

Short Paper

Mental Health an Overview

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doi:10.22158/sshsr.v3n2p31

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sshsr.v3n2p31>

Despite its bad press among the anti-psychiatry movement from my experience I think the mental health system can help people with schizophrenia to the point that life with the illness is worthwhile. We can live within the confines of the system and be grateful of the help we receive.

Instead of being stigmatised by capitalist values these challenges to the system can be overcome by changing attitudes in society. This requires a proper understanding of how the mental health system functions to help people with schizophrenia and how societies ignorance of the condition can change so it more socially inclusive.

Care can be provided within the mental health system and has allowed for some change in the underlying social values. We can live quite happily in the system without opposing it while at the same time the values that that are excluding us are going to be subject to change.

As Margaret Thatcher said capitalism is founded on the Victorian Values of self help and self reliance but the paradox here was that this was not always possible and some community care was needed to teach this. Self help had to be taught and was not always going to be down to how strong you are.

Self help means we have to be resilient to life's stresses and strains in order to overcome them and not to do so was a sign of weakness. The contradiction here was that too much stress could make you snap so everything in life wasn't going to be like this.

That recognition gave birth to the idea of mental illness that going mad wasn't your fault it was just the result of a chemical imbalance albeit stress induced. That recognition meant an inability to cope but because it could happen to anyone it could also be treated as an illness without blaming the society or the individual.

The idea of the political side of the anti-psychiatry movement was to give madness a space so it could voice its opposition. But that space could be used to support the system. Voicing that support draws on first hand experience on how the system can help without having to oppose it.

One of the worst aspects of the mental health system was that it involved some confinement and this still happens with sectioning and forced admittance to hospital. Once there you are being cared for and with insight you will begin to understand you have an illness which is need of curing.

Being sectioned can be traumatic for the patient and their families but it quickly becomes apparent that you are in need of care and that you have a mental illness. There isn't time to explain all of this if you refuse treatment and getting to hospital as quickly as possible is of the essence.

With medication you can be cured or stabilised so why oppose psychiatry when it seems to work? Other treatments like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can also be very effective and they have been advances made through research such as the drug clozapine which has been a more effective cure.

All of this cures the stress induced schizophrenia and many people are going to be able to cope with the problems in life that caused the illness in the first place. Instead of opposing the system many people are going to be integrated back into it.

Instead of being alienated by the dog eat dog way of life which is capitalism you can view it as just ignorance and so it is not really that society is opposed to care within the mental health system. It is not really societies fault that they think like this and can be remedied through education.

There is growing evidence that attitudes to mental health are beginning to change especially through publicity campaigns organised by the government but also by charities like MIND and RETHINK. These charities are vital to overcoming social exclusion.

We all the same need to be tough to live in capitalist society but treatments like compassion focused therapy can allow us to participate with the material benefits this may bring. Films like A Beautiful Mind are instrumental here in that they inspire hope that we can still be high achievers.

Once diagnosed the stigma and labelling becomes to be seen as dangerous but once discharged it is possible to live anonymously within the mental health system free from any danger though this might mean living in sheltered accommodation.

Once again the stigma which might have alienated you from society can be overcome and you can lead a relatively normal life with marriage and friendship whatever the society seems to think about you. It is still possible to find happiness despite the dominating values.

The same system that is supposed to be alienating you provides much empowerment and financial support so things on the material side of life are not so bad...we do not do so bad out of capitalism and this can help with mood and the stresses of life with schizophrenia.

Once we understand the otherness of schizophrenia and how frightening it is we may begin to understand that we have to sympathise and to be more compassionate. To do this we must understand the suffering involved with the condition. That should be enough to help remove the stigma and allows meaningful social inclusion.

This is particularly important to allowing service users to find work and enjoy some missing fulfilment in their lives by being socially useful, though some voluntary work maybe possible. Yet instead of being alienated we may find fulfilment within the capitalist system.

The care I experienced in hospital was empowering and got to the point I could cope with life instead of being alienated. I was well enough to enjoy things again instead of being socially excluded and this opened doors to.

So just because we are potentially alienated by stigma doesn't mean we will be lead to oppose the system. The dog eat dog way of life can be very stressful and cause the illness in the first place as schizophrenia is stress induced. What we have got to understand is that we just that we have an illness it is nobodies fault and there are various ways of dealing with the condition.

The big bad world is out there but the mental health system will protect you it and house in sheltered accommodation which is just that: a refuge from things. Instead of exclusion there is contact between staff and other residents which doesn't leave you socially isolated.

Hospital too was an asylum from capitalist society and again still functions to look after you during the worst times when you are suffering and cannot look after yourself. This works too and can help get you back on your feet as does sheltered accommodation

Instead of confinement you will be released back into the community but the system doesn't just dump and further care is provided to help you function> again this is very expensive but is a further sign how much we care

Once answer to this has been the now longstanding introduction of therapies at day centres which teach many useful courses that can help you relax and cope with having a severe mental illness.

These can engage the mind and emotions and make us feel a whole lot better. We can learn to come through a nervous breakdown and heal the depression which life can cause. There are again people in the world who care about us and this can be a source of strength to cope with things.

Instead of the stigma of being weak day centres run courses on confidence building calming down which all a sort of strength which is needed to find your own way back into the world.

There is a lot of different types of support available through the mental health system and I was fortunate to meet some very intelligent people including university lecturers. I began to find that life was very stimulating again and started to enjoy it further.

instead of alienation I was beginning to get some idea of the effort involved going into psychiatric care including all the money spent on researching the medications and drugs. They were trying to find a cure not to exclude me.

For me there was by now no disjunction between capitalism and care and it is not just dog eat dog but there is a lot of sympathy in society once we realise some people have a disability. People ae going to want to help once they understand it better.

There is growing evidence that attitudes to mental is changing and a lot of effort goes into explaining the stigma form charities like Mind and Rethink. The possibilities for social inclusion are always increasing though this may take some time yet.

One graphic example of this for me was joining a local archery club when I told them I was schizophrenic and they knew what it was. There was a chance to engage in activities outside the mental health system so that life could suit you more individually.

Schizophrenia affects one in a hundred people so everyone is going to know someone with the illness and many people already understand the diagnosis. Again that should allow for some social inclusion

instead of being alienated. The problem of stigma was not as all encompassing as I thought it was when I was first diagnosed.

To feel sympathy we need to explain what the illness is like which takes some getting across and this is the key to changing societies prejudice. That requires an in depth narrative which is beyond the scope of this article but one example will illustrate this so far.

There were three things that result from paranoia which in my case derived from believing I had caused 9/11: including the fear which can be very physically difficult and prolonged, shattering your emotions believing you are responsible for killing so many people and the feeling of being morally worthless at the same time.

We also need to explain the great care that is provided again with graphic examples and this should be a model to us all. Doctors and nurses are there to relive suffering and that care helps us realise why it should be that this is just an illness.

The care provided by the nurse was a lovely experience and contracted a lot with the society that doesn't understand things. It cheered me up and made me feel valued as a person with a mental illness. In your heart you begin to realise mental health care comes from what is best in human nature.

They are very sensitive to the suffering involved and recognise the pain you are going through and that is the ethos of psychiatric care and why psychiatrists come to choose the job they are in in the first place.

Their professionalism underlies the fact they want to do something about curing it.

Capitalist prosperity also pays for all the drugs and medical personnel aimed at find a cure to an illness and the authority of this should replace the stigma with a more scientific understanding of the illness. This again should help remove capitalist stigma.

The cause of a mental illness derives from the fact that it is a chemical imbalance in the brain and two people subject to the same stress might react different. That chemical imbalance is not a sign of weakness although it is still stress induced.

We must also note if you cannot cope with capitalism the system will look after you and people will pay for the professional help. That help can be extremely effective and allows us to keep active and functional for most of the time. Coping with the stigma can be achieved therapeutically.

Being in hospital shows the caring attitude of the doctors and nurses and this was care not control and it goes against the ethos of the psychiatric profession to saying that the care is not genuine. They want our lives to be the best possible

Receiving care which is emotional which is what services users experience and appreciate together with being very grateful for it is real experience and to think it is there because we are being enslaved sounds very far fetched to most people.

The other thing which might be thought to enslave us is the medications which are effective in many cases and again a lot be people will be thankful at the thought of being cured and stabilised.

What we need is some knowledge of what this caring involves and why it is necessary. We need to get across how dedicated mental health nurses and doctors are to doing something about the suffering and that professional image should set an example for more humane treatment.

We need to understand the scale of things with a mental illness so that we know the terrifying delusions would frighten anybody and from here we can see there is going some sympathy. This is not just terror but involves being tortured with it.

Many people have their limits to what they can cope with but schizophrenia this is much more extreme and so overwhelming most people are not going to cope. The idea that this is a sign of weakness is going to be rejected once people realise what is happening.

We know that madness is so overpowering that it also defies description but even so we stigmatise it like it is our own fault. The answer here is to link these two perceptions that the extremities of the condition are worse than weakness that cause it.

If it is thought we are to blame for our own problems we may begin to understand that the illness is far worse than problems that first triggered it and so we are still conforming to the underlying social values which should help removes the stigma.

We need to place ourselves in the position of being mental ill ourselves and that requires getting across how frightening it is and how emotionally painful it can be. Some examples of its severity are needed here so people can begin to understand what you are up against trying to cope with it.

The symptoms are so severe that they can make you want to commit suicide and in my case I thought I was going to be tortured to death by the CIA for causing 9/11. I tired drinking bleach to burn a hole in my stomach but didn't dare go through with it.

One answer here is that one in three people will experience depression at some point in their lives and we can many of us know what it is like to experiences some suffering. That should open the door to some empathy with schizophrenia and help remove the stigma.

With compassion we can reconnect emotionally and make friends and partners and these are the most important things in life not how much money you have...

There is a problem with stress induced schizophrenia in that the fear it engenders can be like war and that means just getting on with it. They should face up to things rather than allowing themselves to go mad. The problem here is that there is some truth to the stigma.

Interestingly here many people were outraged when general Patton slapped a soldier and called him a coward and he had to apologise to the whole sixth army. That reaction could be used to dispel the stigma surrounding schizophrenia.

While the society stigmatises the government does not but the stigma is so deeply rooted in life which sees things as not a bowl of cherries so that changing attitudes is going to be very difficult.

Much depends on explaining that we do not let ourselves go mad but actually display a lot of courage in confronting the symptoms...and can lead us back into the big bad world and at the same time dispel the stigma of being weak so conforming to the dominant social values.

Suicide too is often seen as the easy way of life but with schizophrenia this is not necessarily true and again people with this condition display a lot of courage. But with proper care in the mental health system there is much that that can be done with this.

Again a lot of people will be emotionally moved by learning that the illness can drive you to this and it should generate much sympathy with many people. Again we can begin to get some idea of the suffering involved and will be motivated to do something about it.

Much depends on thinking that there are things which can help us face up to schizophrenia and where it is stress induced we can practice things like yoga and mediation which can help us face up to life in a capitalist society. Again there are things that can strengthen us.

Being excluded from employment is going to derive from people self esteem but with a disability a lot of job opportunities will allow a guaranteed interview under the label of being positive about disabled people. There will always be hope here.

This is going to be very socially inclusive and therapeutic in that there will be some esteem in standing on you own two feet and not being dependent on benefits. Work is good for you and is therapeutic in keep busy and the mental health system can train you for this.

Work can be a lot of pressure on top of the difficulties with having a mental illness but this can be taught but to help things on social integration further there has been plans to get service user all into jobs. Again this reflects an outcome that people with mental illnesses can be cared for.

More than this holding down a job requires some strength of character which may have been shattered when having being afflicted by schizophrenia and it may feel like with employment will never get back to normal. That eventually is only for extreme cases.

To help prepare for work day centres can train you in developing new skill and coping strategies for coping with schizophrenia which means you are more likely to handle the fear and pain it causes. That means we can concentrate on doing courses and if we can concentrate it is more likely we can use these skills in a part time job.

The key to this is to learn to soothe the fear and pain to the point we can handle the extra pressure and that mean that we are not just doing courses for fun or therapy but we have to be strong enough to take on the challenge to employment.

The way this seems to work is that learning new activities is distracting form the symptoms so we get to be a bit more functional but that may only be for a few hours a week. Yet that distraction does seem to work and in less severe cases the activities might be possible for longer.

All the same there I gone great hope here with developing more effective coping strategies and that is with the development of compassion focused therapy which can help with all the problems of schizophrenia including calming down, developing emotional strength and increase self esteem versus the voices.

Compassion can give us the strength to cope with the illness and once that has been overcome the pressure of a job is not going to be so daunting. Again the opportunities of employment such as they are will be available to many more people.

The problem with employment is that it is going to take more than help from the government as once an employer finds out you are schizophrenic the stigma is going to resurface in our lives and will be a bar to achieving our full potential.

The values of not coping in life are going to reappear because if we cannot cope with the stresses in life how are you going to hold down a job? Again we are going to need some way of getting the stigma across that we are strong enough to deal with the illness.

What is going to be a problem to changing attitudes is that we are not receptive to the suffering involved with having schizophrenia. We see it as crazy or eccentric when it is not very funny or else as dangerous because we associate the symptoms with being disturbed or unstable.

At the same time we know the symptoms are extremely severe like walking alone through the valley of the shadow of death and this should reduce the comedy or danger and generate sympathy for the condition. Once we get past the outward appearances of the illness we may begin to understand what it is like in terms of how frightening it is and the emotional pain involved. That realisation can be empathic so we can understand and deepen our sympathy with the condition.

Conclusion

There are two lines of thought here about the relationships between capitalism and the mental health system and that leads us to support for the system instead of opposing it.

The first of these views is that capitalism is trying to control us through the provision of mental health care and that the caring approach is secondary to helping people.

The answer here is that the care received by service users is very real and powerful and you are not going to be able to undermine the system when it helps you to lead a normal life as possible.

The other line of thought is that capitalist values will alienate us to the point that we will be led to rebel against the system. But these attitudes are just the result of ignorance and prejudice and there is growing evidence from charities that views are beginning to change.

Yet capitalism operates on values that are antithetical to mental health care and there is some disjunction between care and the society that provides it. Schizophrenics should not have allowed themselves to get the illness in the first place.

It needs to be got across that anybody subject to enough stress can have a breakdown and crack up so that schizophrenia can happen to anyone. The problem here is that people are frightened to get the illness themselves and so will continue to stigmatise.

What is needed is an educative approach to change attitudes but this is likely to take a very long time as the problem of changing things is so difficult that we are just going to have to put up with it and try to enjoy life within the mental health system such as it is.

Finally it must be noted that prejudice is so deeply rooted in our traditions of thought that no amount of rational criticism to going to dislodge it so the problem isn't necessarily going to go away but there is growing evidence that things are slowly changing...