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Addicted and mentally ill: Challenges and consequences of stabilization

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Mental illness has forcefully galloped to the forefront of Americans' imagination, primarily due to recent "mass-casualty events" perpetrated by individuals diagnosed with mental illness. Away from the national debate around actions by the mentally ill, 1 in 4 Americans (or 26.4 percent) are diagnosed with a mental illness (NIMH), and about 5 percent of these are serious mental illnesses. Further, NIMH estimates that "nearly half (45 percent) of those with any mental disorder meet criteria for 2 or more disorders, with severity strongly related to comorbidity."¹ Some of these other disorders include substance addiction, further complicating the stability and recovery envisioned by symptom management and psychotropic medication. Use and abuse of drugs often leads to masking or reversal of any gains in controlling symptoms of serious mental illnesses (SMIs), and drugs and illicit substances are freely available to individuals with diagnoses. Further, it is not clear that there is significant research on the severity of undiagnosed mentally ill persons using drugs. Yet there lacks a concerted effort either to educate the public, providers and caregivers on the benefits of limiting access to drugs, alcohol and similar substances to individuals diagnosed with SMIs, much as under-age persons are prohibited from purchasing alcohol, despite the benefits that this approach might have in improving the mental health outcomes. This paper proposes a more rigorous, spirited approach combining legislative, policy and activist approaches to improve the public's overall awareness of the benefits of limiting access to alcohol and drugs by the mentally ill.

Biography

Urshila C Williams graduated from Liberty University with her Masters of Arts in Human Services with a specialty in Family and Marriage Counseling. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Psychology, from Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, Kentucky. While at Eastern Kentucky University she was deemed a McNair Scholar, she was also a member of the Mortar Board National Senior Honor Society, apart of the Psychology Honor Society, Psychology Club and a member of the Kentucky Counseling Association. She has diligently worked with the individuals with mental health illnesses every year since she graduated with her Bachelor's degree in 2010. Urshila has served in the Kentucky National guard for four years and received a handful of awards while under contract. In addition, Urshila has conducted research and presented it at two conferences. One of the two papers that she presented was *Reforming the U.S. Prison System: The Case for better Inmate and Correctional Officer Training*, and secondly, *The Outlook of Assisted Suicide in the Elderly Community*. In her undergraduate years she conducted research on the question of "Does Physical Activity Have an Effect on Preschoolers With and Without Special Needs and their Ability to Engage?" Urshila is continuing to pursue her career in counseling, seeking to be accepted into a PhD program.

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