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The impact of mental illness in UAE society

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While the focus on raising awareness in the UAE on mental health is ever relevant, there is some good news. Over the last five years, more people are ditching the stigma attached to seeking help for psychological problems and getting their lives back on track. As the many instances of celebrities and even non-celebrities committing suicide due to mental issues proves, the times we live in do not offer us the luxury of being in denial of what is troubling you. Any such denial comes with a heavy price to pay. Although stigma exists (about mental health), there is an increase in awareness about it thanks to the availability of knowledge resources (especially media). Probably, this is why more people are reaching out to the professionals. Another reason for the increased awareness is that few insurance companies have started covering psychotherapies. There is an increase in the number of parents bringing children to get help for various reasons such as academic difficulties, poor focus and concentration and overuse of gadgets. There are a number of issues among young adults and teenagers including poor emotional regulation, poor time management, delayed task initiation, following through on tasks, behavioral regulation, perfectionism and exam phobia. Anxiety in children is the most common issue that we see, followed by depression. Parents are more likely to bring their children in for treatment and invest in the child's well-being than to do it for themselves. Parents of school-going children often come stressed that is related to their children's poor academic performance. Children develop anxiety about exams from 9th grade when the pressure to perform well starts. This peaks in grades 11 and 12. Children were seen attending schools with certain curriculums which are very demanding. The whole family goes through stress during exams. Traits of perfectionism and anxiety in the child coupled with unrealistic parental expectations worsen the scenario. The stigma associated with mental health issues is making children bully/tease their peers who need care and psychological support. The child with a mental health issue is probably coming from a culture/family where seeking psychological help is perceived as a weakness. These factors reinforce stigma.

Biography

Najiha Syeda is a CDA Certified International Counselor who has worked in Saudi Arabia, Australia and UAE. She has completed her Bachelor's study in Psychology and Post Graduate Diploma in Child and Youth Counseling. She has also studied MSc in Counseling and Psychotherapy. She is a Member of American School Counselor Association, International Association for Counseling and Affiliate Member of Psychotherapy and Counseling Federation of Australia (PACFA).

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