

Living with a Family Member Having Mental Health Issues

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Mental illness is a condition that involves emotional, cognitive and behavioral changes associated with impairment in personal, social and occupational functioning. A variety of psychosocial issues that can result from mental illness includes stigma, poor quality of life, social isolation, financial issues, lack of support, family and relationship issues, legal and ethical issues, substance abuse, and low self-esteem (Dayani et al., 2024; Phillips et al., 2023).

It is a complex and multifaceted experience to live with a family member who has a mental illness. A close family member or loved one suffering from a severe mental illness can significantly affect many facets of life. This includes social, psychological, emotional and interpersonal relationships, leisure activities, work, finances, mental and physical health, and personal growth. The course of illness is prolonged and unpredictable, with significant mental health crises occurring along the way. Mental illness not only affects family, it also affects relatives, neighbors, colleagues, coworkers and other members of society (Aass et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, an estimated 15-20 million people, or almost 10% of the population, suffer from mental health illnesses. Majority of patients with chronic mental illness live with their families. According to

The National Psychiatric Morbidity Survey of Pakistan in 2022, out of every three adults in Pakistan suffers from mental illness. Psychiatric disorders are major public health issues with higher prevalence. It is estimated that 24 million people in Pakistan need mental health services and only about 500 psychiatrists are available. Over 90% of people with common mental illnesses do not visit mental health professionals or receive treatment. In Pakistan, individuals with severe Psychiatric illnesses often seek help through outpatient Psychiatric services. Long-term hospital stays are not possible due to a shortage of inpatient psychiatric facilities. Their families are overwhelmed by a lack of resources, stigma or understanding, and they frequently abandon them (Dayani et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024; Siddiqui & Khalid, 2019).

Family members are the primary caregivers of the person suffering from mental illness. Family members play an important and multitasking role in the care of a person with mental illness. Family members who are taking care of a relative having a mental illness frequently suffer from psychological pressure, stress, anxiety and emotional instability. They feel frustration, anger, helplessness, future uncertainty, social isolation and low self-esteem. In many cultures, they feel embarrassed and hide the illness due to stigma and fear leading to social isolation; and lack of awareness often make the situation worse. Financial difficulties and limited occupational opportunities are common outcomes of caring for a family member with mental health concerns. To provide necessary care, families reduce working hours or quit their jobs, which can worsen financial stress and lower family well-being. Mental illness

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also disturbs family relationships (Chadda, 2014; Shimange et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, family can also foster resilience and personal growth. One should realize that he/she is not alone if a family member or dear one experiences a mental health issue. Worldwide, the millions of individuals who suffer from mental health issues every year are frequently assisted and supported by family members and caregivers. It is important to provide information care, psychoeducation and new skills to deal with family members with mental illness. To properly manage patients, family members and caregivers may need certain techniques and abilities like developing caregiving and interaction skills, improving caregiver self-efficacy, establishing appropriate boundaries, and managing behavioral and communication issues with a person with a mental illness (Aass et al., 2022; van Husen et al., 2025). Families living with mentally ill members require both formal and informal support systems. The mental well-being of the family is also important. Comprehensive emotional support, counseling and guidance, psychoeducation, coping techniques, stress management, improved family functioning, and self-care may be beneficial for family members. In addition, family members may want mental health professionals to recognize and appreciate their involvement. Supportive and empathetic attitudes are necessary from mental health professionals. The Social Work Department also provides financial assistance and free medicine for patients (Budden et al., 2023; Siddiqui & Khalid, 2019).

It concluded, that the experience of living with a family member who has mental health issues is difficult and involves many financial, social, and emotional difficulties. Families can, however, also benefit from resilience and improved connections if they receive the right assistance, awareness and coping mechanisms. Improving these families' quality of life and the results for the family member with a mental illness

requires acknowledging and addressing their needs.

Contribution of Author

Bushra Akram: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

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