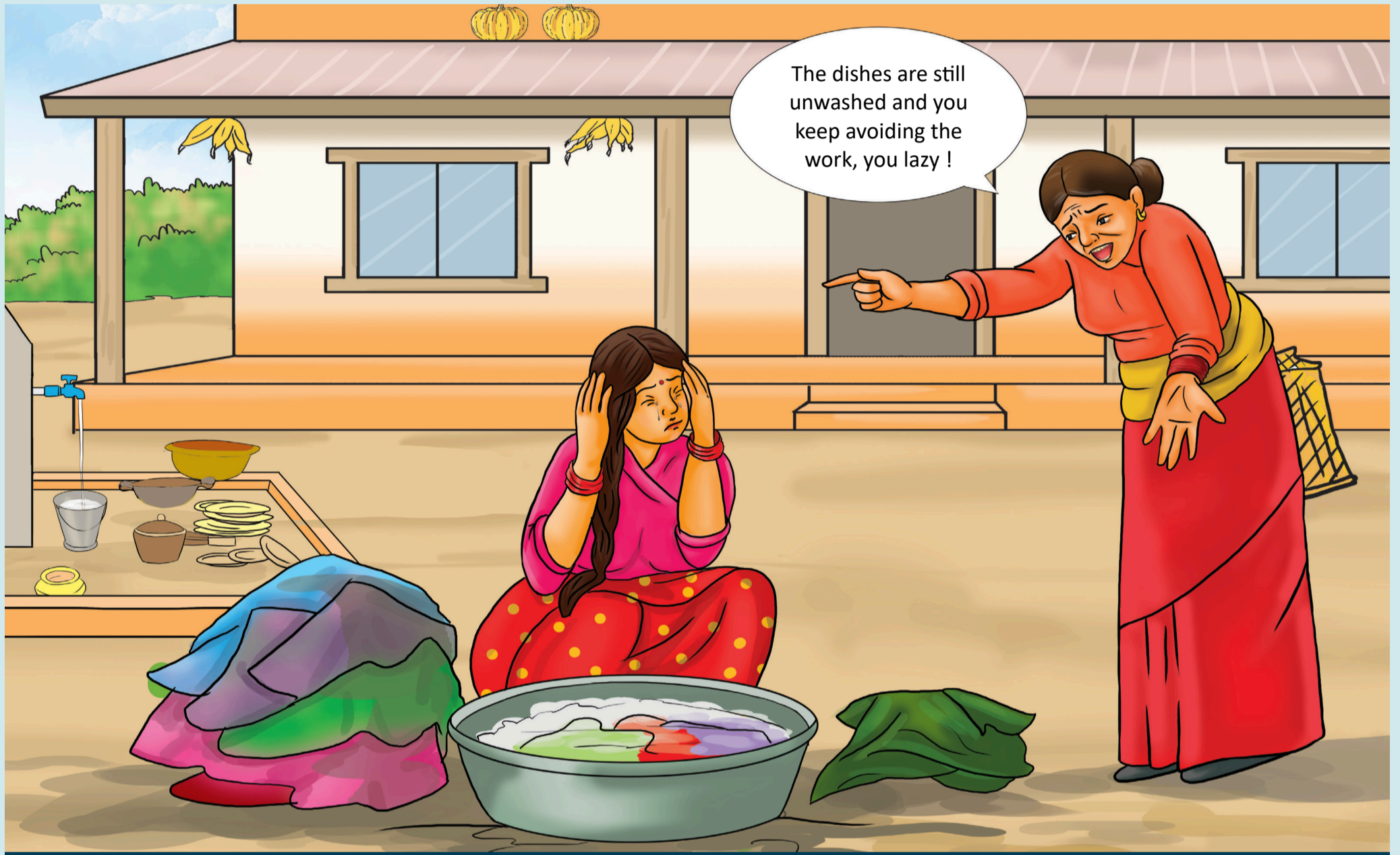


उदासीनता बारे लाञ्छना, भ्रम र यथार्थ Stigma, Myths and Facts About Depression



Background

Stigma refers to the act characterized by negative attitude, accusation, hatred, discrimination or devaluation directed towards any person or a group based on specific characteristics such as their faith, thoughts, behavior, work, etc.

In mental health, stigma refers to the act of commenting negatively, having negative beliefs and demonstrating negative behaviors towards people with mental health conditions. Stigma often leads to social exclusion or discrimination. In our communities, we have found that people with mental health conditions face many types of stigma and discrimination.

Examples of stigma and discrimination against people with depression

- ➔ Blaming them for having the mental health condition
- ➔ Avoiding close contact with them
- ➔ Calling them with derogatory words or names and mocking them
- ➔ Backbiting them
- ➔ Making fun of them, etc.



People with depression are facing stigma and abuse not only from the community but also from their family members and friends.

They are often called by various derogatory names such as: **slow** (*loshe*), **crazy** (*pagal*), **lazy** (*alchi*), **slacker** (*kaamchor*), **single-minded** (*ekohoro*), **insane** (*bahula*), **mentally unstable** (*dimag Khuskeko/bigreko*), **wild** (*jangali*), **stubborn** (*atteri*), **selfish** (*ghamandi*), etc.

For men with depression terms like **disgraceful** (*kulangar*), **substance user** (*gajedi*) are used, while for women, terms like with **cunning** (*chandalni*), **gossiper** (*chothale*) are often used.

Besides this, people often say things such as **influenced by black magic or witchcraft** (*kasaile kehi lagaideko, boksi Lageko, or mohani lagaidiyeko*) as a rationale for having depression. Similarly for elderly people with depression, stigmatizing statement like: **“Gai goru budho vaye bhir khojcha, manche budho vaye nihu khojcha”** is commonly used to indicate that people tend to seek arguments and fights with their increase in age.



How does stigma affect treatment and support?

- ➔ It prevents or acts as a barrier to seek help and treatment
- ➔ It forces those with problems to suffer in silence
- ➔ It forces people to keep their treatment secret or consume medication without letting others know
- ➔ It forces them to seek treatment from the centers that are far away
- ➔ It compels them to seek support only from traditional healers and shamans

Many people with depression avoid treatment due to stigma. Even if some people gather the courage to seek treatment, hurtful comments like “he/she has gone crazy” (*Yo ta bahulaye cha*) or “he/she is taking medicine from doctor that treats crazy people” (*yo ta bahulako upachar garne doctor kaha bata dimag ko ausadhi khancha*) making them reluctant to seek treatment or continue the treatment. This can make the treatment less effective and potentially worsen the condition.

Many people with depression fear and worry that if others get to know about their condition, the dignity of self and their family will be lost, their relationship with others will be strained, they will be excluded from social activities, their job or work might be affected or their marital relationship might end up in divorce.

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Myths and Facts about Depression

To reduce the negative impact created by stigma and discrimination, to encourage people to seek treatment, and to create a conducive environment, we need to be aware about the misconceptions and myths about depression that exist in our communities.

It has been found that several myths and misconceptions related to depression in the community act as a barrier to seeking and receiving help. Now we shall discuss about some myths and facts related to depression.



Myths



Facts

<p>Depression isn't a real problem. (It's just an act to avoid the work)</p>	<p>Depression is the most common mental health condition. Since this condition also makes a person physically very weak, it may appear as if they are acting to avoid the work, which is not true.</p>
<p>People with depression can never live a normal life.</p>	<p>People with depression can live healthy, happy, and productive lives after the appropriate treatment.</p>
<p>Depression is caused by personal weakness, ghosts (<i>bhutpret</i>), witchcraft (<i>boksi</i>), or by divine causes (<i>devi deuta ka karan</i>)</p>	<p>Depression isn't caused by personal weakness, ghosts, witchcraft or divine causes. Rather it is caused by biological (genetic, physical), psychological (unpleasant life experiences, death of loved ones) and social (poverty, unemployment) factors.</p>
<p>Depression can't be treated.</p>	<p>Depression can be effectively treated through counseling and medication.</p>
<p>Depression goes away or is cured on its own.</p>	<p>Depression doesn't disappear or heal on its own. Ignoring symptoms can make the condition more complicated. Seeking appropriate help is necessary for effective treatment.</p>
<p>Only some people have depression.</p>	<p>Depression can affect anyone, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, profession, education or health status.</p>



Myths

Facts



<p>There's no benefit of talking about depression with family or friends because they won't understand.</p>	<p>Sharing thoughts and feelings with people you trust can help reduce one's pain and suffering. It also makes it easier to explain your problems to others and seek treatment. There is a saying,</p> <p>"A joy shared is a joy doubled, a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved"</p>
<p>Only trained professionals can help or treat people with depression.</p>	<p>Friends, family, and community members can also provide equally important support. They can help by accompanying them to health workers, ensuring treatment continuity, and observing changes during the course of treatment</p>
<p>Depression can only be treated with medication.</p>	<p>Medication isn't the only treatment option. Counseling, therapy, and yoga can also help reducing symptoms of depression.</p>
<p>Medication for depression must be taken for life and may lead to weight gain and dependency.</p>	<p>Not all individuals with mental health condition requires lifelong medication. Duration of treatment depends on duration of symptoms and their severity. Also, all medications do not lead to weight gain or dependency.</p>
<p>Depression is contagious and can spread to healthy people who help or stay close to those affected.</p>	<p>Depression is not a contagious disease. Therefore, helping individuals with depression, sitting next to them, or coming in their contact does not spread it.</p>



Negative consequences of stigma

- Can create barriers to seeking help and treatment
- Can lead to discrimination in the community
- People may be affected by threats or violence
- Reduce self-respect and weaken self-esteem
- Changes in daily routine
- Can damage social image and relationships
- May reduce support received from friends family and society
- Can encourage superstitious beliefs
- Discontinuation of treatment
- Feeling worthless or suicidal

Stigma affects not only those with mental health condition but also their families. Family members may experience discrimination in the community, social rejection, and feelings of isolation, which can negatively impact their health and create financial problems in the family.

Similarly, others may avoid visiting the homes of people with mental health condition, refuse to help them, or avoid sitting with them, believing the condition is contagious.

In some cases, family members themselves may hide people with depression or even keep them chained up due to fear of embarrassment or fear of loss of social prestige. There are also instances where people with depression face rejection, are expelled from their own homes, or are kept isolated.



Family's Role in Eliminating Stigma:

- Accept the person with depression and their problems within the family
- Offer them love, care, and support
- Encourage open discussion about mental health condition and experiences within family and community, and encourage others to do the same
- Avoid blaming the person for their problems
- Help them understand that depression is treatable
- Include people with depression in family discussions, gatherings, events, and decision-making processes
- Use respectful language instead of derogatory and disrespectful terms

(When talking to people with depression, use respectful and compassionate terms like mental health problem (*man ko samasya, manorog*) or psychosocial problem (*manosamajik samasya*) instead of derogatory terms like “depressed, loshe, pagal, kamjor, alchi”)

Summary / Key Message:

Many myths and stigmas related to mental health conditions including depression exist in our community. We can all contribute significantly to reduce the stigma. Family members can encourage to seek required help and treatment by using respectful and compassionate language, having open discussions about the problems, and by providing necessary support to those affected.

What's important to remember is that depression can be cured if it is identified and treated early. If we all work together to "create a society free from stigma and discrimination", those affected can seek treatment and support without any fear.