

Publication: The Straits Times

Title: [Employers, drop prejudice against people with mental health conditions: Halimah Yacob](#)

Author: Melody Zaccheus

Date: 8th October 2016

SINGAPORE - Employers, drop your prejudices and stop discriminating against people with mental health conditions. That was a call made by Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob on Saturday (Oct 8).

Speaking on the sidelines of a mass walk at Orchard Road aimed at raising awareness about the importance of mental health, Madam Halimah urged employers to give people with mental health conditions a chance at employment.

She said that getting hired is an important step in the road towards recovery for such people as it will help them find a "meaningful purpose" and enable them to take care of their own needs.

"In addition, we must also have a support system at work where human resource practices can support people with mental illness so that they can be productive," she said.

The mass walk, which also sought to eradicate the stigmatisation people with mental health conditions face, was co-organised by 15 community mental health partners such as the Caregivers Alliance. The walk was also part of efforts to commemorate World Mental Health Day on Monday (Oct 10).

Madam Halimah was joined by more than 1,200 participants at the "Walk with Us, Stamp out Stigma" event. Among them was Ms Winnie Kong, 28, a sales assistant at a thrift shop, who suffers from borderline personality disorder.

Ms Kong said she had struggled to find employment for sometime and was rejected by numerous employers for positions in administration and sales. "When they see that you have this illness, they will turn you down. They think that we are violent but this is not true for most cases. I think we should be given a chance."

The Agency for Integrated Care, one of the organisers of the event, said that more than 50,000 residents have been reached through its various mental health awareness activities under its Community Mental Health Masterplan. It added that community mental health teams and networks have supported about 20,000 cases of people who may be at risk or have mental health issues.

Madam Halimah said that she is also concerned about young people and elderly.

Citing student suicides, she noted that the young face "tremendous pressure" from the moment they enter primary school all the way till university. She said: "I think we do a lot in terms of early intervention programmes but we also need to provide support to our students in university."

On the elderly, she said as the country ages rapidly, the need for the community to band together to show them support and render aid, increases.

Publication: The Straits Times (Forum)

Title: [Share stories of mental-illness sufferers to promote understanding](#)

Author: Lee Kay Yan

Date: 8th October 2016

I agree with Ms Sukriti Drabu that today's skewed attitude towards mental illness tends to put the blame on the sufferer himself ("Raise awareness of realities mental-illness sufferers face"; Wednesday).

With World Mental Health Day next Monday, we should beef up public education about certain deep-seated myths and misconceptions about mental illnesses.

The Institute of Mental Health publishes a quarterly newsletter to inform the public on matters of mental illnesses.

Personal stories penned by patients are included.

However, the newsletter does not seem to have a wide base of readership, other than the patients themselves and their family members involved in their care.

The personal stories are highly uplifting and could potentially remove much of the stigma society has against mental illnesses, if more people could gain access to them.

There have been calls for legislation to stop employers from asking applicants to declare if they have a mental illness in job application forms and to employ them nevertheless ("Call to remove mental health query on job forms"; Sept 27, "Ask about applicant's ability to work instead" by Ms Jacelyn Chia Yee Fang, and "Give young people with special needs a fair chance" by Madam Liew Yuen Ping; both published on Wednesday).

If this materialises, we can better support mental-illness sufferers in their rehabilitation and reintegration, as an inclusive society.

Publication: The Straits Times

Title: [People with mental issues face job discrimination](#)

Author: Melody Zaccheus and Priscilla Goy

Date: 9th October 2016

The hallucinations and delusions started in her late teens. Then five years ago, Ms Hafizah Kamarulzaman was diagnosed with schizophrenia after giving birth to her son.

While the single mother, now 23, managed to control her condition after seeking help, she struggled to get a job for almost four years, she told The Sunday Times.

She described how she was turned down for positions in the food and beverage and healthcare sectors, on the sidelines of an event called "Walk with Us, Stamp out Stigma". It was held in Orchard Road yesterday to combat the stigma faced by people with mental health conditions.

She said: "When the boss saw in my application form for a waitressing job that I had a mental illness, he asked what would happen if I had a relapse. I told him I had coping methods that I could use.

"His response was, 'If that's the case, then our position is full.'"

Ms Hafizah finally found a job late last year as a programme executive at Club Heal, a social service organisation that helps people who have mental illnesses. It was also where she had been treated.

Yesterday's event was co-organised by the Agency for Integrated Care alongside 14 other community health partners such as Caregivers Alliance and the Institute of Mental Health, to commemorate World Mental Health Day, which is observed tomorrow.

At the event, Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob urged employers not to be prejudiced against people with mental health conditions.

In a recent National Council of Social Service survey of 477 people recovering from mental health issues, seven in 10 said they had problems "living with dignity" because of other people's attitudes and actions, making them feel unaccepted by society or unable to contribute meaningfully to it.

Others interviewed by The Sunday Times said they felt the sense of societal rejection most acutely while job hunting.

Ms Yamuna Segaran, 26, who has had acute anxiety and depression since her teenage years, said an interviewer once pushed her resume away upon learning about her mental health condition.

This was even though the interviewer had initially been impressed by her work experience.

Ms Yamuna, a part-time student at Kaplan Singapore who is pursuing a counselling degree from Northumbria University, said: "The look on the interviewer's face is still etched in my mind."

While she wanted to reintegrate into society, the difficulties she faced in finding a job made it harder to do so. She persisted in her job search, thanks to the support of her family, counsellor and psychiatrist and has since found a job as a supervisor at a bar.

Ms Valerie Liu, 34, who has had schizophrenia since 2008, feels that people with mental illnesses also have to overcome their own biases and fears. Some may themselves hold negative stereotypes associated with mental health sufferers, or be afraid of communicating with people.

Ms Winnie Kong, 28, a thrift shop sales assistant who suffers from borderline personality disorder, said she had been rejected by employers for positions in administration and sales.

She said: "They think that we are violent but this is not true in most cases. I think we should be given a chance."

Publication: The Straits Times

Title: [Living with dignity hard for many with mental issues](#)

Author: Janice Tai and Melody Zaccheus

Date: 9th October 2016

Seven in 10 people with mental illness believe they are stigmatised by society, while slightly more than half have problems joining community events.

These are some of the key findings of the first government survey on the well-being of those with mental health issues.

Describing the findings as worrying, social workers are calling for more to be done to raise awareness of the problem.

The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) - a statutory board that oversees more than 450 social service organisations here - polled 477 people recovering from mental health issues such as mood and anxiety disorders or schizophrenia last year.

The study, whose results were released to The Sunday Times yesterday, found that 55 per cent had problems joining communal activities, including public festivities and communal sporting events.

Seven in 10 said they had problems "living with dignity" because of the attitudes and actions of others, meaning they do not feel accepted by society or that they can contribute meaningfully to it.

Ms Tan Li Li, executive director of the Singapore Association for Mental Health, said the findings are of concern as the respondents were using mental health social services in the community.

This means that they were likely to have less severe mental health issues and were able to hold jobs.

"So, knowing that 70 per cent have problems due to the attitudes of others may be cause for us to think about what we are lacking as a society," she said.

More than one in 10 people here will have a mental health condition in their lifetime, according to a 2010 Singapore mental health study.

The most common condition is major depressive disorder, which affected more than 5 per cent of adults in the 2010 survey, or more than 57,000 men and twice as many adult women.

Mr Anjan Ghosh, director of the service planning and development group at NCSS, highlighted that this feeling of being stigmatised could also stem from the respondents' own perceived fears and misconceptions.

He urged more interaction between both groups.

He added: "It is a vicious circle. The more there is perceived stigma, the more people with mental health issues isolate themselves and the more misconceptions develop due to the lack of interaction."

To raise awareness and educate the public on mental health issues, NCSS is coming up with a series of videos featuring real-life stories of people with conditions such as depression.

Last year, NCSS and the Singapore Anglican Community Services started an employment internship programme that provides on-the-job training for people with mental health issues.

By March next year, NCSS intends to start an employment assistance programme that will enable employers, through training for instance, to better understand and harness the potential of such workers.

Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob yesterday also made a call for employers to drop their prejudices and stop discriminating against people with mental health conditions.

Speaking on the sidelines of a mass walk in Orchard Road aimed at combating such stigma, held to mark World Mental Health Day tomorrow, she said getting hired is an important step in the road towards recovery for such people.

Employment will help them find a "meaningful purpose" and enable them to take care of their own needs, explained Madam Halimah, who is an MP in Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC. "Give people with mental health issues a chance to work and also to contribute to the company," she urged.

Publication: The Straits Times

Title: [Schools step up focus on students' mental health](#)

Author: Amelia Teng

Date: 10th October 2016

Schools have told The Straits Times they are paying more attention to students' mental wellness, amid a national bid to tackle the problem of young suicides.

From peer helper initiatives and talks on mental health to setting up rest corners, some are going beyond counselling to encourage students to speak up about difficulties - whether emotional or academic.

Last year, there were 27 suicides among 10- to 19-year-olds - a 15-year high. This was double the 2014 figure, despite a drop in the overall number of suicides.

In August, two students from a top junior college killed themselves within 10 days. Last month, a local university student was found dead on campus.

Minister of State for Education Janil Puthuchery said in Parliament last month that the Ministry of Education (MOE) was reviewing suicide-prevention strategies. A multi-agency group has also been set up to better understand how young suicides can be prevented.

Meanwhile, schools have taken preventive steps. Raffles Institution (RI) has trained 29 students in basic counselling skills and mental health issues as part of a Peer Helper Programme started this year.

It held its first Mental Health Awareness Week last year. The event was also held this year.

RI student He Zhouzhou, 17, a peer helper, said it aimed to help students understand conditions like depression through booklets, and booths set up in the canteen.

Since last December, Raffles Girls' School has set up four dedicated counselling rooms. Previously, counsellors met students in their offices. This year, student leaders started a peer support system to help juniors look after their classes' well-being - such as teaching them ways to handle cliques and highlight problems to form teachers.

Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) Independent, which has three full-time counsellors, plans to start a Peer Always Listens programme next year to train 30 to 40 second-year students to be better listeners and spot signs of distress.

At Crescent Girls' School, Secondary 4 students attend motivational workshops and are given notes and gifts from other students, parents and the school.

Mrs Tan Chen Kee, its principal, said: "We recognise that O levels are around the corner and stress can build up and when students are discouraged, negativity sets in."

Dr Daniel Fung, chairman of IMH's medical board, said some pressures that teens face today are not as "tangible" as before. "It's about how others view them, finding purpose in life - and sometimes in top schools that's more intense."

The MOE said it "closely monitors the socio-emotional and mental well-being of our students" by working with schools, families and other agencies to build support networks. "Emphasis is placed on early identification and timely support for students who are in distress before the problem is exacerbated."

Teachers are trained to detect signs of distress in students and provide basic counselling support, she said. Parents and students said that peer support is a useful first line of defence, as teens may prefer sharing their struggles with friends.

Mr Paul Long, 52, who has two sons in Primary 5 and Secondary 2, said: "It's a good initiative, but peer helpers must also be mature so they themselves don't get affected."

RI student Lee Yao En, 17, said: "It can be quite paiseh (Hokkien for embarrassing) to say 'I feel depressed', and this stigma causes people to be less open about it.

"But you can't just shrug it off. To the person, it means everything."

HELPLINES

Samaritans of Singapore: 1800-221-4444

Singapore Association for Mental Health:
1800-283-7019

Institute of Mental Health's Mobile Crisis Service: 6389-2222

Care Corner Counselling Centre (Mandarin):
1800-353-5800