



Mental illness - don't just suffer in silence

Some are found collecting rubbish wearing plastic bags on the streets and main roads. Some are chained and locked inside cages and unused backyard rooms by their family members who do not want the community to know about them. Others just suffer in silence.

These are people suffering from mental illness, or a mental disorder as it is also called.

According to the Department of Health, July is Mental Illness Awareness Month. During this month, the department will inform people of the problems of mental illness.

Why focus on mental health?

There is a need to teach people how to care for those with mental illness, what treatment is available and how it affects families.

It will also teach them not to be ashamed of mental illness. This will help to reduce discrimination against people who are mentally ill.

Such discrimination prevents many people from receiving the treatment they need and deserve. It also results in the majority of mentally ill persons ending up unemployed, not having

access to care or education and forced to rely on state grants for the rest of their lives.

What causes mental illness?

There are many causes and many kinds of mental illness. Among the causes are great trauma (shock), alcoholism, drugs, accidents and loss of job.

There are different treatments for different kinds of mental illness. In some cases a doctor prescribes medicine. In other cases the patient is treated by a psychologist, or, in the case of alcohol and drugs, they can be treated at special rehabilitation centres. Many people improve after the correct treatment and can lead stable, normal lives.

Are mentally ill people dangerous or violent?

Mentally ill people are not usually dangerous or violent. But it is possible in some cases, depending on the nature and seriousness of the illness.

Is mental illness a disability?

Studies have shown that mental illness is one of the leading causes of disability. This depends on the nature of the illness. – *Ndlovu Khangale*

Raising awareness

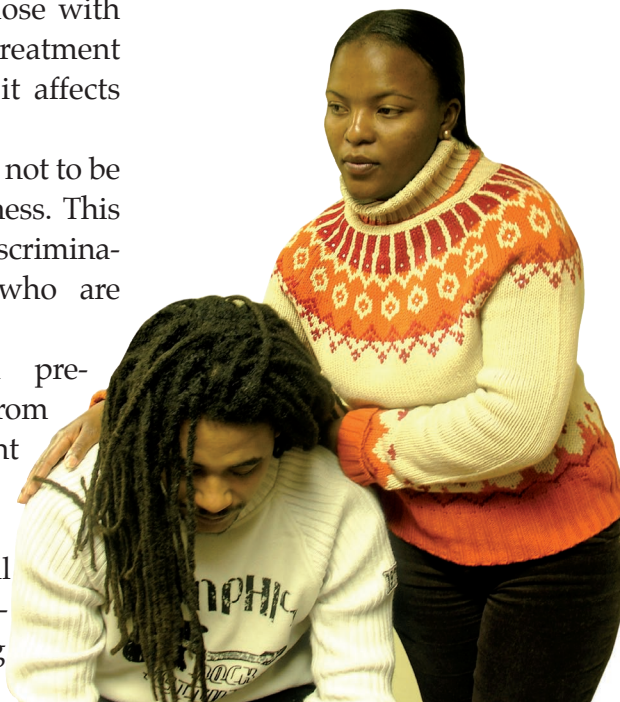
We do not have to be ashamed of mental illness. It can happen to anybody. Only a few people who suffer from mental disorders receive treatment. Most of them struggle in silence.

The South African Federation for Mental Health has set the theme for this year's awareness as "Partnership in human rights for mental health".

The Department of Health focuses its campaign on informing people about the Mental Health Care Act.

Some of the key messages during July are to:

- **protect the rights and dignity of people with mental illness.**
- **ensure that mental health-care is provided at primary health-care levels.**



For more information on mental illness, call (012) 312-0690

Write to Vuk'uzenzele Health Advice, GCIS, Private Bag X745, Pretoria, 0001. The Department of Health will advise you.

E-mail us on: vukuzenzele@gov.za.