

**Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word,
A listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring,
All of which have the potential to turn a life around.**

(Leo Buscaglia)



More and more I find myself in situations where people of any age are suffering from mental illness. We encounter the man, woman, child or teen either showing signs of distress or, worst yet, acting like everything is okay in the midst of a chaotic lifestyle. Is depression increasing?

In an article by Andrew Chambers, he notes that mental health is the invisible problem in international development. The World Health Organization estimates that mental and neurological disorders are the leading cause of global ill health and disability. However, there appears to be little interest or action on the part of governments or NGO's. It's important to note that 'mental illness' encompasses a wide spectrum of symptoms and suffering.

Mental Health in many countries receives less funding and support in comparison to the funding of Cancer Research, HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB. The stigma attached to mental illness may be one cause that charities have a difficult time raising awareness and funds.

Today, it seems that almost every family is touched by some form of mental illness. Receiving a true diagnosis is often a struggle in terms of follow-up treatment and support. Who is monitoring the medication and helping the suffering individual learn healthier ways of living and handling difficult situations? And who is supporting or mentoring the family, friends and communities who are deeply affected?

Some of the factors that may cause mental vulnerability are *lack of acceptance of inherited traits, *hopelessness, *negative social media, *anger, hatred and jealousy which have taken control in one's life, *lack of mentoring and encouragement, *not allowing failure to be a time of growth, *family break up and feelings of abandonment, *violence and repression in its many forms, and *fear about the future.

These are some of numerous challenges facing our world, our church, our religious communities today. Are we prepared for the seeming increase of suffering people needing medical treatment, understanding and support? How are we educating the loved ones who often feel disempowered in the whole process of seeking help?

Statistics can assist us in understanding the overwhelming needs. But they don't help us in individual situations to find solutions that benefit the person living with mental illness and those closest to the person.

What is the call for us today regarding mental health?

Sr. Teresa Morrison, CPS

