



Mental Illness and the African Community

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In general, mental illnesses in the society is regarded as a taboo, but in the African community, it is treated as a plague that can be contracted like any other communicable disease. This outlook is mostly due to a lack of understanding of what mental health is, or how symptoms can be treated or managed.

Mental illness is any condition that affect or, cause a change in an individual's thinking, emotion, and behavior. There are so many factors that leads to a degenerative or so-called full blown mental illness. The causes can be put into four groups, with simple

examples to back them up.

- (1) Biological or hereditary causes (Triggered during pregnancy or hereditary)
- (2) Injury or trauma (Accidents involving the head or spine, causing severe damage)
- (3) Chemical imbalances (Hormonal causes; for example, women after delivering a baby)
- (4) Substance abuse (Use of drugs that alter one's thought and behavior)

The early signs of mental illness is usually noticed by the immediate family, but ironically, this is the reason why symptoms are mostly neglected. Because

people tend to love their family, it is hard to detect that anything is wrong with them. Mental illness is associated with problems of being unable to function at full capacity within the family, work environment, and socially. As a result, there is an obvious disruption to the person's identity. When we look around us - in our immediate environment, there are some factors that are inevitable in the African community that lead to environmental causes of mental illness; homelessness, violence, sexual, physical and emotional abuse, and of course, substance abuse.

Mental illness is considered a silent epidemic throughout most parts of Africa, due to our structural and systemic barriers, such as inadequate provision of healthcare services, which is slowly creeping into developed countries today - so it's no longer an African issue. If you live in New York and you don't have the appropriate insurance, you will not get the appropriate health care, and you could be in the hospital, and get a biased care due to the kind of insurance you have. This is a topic for another time. According to (Collins et al., 2011; Becker & Kleinman, 2013),

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