As though I'm moving on but I want people to remember the good things and not the bad things.*

Page 187

*Every step that I take is another mistake to you
I've become so numb, I can't feel you there
Become so tired, so much more aware
I'm becoming this, all I want to do
Is be more like me and be less like you*

Page 223

*Try to give you warning
But everyone ignores me
Told you everything loud and clear
But nobody's listening*

Page 348

*I don't like my mind right now
Stacking up problems that are so unnecessary
Wish that I could slow things down
I want to let go but there's comfort in the panic*

*I keep dragging around what's bringing me down
If I just let go, I'd be set free*

I don't just want a break, I want to not feel anything anymore, I don't want to do anything anymore. Sometimes, I just want to kind of retreat to a corner, not eat, not drink, not speak to anymore until I die. I have a hard time with life even when it's good, like, I just am uncomfortable all the time. And my goal is to, personally, to figure out how to live life on life's terms. I don't want to just be happy all the time. I just want to be able to just... be.

I am lost in the words I've scribbled all through these years, trying to cope with the floodgates of memories that seemed to have opened up. Every scar, every fear, everything seems to have come back to life in an instant.

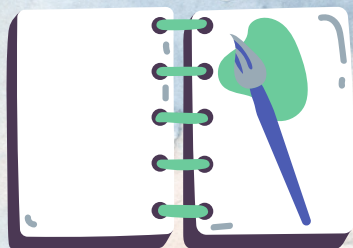
I'm suddenly broken from my trance when there's a knock on the door. One, then another, then another, until it changes to loud and full-on banging. And then...silence. I am pretty sure the person who was at the door has left but then, moments later, I hear the soft jingle of keys. The door opens slowly and in comes my landlady. And after that, everything seems to happen in the fraction of a second. She sees a body, my body, hanging from the ceiling fan, lifeless and blue. The very next moment, I hear the fast approaching sirens of ambulances. There are people crowding in, not able to believe their eyes, just like they never believed my lyrics weren't mere figments of my imaginations. They are taking me away.

I, on the other hand, stand frozen, watching everything unfold, almost as if I was there and not there at the same time. I want to shout, scream, tell them I am alive, but I know I can't. I am a rockstar, silence, not screams are deafening to me. But a soul isn't heard, just felt. Yet only, if you are willing to, only if you look deep enough.

I can tell you now, the art that most people find liberating can fail the artist, the source of the liberation, too. And I wonder where everything went wrong. Why the music I created from my blood and sweat, ended up saving everyone except me. If the people around me didn't care enough or if I didn't ever truly let them in. And I see it, almost like a play, like someone watching it unfold scene by scene from the sidelines. I wrote this myself. Memory by memory, lyric by lyric. I wrote this story, I scripted this end. From the physical scars of childhood to the mental battles with depression, broken relationships and friendships, giving up on myself bit by bit. Maybe it wasn't one stabbed wound, maybe it was a thousand paper cuts everyday until it became too much, until everything started leading to nothing.

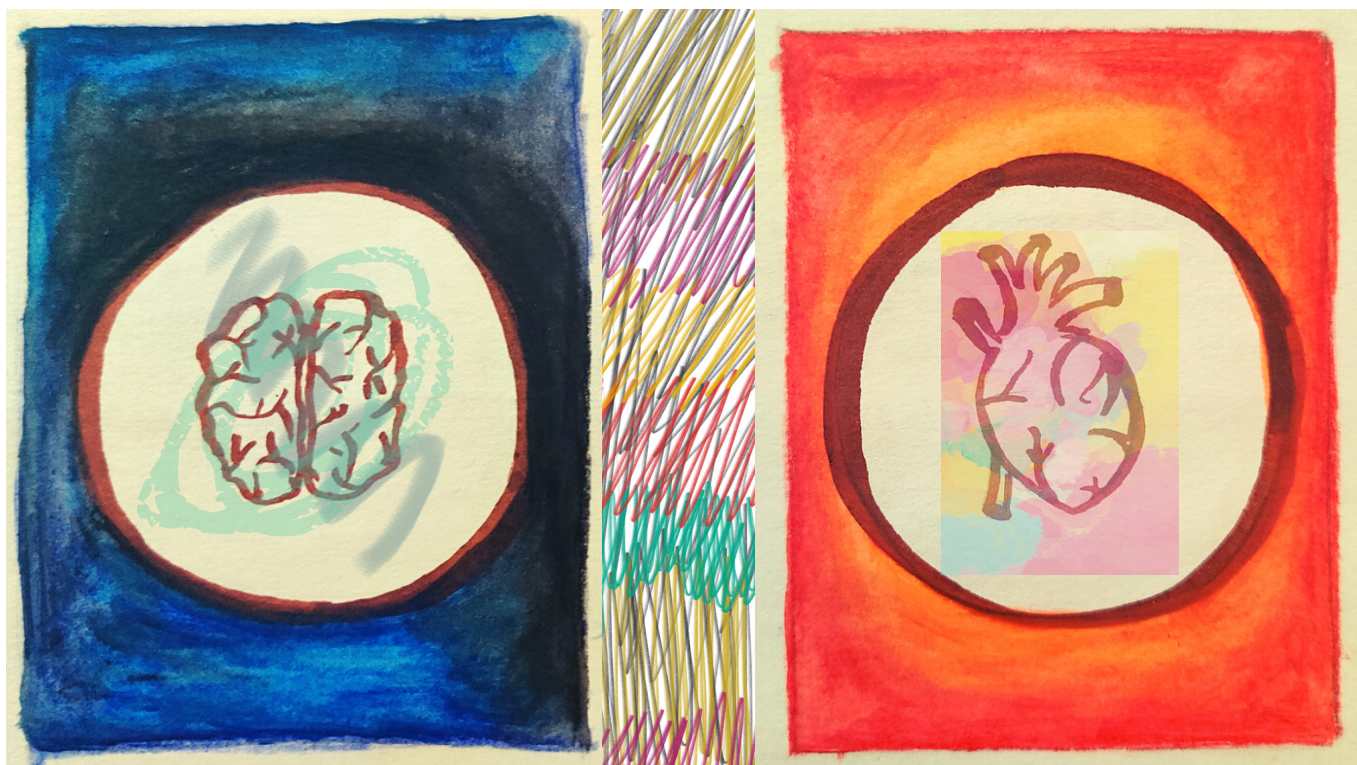
Maybe that is why Cornell did it. Maybe that is why, I did it.





VEDA'S VISUAL VERSES

AS JULIA CAMERON ONCE SAID, "ART OPENS THE CLOSETS, AIRS OUT THE CELLARS AND ATTICS. IT BRINGS HEALING."
WELCOME TO A SPACE WHERE I EXPLORE MENTAL HEALTH THEMES AND CAPTURE EXPERIENCES THROUGH ART AND WRITING!



THE SECRECY SURROUNDING SCHIZOPHRENIA- STORIES OF STIGMA AND SHAME

A VISUAL SERIES

Mental health is stigmatized, the mention of mental illness even more so. While we are seeing increased awareness and efforts to destigmatize mental health conditions, not all conditions are stigmatized the same way. In fact, research shows that stigma faced by those living with severe mental illness adds significantly to the burden of their condition,

in some cases more than the symptoms themselves.

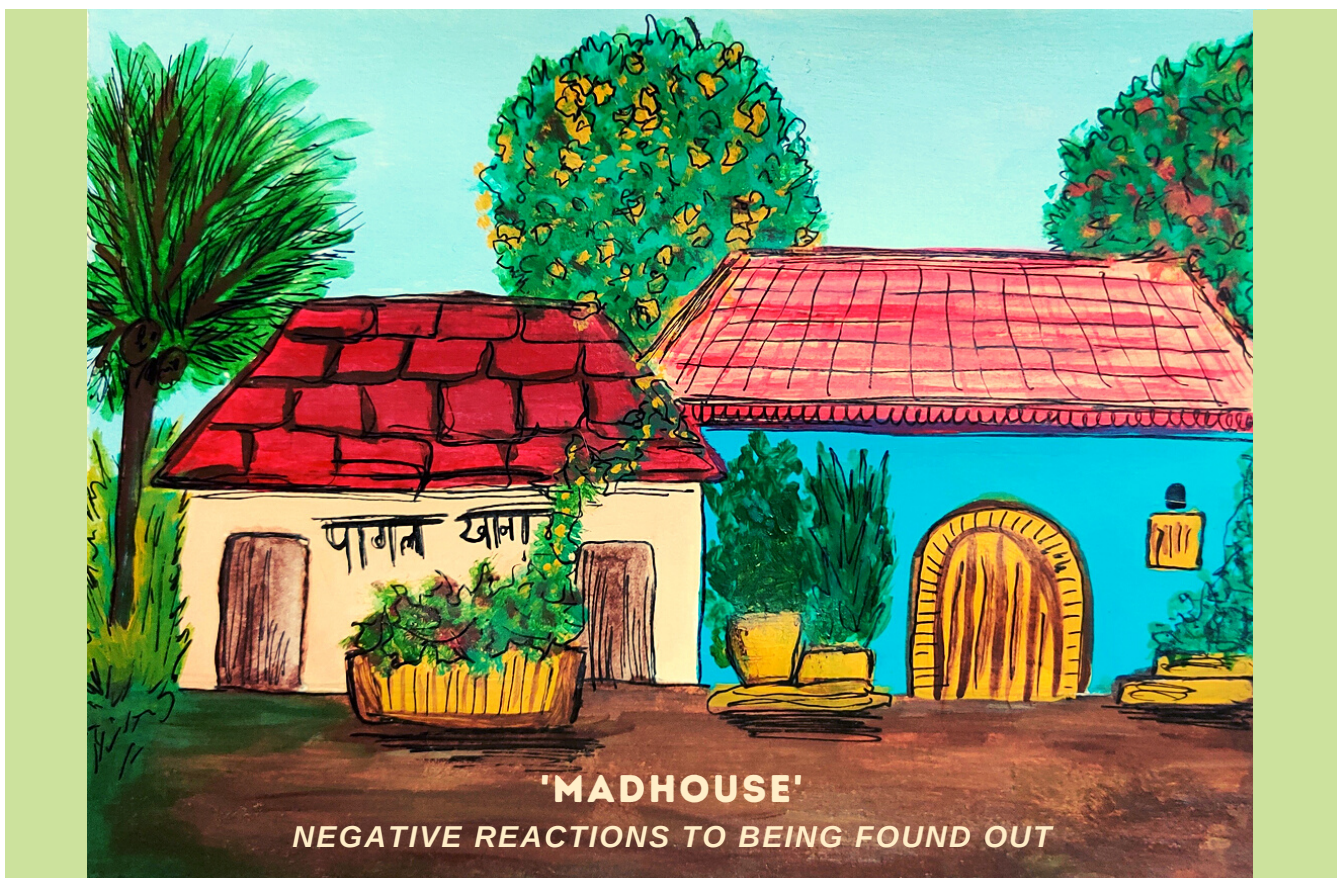
One such illness is schizophrenia, a chronic condition characterized by distortions in thinking (delusions), emotions, perceiving reality (hallucinations) and sense of self. Though schizophrenia is treatable with medication and psychosocial

support, most people living with this condition either lack access or face barriers to accessing treatment for various reasons, one being the stigma, shame, and secrecy surrounding the illness. Not only do people living with schizophrenia face stigma, but also their family members and caregivers by association. There is a strong need for support but unfortunately it is hindered by misconceptions and lack of awareness.

This past month, I was pleasantly surprised as I came across a book in the library by Shefali Tripathi Mehta called "People on Our Roof".

The book poignantly captures the unique stories of patients and their loved ones along with the vicissitudes of their lived experiences.

This visual series is inspired by my reading and reflections based on this narrative, my own work and experiences with people living with schizophrenia, as well as the stories of family members and caregivers that I have heard. This is my way of bringing to life these valid experiences that need more safe spaces to be *shared, heard and held*. Slowly un-layering the cloaks of stigma and shame.



They can't write 'paagal' on your forehead. So it's branded on your house instead. You wipe the words off the wall, wishing you could do the same to this memory.

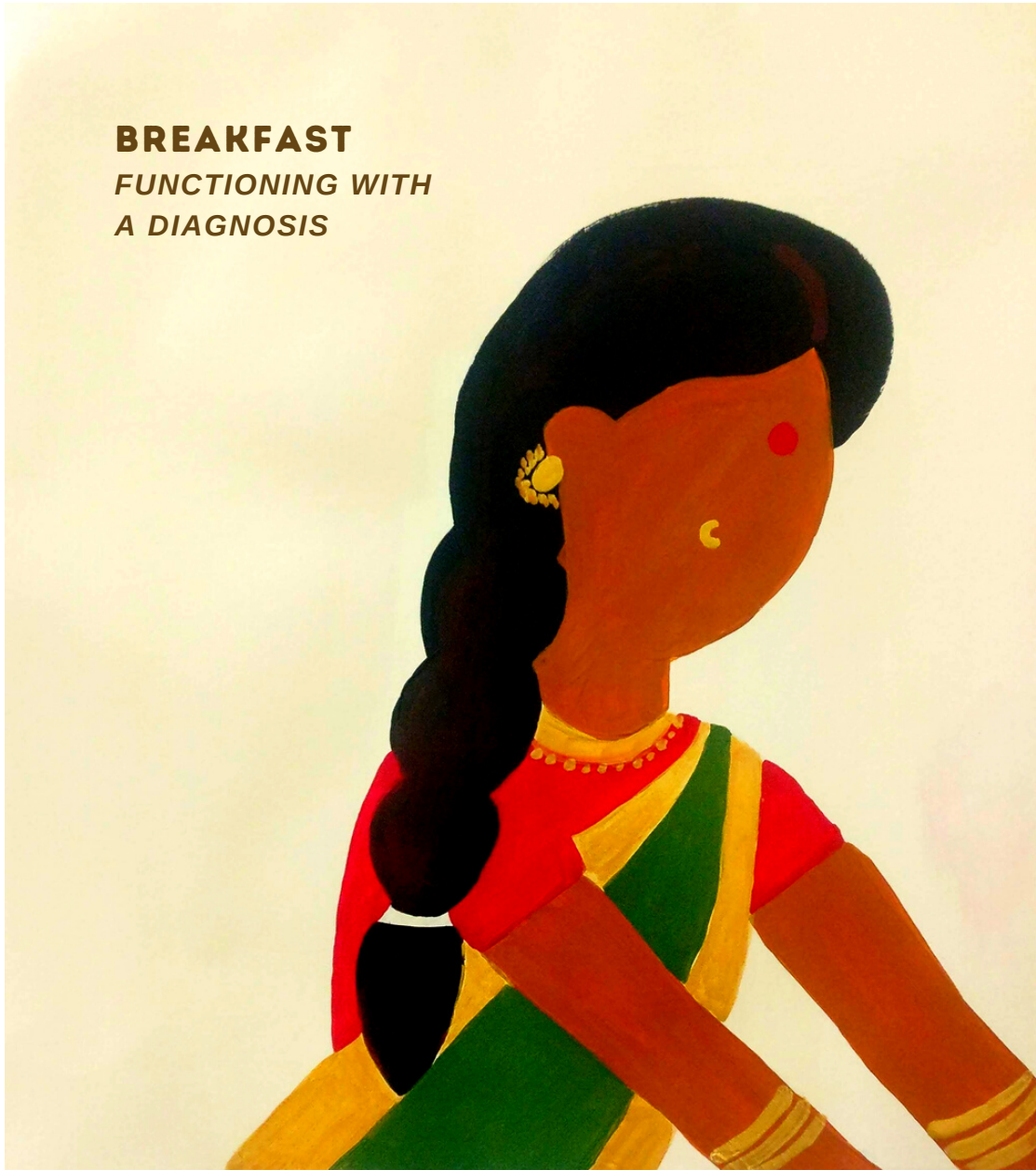
ONLY CHILD- MANY ROLES
*CAREGIVING AND ROLE REVERSALS
AMONG ADULT CHILDREN OF
PARENTS WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA*



*You're a one woman show.
Different garb for each
and every part you play.
Curtain rising and falling
with the tick of the clock,
cutting scenes in halves and quarters.
Caregiver. Breadwinner.
Parent to a parent.
You are your own mother.
You are your own father.*

*Walking the tightrope of adult/child
Switching like the flip of a coin.
How many people do you have to be?
For yourself, your family ?
Who do you have to be
To sustain 'normality'?
Who do you turn to?
They say it takes a village to raise a child
Well, you are that village.
You are your everyone.*

BREAKFAST
*FUNCTIONING WITH
A DIAGNOSIS*



The morning was rough, starting with the rituals of bathing, brushing and resistance to routine. But after going through the motions and taking my medication, I step into the kitchen and all is forgotten. Soon, there is hot sambar, chutney and podi dosa on the dining table, ready for everyone to tuck into. We eat like a family, and I'm happy. Making breakfast is my favourite part of the day.

I remember there were days I found it hard to get out of bed, couldn't even think of cooking. Today, I'm glad I have not forgotten. Glad everyone is enjoying the food.

There's nothing quite like it...sharing a meal I've made with my loved ones. A lot of people wouldn't understand how much this means. Who would understand? "It's just breakfast." they would say.



SWATI'S STORYBOARD

WAYS OF COPING FROM THE COMMUNITY

As part of this quarter's theme of "Mental Health in an Unequal World" we were thinking of how inequality stems from systems being organised around themselves, as opposed to the individuals who need them. We invited responses from the community as a way of reimagining a society more centred around individuals.

When we organise society so that we put people first, what becomes possible for them in their lives?

When society is organised to naturally make everyone feel included, talking about what makes one 'unique' or 'different' would be much easier. The filter of judgement shall possibly be out of the way.

the society starts being shaped according to the capabilities and capacities if people and people will not be forced into dragging themselves through society.

To be heard. In the contemporary world, people tend to talk more and listen less. When a non-judgmental space is created for people to just talk and be vulnerable, I think it teaches them acceptance and the art of moving ahead.

People will feel honoured unconditionally. And this will allow them to contribute to society from a place of abundance and not from a place of inadequacy.

What becomes possible with respect to people's mental health when it's a people-first society?

It becomes an enabling environment for people, a more wholesome and accepting and understanding place. The society in general becomes safer and more live-able.

In a society where you are free to be you, your mental health is going to definitely be better. Fear, shame and anger would hopefully not be so common.

It's probably utopia. :) But I won't stop believing we can get there. If we all just try. A little bit.

The art of acceptance. This space teaches you to accept things and move ahead with it. Possible to be vulnerable and not being judged by anyone.

Have you ever witnessed this happening somewhere; can you share what became possible for that person/group of people?

Working in the development sector had me work with the victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, and we have worked along with the counselors. We have had many of our clients approaching counselors with the hope that their problems will be resolved because the counselor will somehow come up with solutions. Instead, they learnt that the space was basically for them to talk and share and declutter their mind space. Also, decluttering takes a lot of energy from us and hence we need a professional hand to help us navigate through this.

I have never witnessed this. Feels like a utopian world for me. I find judgement and miscommunication w.r.t. mental health wherever I go. Its a hustle or be looked down upon culture that I'm surrounded with. its sed.

WE WOULD REALLY LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE AND MORE, FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS:

SOWBHAGYA, JYOTI, SHARVARI AND OTHERS



COMING CLEAN

New Haven, Connecticut. At the age of 32, Clifford Beers was discharged from what was his third hospitalization in a mental asylum in three years, due to mental breakdowns following a suicide attempt, after being diagnosed as a manic depressive. He had given a lot of years of his youth just going in and out of institutions, suffering immense physical and emotional abuse at the hands of poorly paid attendants, lack of supervision by the in-house physicians, and general unhygienic, barbaric, and inhumane living conditions of these places. Upon his discharge, he had a vision – an overarching, sweeping reform for the existing method of treatment of mental illnesses, which, by his experience, had a detrimental effect on the person's health and well-being. He wrote an autobiographical account of his institutionalization- *A Mind That Found Itself*, which was published in 1908, and lauded by eminent

psychologists of the time, like William James and Adolph Meyer. The book exposed the shocking details of what went inside these institutes, and started what is now called the Mental Hygiene Movement. In the US, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene was formed, which aimed to 'war against the prevailing ignorance regarding conditions and modes of living which tend to produce mental disorders'.

History has had a variety of fickle views on the origin of mental disorders itself. The historic pendulum, at various points of time, has been swinging on different accepted models; supernatural, behavioural, somatogenic (physical illnesses). Ancient Greece took up a biological stance, while various cultures in the millennia to come would attribute mental illnesses to supernatural causes, sometimes leading to extreme measures, like prosecuting the mentally ill, and banishing them to incarceration or exile. In some unfortunate cases, it would lead to execution (remember the Witch Trials?). The late 19th and 20th century also recognized behavioural and environmental factors as possible causes. At the turn of the 16th century, asylums and sanatoriums were widely used as dumping grounds for people with mental illness, who were imprisoned along with the poor, the homeless, the criminals, and the unemployed. The categorization was clear; this was a category of undesirables. Even the biologically deterministic stance had little to offer on the living conditions and the environment of the committed. In the

pre-Freudian era, the precursor to psychiatry as a discipline was biologically inclined, albeit with faulty and pseudoscientific notions and treatments, like purging, bleeding, and emetics, and the people practising this discipline were called Alienists, because mental disorders and aberrations at that point of time were considered 'alien' to the inherent human condition. In certain cases, the mentally ill were likened to animals; unable to reason, capable of violence without provocation, having little sensitivity to pain and hurt, and an ability to live in miserable conditions.

Beers was not the first person to recognize a need to depart from these archaic methods. The Italian physician, Vincenzo Chiracchi, in 1785, encouraged unchaining of the mentally ill inmates, and promoted physical hygiene, as well as recreational and occupational training. This practice took off in Europe after this, after a string of positive results was observed. This was also recognized by the Quaker community in England around the same time (although motivated by religious reasons), where William Tuke established the York Retreat in 1796, where patients were treated as guests rather than prisoners.

The movement that Beers started catapulted into a worldwide phenomenon, though it was not without its detractors. Initial research lacked scientific validity, and a lot of practices then still focused on controlling the ill, not the illness. In 1940, the Nobel Prize in Medicine was given to Antonio Egas Moniz, a Portuguese neurologist who

pioneered the art of prefrontal lobotomy- a surgical practice where a part of the prefrontal cortex was surgically removed from the human brain, to control the violent and uncontrollable urges in patients with psychotic disorders, but it also extended to people with mood disorders or learning disabilities, the most famous subject of all being the sister of John F. Kennedy, Rosemary Kennedy. However, with further research, and advances being made in the cognitive-behaviour aspect of human psyche, this practice was publicly discredited, and more



benevolent methods were introduced to take care of people with mental illnesses, and the Mental Hygiene Movement remained the ancestor of these leaps, eventually evolving into preventive health care, and promoting the general ideology of well-being.

We are still far from the ideal or even humane ground when it comes to how we treat mental health conditions, though. Stigma continues to persist, even in this globalized economy, with social media and all the literature at our disposal. Capitalization and privatization of healthcare industries have turned the field of mental healthcare into a luxury only the rich can afford, which is something that no amount of awareness can address. Pharmaceutical monopoly is ensuring that the field of medicine and psychiatry is still detached from cultural considerations, community health practices, and the idea of maintaining a harmony between our biology and environment. The hustle is to feel and be productive, rather than to feel good. There is hope, though. Clifford Beers entered the arena as a layman, as a victim, but he ended up changing the world as we see it. To keep questioning is the key, without assuming anyone has got it right in this world. You know yourself the best, and it is irreplaceable.



BREAK FREE FROM

People talk and no one listens,
It's a crowded world out there.
Can't scream, can't shout
Can't make sense of anything
But nobody listens.

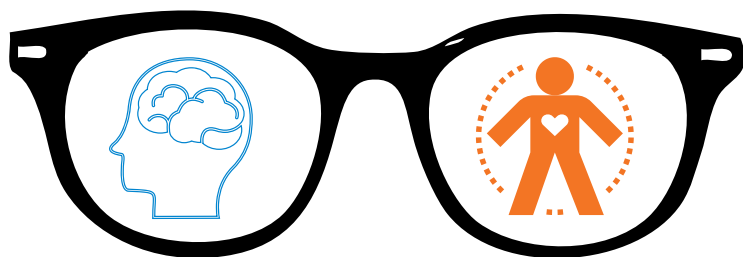
Who would talk about us?
The people that hurt
And the people that care

About the minds that suffer in silence
every day.

Its not about who talks about it
Its about the ones that listen
Quietly
To the ones that hurt
Every single day.

There is hope
There is love
There is joy
But there is also Pain
There is hurt
There is sorrow
And it must go away
So, we begin on the journey of
Making people sway to the tunes of
emotions
To begin a conversation today.

LAKSHMI'S LENS



TAKING A LOOK AT THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

HUMANIZING
MENTAL
HEALTH

Mental Health is an integral part of health and is more than the absence of mental illness. It is the foundation that helps us function effectively. It includes mental wellbeing, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. By this definition, almost all of us experience challenges in life that may affect our mental health. The last 18 months have forced us to cope with unimaginable situations, resulting in an unprecedented number of people voicing their mental health challenges. The pandemic has also been especially eye-opening in terms of the gross inequities in society about mental health, which has made me reflect on

how language and processes around mental health require “customization” rather than “one size fits all”. We, as mental health professionals, need to consider intersectionality, cultural context, marginalized experiences, and diversity of backgrounds in our clients, now more than ever. Here is a quick recap of some of my reflections and learnings along this journey:

**ACCESS AND AWARENESS AROUND
MENTAL HEALTH IS A PRIVILEGE**

In a recent group session, one of the participants, from a small town, voiced that they were completely thrown off by

by the idea of “mental health” as they’d never heard of it before. While the world has come far since the start of the digital revolution, we still have a long way to go when it comes to self-awareness and holistic wellness. Being aware of this distinction and using it to build a foundation for supported self-discovery as the first step for every client can help us make mental health awareness more accessible to all.

BODY LANGUAGE VERSUS LANGUAGE

Privilege also plays a role in the way we connect with our minds and bodies. Studies have shown that people in urban cities tend to engage with themselves in a more cerebral way through language and intellectual processing, while individuals from rural backgrounds are more in touch with their bodies and benefit from engaging in the expressive arts. Not everyone has equal access to intellectual processing, nor does everyone feel safe connecting to their bodies. For survivors of trauma and abuse, bodywork can be retraumatizing, if not done in an intentional trauma-informed way. Similarly, forcing cognitive processing without considering the cultural conditioning and implications of alien concepts such as boundary setting, prioritizing oneself, and sometimes even just being self-aware can have disastrous consequences for our clients.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN THERAPY, SAFE SPACES, AND SYSTEMIC FAILURE

We are often trained to focus on behaviors as symptoms of dysfunction within an individual, but this is a very

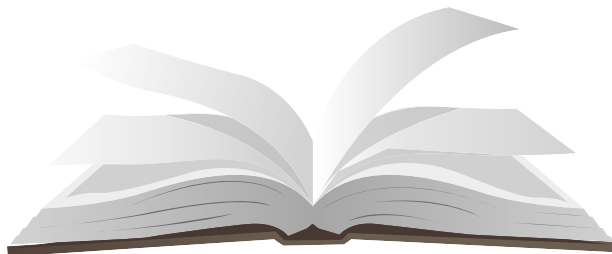
reductive way of thinking and completely negates the fact that our identities exist in relation to each other, the environment, and our larger social context. Considering the various intersecting identities, a particular client holds is vital to supporting them in navigating the world. The experiences of women, queer folk, and those from marginalized identities are constantly under threat in our hetero-patriarchal capitalist system, therefore many behaviors that might easily be identified as maladaptive and pathological by the DSM may be the effect of a complex set of defense mechanisms acquired to survive. This does not mean that toxic behavior cannot be called out by an intersectional therapist, only that every behavior is relational and must be identified and treated accordingly. In the area of mental health and wellness the term “safe space” is used widely without taking into consideration whether or not we can genuinely claim safety in our space, what is safe for one person may not feel safe to all, and a large part of ensuring a supportive and liberating environment is being open to consciously and intentionally renegotiating the bounds of safety alongside our clients in a way that works for us both.

Guiding someone’s wellness journey is a huge responsibility, so we need to remain conscious, open, and adaptable in helping each other navigate this journey. Only through fostering a sense of authentic community, can we heal in an equitable and sustainable way.



HELLO THERE! JOIN ME IN THIS JOURNEY OF UNRAVELING THE WONDROUS SPACE OF BOOKS/MOVIES THAT ARE LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH ☺

'ELEANOR OLIPHANT IS COMPLETELY FINE' BY GAIL HONEYMAN



Disclaimer: Spoilers ahead!

'Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine' is the story of 'Eleanor' a woman in her early 30's, going through the daily motions of existence. Eleanor is the narrator, who makes the reader privy to her inner monologue, but not to her most private thoughts and feelings, and so, there remains a cloud, an uncertainty about her, through the unraveling.

She's been working for the last nine years as a finance clerk in the same graphics design company in Glasgow. She arrives and leaves at the exact same time each day and does the newspaper crosswords every day during her lunch hours. Her life is carefully timetabled-one where she avoids social interactions, spends her weekend with frozen pizzas and vodkas. Life is more of a habit for her and being lonely isn't really a bother.

The story gradually builds up a character with deep-seated fears, lurking in the abyss of her being. Certain experiences, growing up, have worked on her psyche, which are alluded to occasionally. Through her growing years in a variety



of foster homes, she teaches herself to be fine, *completely fine*.

The book is a rollercoaster of sorts as we journey along with Eleanor through the good, difficult and better days. During the book, we meet other characters including Raymond, the IT guy at Eleanor's office, who we also get to know with Eleanor. The pair's relationship, traits and views on the world is wonderful and you can easily be absorbed in Honeyman's writing and sharp dialogue and plot.

Messages of loneliness, love, grief and the larger theme of mental health is spread throughout and incorporated within the story.

On reaching the latter part of the story, the import of everything that happens prior to that strikes you. In the 'after', Eleanor embraces a sort of newness with glee, and Raymond, a true friend, watches and applauds. As one has known, not all is ever lost. If there's even one who believes in us, and loves us, it is enough to bring us back from the dead, as it were.

After arriving at the end of the book, I just sat and looked at Eleanor, sitting across me, and said, "Well done you!" She had been with me the entire time, and I with her. We had bonded.

Honeyman is a fine storyteller, weaving it all like an expert in her debut novel. She has breathed life into Eleanor, making us fall in love with her. It is certainly worth a read.

So many lines in this book stay with me and some of them that really strike a chord are as follows:

"It takes a long time to learn to live with loss, assuming you ever manage it. After all these years, I'm still something of a work in progress." (p. 236)

"Such a strange, unusual feeling - light, calm, as though I'd swallowed sunshine." (p. 314)

"I feel sorry for beautiful people. Beauty, from the moment you possess it, is already slipping away, ephemeral." (p. 28)

The ending is again an emotional roller coaster. You go up and down and then up again and then you're just floating.

There's so much to Eleanor. Everything that she has been through, the people in her life and the way in which they have impacted her. The larger theme of mental health and all the questions that it brings up for me and makes me think.

However, she is portrayed to be, there's a glimmer of hope at the end that one day, she gets to be much more than just fine.

You know, there are the books that inspire you to be braver. Then there are the books that dare you to travel more. And some books stun you, leaving you speechless.

But there aren't a lot of books, especially the ones that highlight mental health, that inspire you to be a better person – kinder, slightly more tolerant, and a bit more helpful.

'Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine' gives you another perspective on life. A perspective we so often forget about.

And that's what makes it so special to me.

MY RATING:





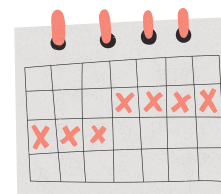
MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK ON CAMPUS



WHAT DOES MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING MEAN TO YOU?



QUARTERLY MENTAL HEALTH CALENDAR



Across the year, various days, weeks and months are observed as events to spread awareness on mental health and well-being. For this quarter of the year, here is a list of days, weeks and months our team will be commemorating through events and curated content to keep de-stigmatizing mental health. Watch out for our emails for more details!

OCTOBER

(MENTAL HEALTH MONTH)

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY (OCT. 10)

NOVEMBER

INTERNATIONAL STRESS AWARENESS WEEK (NOV. 2-6)

KINDNESS WEEK (NOV. 8- 13)

TOLERANCE WEEK (NOV. 15- 19)

DECEMBER

WORLD AIDS DAY (DEC. 1)

DISABILITIES AWARENESS WEEK (DEC. 3-10)

HUMAN RIGHTS WEEK (DEC. 10-17)

**TOGETHER LET'S SPREAD AWARENESS
AND FIGHT STIGMA!**

APPLICATIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT TEAM 6



At Azim Premji University, our approach to Mental Health & Wellbeing is Proactive, Preventive & Supportive. Our objective is to create awareness and destigmatize Mental Health concerns among the members of our community. To achieve this objective, we involve, collaborate and work with all the stakeholders in the community. The Peer Support program is one such initiative that involves the student population to create another layer of support for our students in addition to the Conversations team of counsellors.

Peer Supporters are a voluntary group of students, both UG & PG, who are selected, trained, supervised, and mentored by the Conversations team to provide emotional support to their peers.

The Objectives:

- ✓ To create awareness to seek help for emotional distress, mental wellbeing, and personal development.
- ✓ To identify and help students in distress.
- ✓ To identify and refer students to the Conversations Team to seek professional help if needed.
- ✓ Equip students to support each other and to build a caring community.

Eligibility, Selection Process & Training:

We will start the training process towards the end of 2021 and it will be completed by the end of February 2022.

Eligibility:

- UG: 2nd & 3rd year students (as of January 2022)
- PG: 1st year 2nd-semester students (as of January 2022)

We follow a 3-step selection process:

1. **Application to volunteer:** If you are interested in volunteering as a peer supporter, we have attached an application form in this mail with some questions that you need to answer.
2. **Face to face interview:** Once we receive your responses, the selected students will receive mail from the Conversations Team for an interview.
3. **Training:** Selected students will undergo peer support training in basic counselling skills, supervision, and mentoring.

Once the training is completed, the final batch of peer supporters will be announced.

If you are interested in applying to be a part of the sixth batch of peer support, kindly fill in the application form that we have emailed.

Looking forward to your responses!

**NEWSLETTER DESIGN AND
LAYOUT CREDIT: VEDA DANDAMUDI**