

ESSAY - 4.

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA IN
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Outline:

1) Introduction

Thesis Statement: Stigma around mental health has deep and intense effects on individuals, society and overall national performance. The need to address the stigma in contemporary world is important for healthy and productive societies, contributing to development of countries.

2) Historical perspective in shaping stigma surrounding mental health.

3) Factor contributing to Mental Health Stigma-

a) Media portrayal and negative stereotyping of mental illnesses.

b) Lack of awareness regarding mental health and illnesses.

c) Cultural influence in shaping stigma around mental health.

d) Gender differences in stereotypes against mental health.

4) Effects of Mental Health Stigma.

a) Impacts on individual contributing to low self-esteem and isolation.

Date _____

Day _____

- b) Hindrance in seeking help - fear of rejection and discrimination.
- c) Impacts on Societal Wellbeing
- 6) Addressing Stigma around Mental Health: A Changing Global Perspective
 - a) Successful Anti-Stigma Campaigns
 - b) Stigma debunking through stories and shared experiences.
 - c) ~~Cultural~~ Influence in debunking stigma surrounding mental health.
- 7) Media's Role in Debunking Mental Health Stigma.
 - a) Positive portrayal of mental illnesses and mental health.
 - b) Breaking stigma of mental health through social media.
 - 8) Educational and Awareness Programs to break stigma.
 - a) Integrating mental health awareness in schools.
 - b) Workplace mental health programs.
 - c) Community involvement to break stigma surrounding mental health.
 - 9) Role of Language in Debunking Stigma
 - 10) Conclusion:

"There are so many people who are suffering in silence. And there's still stigma attached to mental health which we have got to completely obliterate!"

The statement of Duke of Cambridge, Prince Williams address ~~how~~ the stigma attached to mental health even in today's contemporary society and is the reason people still choose to stay silent and suffer to avoid being labelled and discriminated. The pervasive specter of mental health stigma casts a shadow on the well-being of individuals and communities alike. The ~~next~~ word "mental health" is defined by negative set of belief, and attached to words like insane, madman and misconceptions poses a barrier to the pursuit of mental well-being. Addressing the mental health stigma is important to ensure the overall well-being of society and individual's productive contribution to alleviate the status of society as a whole. The historical impacts of mental health stereotyping has seeped into today's perception of mental health contributing to negative stereotyping and stigmatization along with media's negative portrayal, lack of awareness, cultural influences and gender differences in treating mental health. The stigma attached to mental health has ripple effect on individual's wellbeing and society's and

hinder the overall growth of nations. Though progress had been made to address the stigma through anti-stigma campaigns, story sharing and cultural competency in debunking the stigma attached and positive media role. Still, there is significant stigma attached to mental health and needs to be addressed through educational awareness and using non-stigmatized language to break the perpetuating cycle of stigma. Stigma surrounding mental health has deep and intense effects on individuals, societies and overall performance of nation. The need to address stigma is important for healthy and productive societies.

Throughout the history, mental health and illnesses have been perceived as spiritual possessions or a fault in the character of the person and several unhumane practices were used to treat them like trephination, a surgical procedure to drill a hole in the skull to get rid of bad blood or spirit leading to deaths of patients. Another method used was drowning the person to check the character of him/her. These practices are transformed in the contemporary world. Nowadays, mental health is still perceived as demonic possession in some parts of world and unhumane methods are used like hitting the patient until the spirit leaves. The historical perspective

of spiritual influence is still used to define mental illnesses. The mental health patients are treated as insane and madmen and weak persons just like in the past.

The stigma attached to mental health is due to the negative portrayal of mental health and illnesses by media through oversimplification of mental illnesses and portraying the patient as violent and harmful. The popular T.V series "Monk" shows the oversimplified disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. The protagonist plays the role of detective with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and due to his illness, he pays close attention to cases leading to advancement in career. While, the disorder is not only linked with cleanliness and attention to detail, it is much more complex than that. Also due to this oversimplified portrayal, people misunderstand the mental illnesses and absent-mindedly use the terms to describe normal behaviours. The hashtag OCD (#OCD) commonly used on social media to describe one's attention to cleanliness. Moreover, the portrayal of Schizophrenia in movies and dramas are just the tip of ice-berg i.e. only positive symptoms are portrayed like delusions and hallucinations. A study highlights that 24% of characters with schizophrenia commit suicide in films and T.V dramas while only 4% - 13% die of suicide in reality. This is an exaggeration.

increases the risk of suicide and suicidal ideation. The negative and irresponsible media representation attach stigmas to mental disorders and mental health contributing to adverse impact on lives of individuals.

Another contributing factor in shaping stigma of mental health is lack of awareness regarding mental health. The lack of awareness of mental health issues results in negative beliefs and attitudes like sign of weakness or disassociation with religion and treating them as insane or discriminating against them. When in reality it is just an illness of mind like any other illness of other body parts. According to Michelle Obama, it is time to "flip the script" because

"Whether an illness affects your heart, your leg or your brain, it is still an illness, there should be no distinction."

Lack of awareness results in isolating people with mental health issues and contribute to the negative stereotyping and with education, the misconception surrounding mental health can be dispelled.

Culture is one of the contributing factor of stigma attached to mental health. Different cultures have different conception surrounding mental health issues. A study highlighted how different culture perceive mental illnesses.

According to the study, in Asia, mental health illness is seen as personal weakness and failure of self-control while in Western societies, people with mental illnesses are perceived as dangerous and unpredictable. In contrast, in Arab and African countries, mental illnesses are a result of demonic possessions, punishments from divine or result of dissociation from religion. Different religions & cultures perceive mental illness differently but the common thing is misconceptions and negative perceptions leading to discrimination against the individual with mental illnesses and social isolation.

Culture shapes the stigma attached to mental health and contributes to misconception of mental illnesses resulting in suppressing the voice of people, combating with mental health issues.

These factors along with other effects the individuals on personal level as well as on society level. The mental health stigma impact individual by lowering self-esteem, negative self-perception and isolation often leading to suicidal ideation and attempt. Due to the negative perception of mental health issues, the affecteds perceive themselves as lesser than their peers and different from them and due to inability to speak up, they

found themselves in the dark alley of isolation which can only be escaped through suicide. The suicide rate worldwide is quite high and according to World Health Organization report, **one in four people** worldwide commit suicide everyday. Accordi This show how serious it is to debunk the stigma attached to mental health, so that more lives can be saved.

Mental Health Stigma also hinders the individuals to seek professional help. The negative perception of mental health issues stops individuals suffering from it from seeking help as they fear the rejection and discrimination by the society and peers. Around only **10%** people in Pakistan receive mental health treatment (psychological/psychiatric treatment) as per World Health Organization report, 2022. The fear of being left out and rejected by the society results in overburdening and people become extremely ill to the point they can't take anymore and eventually end their lives. The suicidal population of Pakistan is **24 million** according to President Arif Alvi because only 10% has the courage to seek help while the rest stay silent due to fear of rejection.

The unhealthy individuals can not contribute to society productively and results in economic

and social downfall. Mentally ill people can not do much for the prosperity and development of society. This is why attaining mental health is one of the goals in sustainable development growth program. If the mental health stigma contributes to social division and fosters a climate where misconceptions prevail, hindering progress towards creating a society that values empathy, understanding and collective well-being.

The far-reaching consequences of stigma demand urgent attention and comprehensive efforts to reshape society and support structures surrounding mental health. Over the years, several anti-stigma campaigns have been launched to break the perpetuating cycle of negative stereotyping of mental health and promote a more positive image. The popular campaign include CALM - Suicidal does not always look suicidal, to portray that people with suicidal ideation does not seem suicidal rather they act normal and masks their feelings and often times people do not notice until the person commits suicide. This campaign included videos of people and posters who committed suicide but never showed any sign. Another campaign is kicking the stigma, to raise awareness about mental health and raise and distribute funds

to educate and help people. Another popular slogan is "You are not alone." It is an effort to remind people suffering that they do not have to suffer alone silently and there are people who care for them.

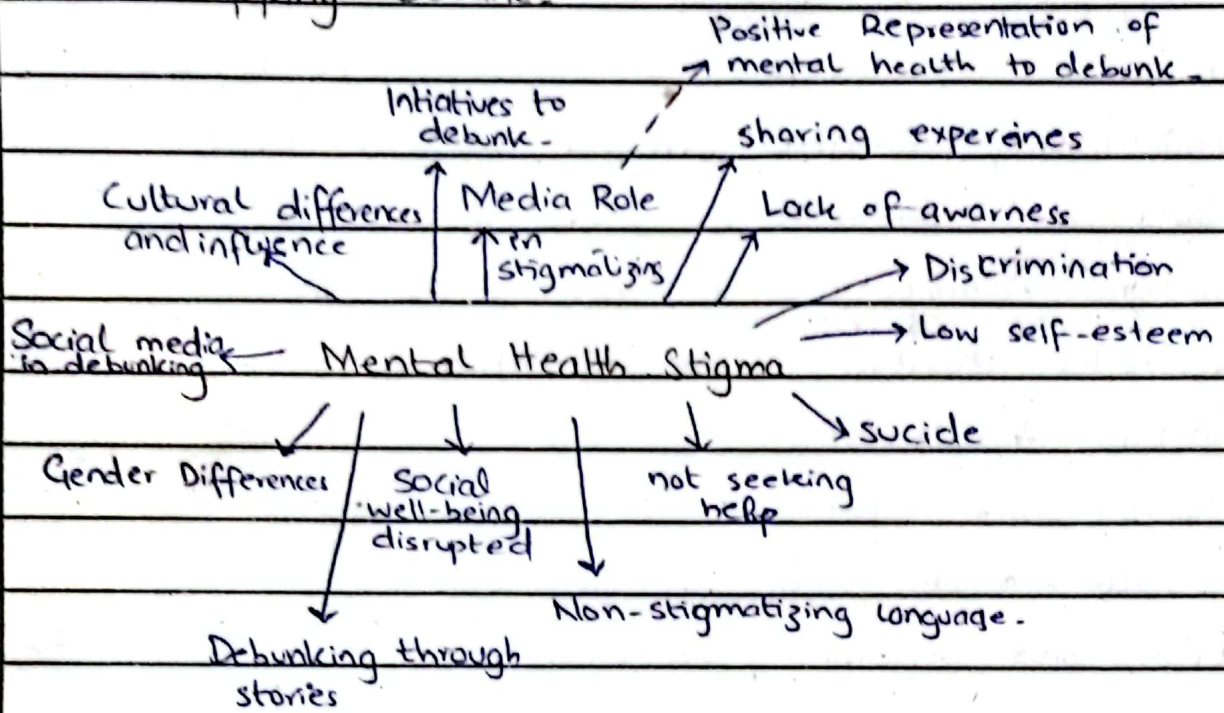
Another successful attempt of addressing the mental health stigma is through stories and share experiences to motivate others to speak up and seek help. The stories shared on blogs, programs and specifically social media helps in raising awareness about mental health and encourage people to ask for help when needed. One such story is of an Indian actor who committed suicide "Sushant Singh", his story was very trending and it also raise awareness that most often people do not show any signs of mental illness until they commit suicide. The suicide of Sushant Singh helped in raising awareness not only about mental health but also highlighted how mental illnesses are more stigmatized for men to speak up than women. Another effort was "Mind if this speaks to you, speak to mind," through this campaign, people shared ~~there~~ their experiences and stories of them or people around them to de-stigmatized mental health.

In addition, to these successful efforts

recently media has also been playing positive role in debunking mental health stigma through positive portrayal of mental health and responsible reporting of the ~~issue~~ mental illnesses. Dramas like Good Doctor, represents how people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder can also productively contribute to the society and are not violent or unpredictable rather just needs extra care. Other dramas include Doctor Slump - a Korean drama portraying depression and impacts of overburdening, and another ~~drama~~ various dramas and films represents mental health in positive light. Media shapes the opinions and perceptions of people and positive portrayal of mental illness can help in de-stigmatizing it.

In summation, mental illness health stigma contribute to negative impacts on society, individual and development of nations and addressing the issue properly will help in sustainable development of countries along with healthy and productive citizens. Mental Health is not something to be ashamed rather it is same as getting a flu or breaking your leg i.e an illness, and should not be treated distinctively.

Mind Mapping Outline



Outline

- 1) Intro
- 2) Importance of addressing mental health stigma in society
- 3) Historical influence in stigma around mental health-
- 3) Factors Contributing to Mental Health Stigma-
 - a) Media portrayal and negative stereotyping of mental illnesses
 - b) Lack of awariness regarding mental health & illnesses
 - c) Cultural Influence in shaping stigma around mental health.