

Mental Health Awareness Week – 11th to 17th May 2015 – Overcoming Stigma

Atiqul Haq Mazumder

Department of Adult Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Mental health awareness week is going to be observed this year from 11th to 17th May. Stigma about Psychiatry is a global issue running from the very beginning of every civilization since today. As being a psychiatrist in a developing country, I am fighting against stigma by not only treating the patients suffering from schizophrenia but also educating parents of adolescent school going children in Bangladesh. I was inspired by the work of my Japanese colleague Hatsumi Yoshii, who has been developing an effective educational program since 2011 to improve knowledge of schizophrenia in parents of junior and senior high school students in Japan (Yoshii, Watanabe, Kitamura et al., 2011).

I have the opportunity to join her subsequent researches. We have found that integration of mental health awareness and related educational programs in the curricula of high school and vocational school is essential to overcome stigma (Yoshii, Watanabe, Mazumder et al., 2013). Another interesting finding is that, more the negative attitude and social distance among mothers towards schizophrenia, less the chance of reporting mental illness of their children to the health clinic (Yoshii, Watanabe, Kitamura et al., 2012). In a 2009 cross sectional research in Bangladesh, lack of knowledge about mental health has been found to be the major (50%) cause of delayed referral to the psychiatric outreach services (Chowdhury, Yaseen, Chowdhury, & Hakim, 2011).

Which group of people should then be targeted mostly for the dissolution of social stigma about psychiatry? The answer is very obvious: Parents of adolescent school going children. They're truly the role models for the development of new generations with sound mental health.

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*Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to: atiq10@gmail.com