

Impact of Mental Illness (Schizophrenia) on Family

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Many people are ignorant about the fact that mental illnesses can affect the body. They give serious attention to physical wellness but often ignore the mental health of an individual. For instance, many may be aware of physical diseases or disorders and usually common terms such as cancer, heart attack, diabetes etc., can be heard even from a not-so-erudite person. But only a few of them might be knowing the terms used in mental illnesses like psychosis, dementia, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder etc. Often people put all mental disorders into a single category, labelling the patient or the affected individual as mentally sick or lunatic, though medical science has shown that there are different illnesses, disorders, situations and moods affecting cognitive activity.

Talking about such mental illnesses, we have one such kind of disorder known as Schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a mental disorder in which an individual is affected by delusions and hallucinations often which go unnoticed for the time being and later on create problems for both the affected person and their caretakers or family members. Here we will be talking about the caretakers or family members of the patient who have to undergo mental stress amid the patient with schizophrenia.¹

Most of the articles talk about the individual who is suffering from this disorder, but there are fewer articles that also focus on the mental health of the other person

who is looking after the affected person. For instance, an individual whose family member is affected by schizophrenia has to make sure that the patient does not create any issues or harm themselves or others due to their hallucinations and delusions. In most schizophrenic cases, the patient considers the family members to be enemies or becomes sceptical and hostile towards them, thinking that they are after their life or their reputation. In such a situation, the family person has to pacify and take the affected patient into confidence, which is very difficult to manage as it is not easy to convince a schizophrenic patient and explain to them about reality against the patient's delusion. Similarly, the family member must visit the counselling psychiatrist and psychologist for the patient and regularly follow up with the prescribed medications and other activities, and it is not easier to get the psychiatric medicines at the pharmacist store as most of them decline to have the stock and some consider only if the prescription is signed and stamped on having the same date. Similarly, the society around the people who are ignorant of the mental illness facts starts disturbing the caretaker and the family member when they come to know that the particular person is affected in the family either giving the unwanted and ludicrous suggestions or saying that they have been possessed by some supernatural powers etc.

Basically, the family member must have a good amount of patience to look after the affected individual and to cope with their regular activities.² For instance, a person whose family member is affected might also be worried about the attempted suicide or creating a brawl based on the hallucinations or the delusions of the patient and the family member might be in constant thought and get anxious about whether the patient may try to create an issue or will try to kill themselves or others,

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or if they will create any other nuisance. Regarding the medications, it should be handled with safety if there is an overdose and if there is an irregularity in the medication prescribed as it might be risky for the patient and therefore, family member has to take care of prescribed medicines at a regular time and follow up with the same. There are a few instances where the affected patient is criticized by others, stating the person is doing it purposely, and the family members are threatened with legal action. It is really difficult for the family member to cope with the external world and to look after the patient while simultaneously managing other routine things and therefore the caretakers often land into depression or other mental disorders.³

Despite the fact that the vast majority of organisations are focused on providing services to patients, relatively little aid is provided to family members and caretakers. According to the findings of a few studies, members of the patient's family who provide care for schizophrenic patients reported much higher levels of mental, financial, and physical stress than the family members of patients who were only impacted physically by the illness.

The question that must be answered is how well-versed these family members are in the conditions and how to care for those who are affected. Some family members face significant emotional hardships as a consequence of their roles as caretakers. Some have argued about how much care is required because of the chance that a family member of someone who is ill may be influenced by difficult circumstances or substantial life changes. Many caretakers have faced the stigma of society and many have come across embarrassing situations due to

the behaviours of patients and the caretakers themselves faced disruption of sleep, family life, work cycle and social activities. In addition to that, even the financial expedition of counselling, medications, and other necessities adds a load. The family member also faces emotional and mental challenges with the withdrawal of social support from family, relatives, and neighbours.⁴

Families must be given information about the condition, its early indicators, recurrence of drug side effects, coping with aggressive behaviour, and many other elements of patient care at home.⁵ Making knowledgeable about the condition, symptoms, and treatment options available to family members and caretakers. The mental health of the family members must also be ensured by treating them the same way the patients are treated. And society must be made aware of mental disorders and illnesses and educated to help and cope with the situations.

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