

Take your mental health as serious as your physical health

by Yolanda in South Carolina

"Mental illness" is not a welcoming word, and I never labeled myself as mentally ill. However, a lot of what I was dealing with did, in fact, affect my professional life, spiritual-self, and my relationship with my spouse. My schoolwork on the PhD level actually provided an open door for me to research, and get the therapy, counseling, EMDR therapy, and support group counseling services I needed.

My job is what it is, an inter-level position which has not afforded me any kind of professional growth or better pay scale. I have earned a B.S. in Sociology, M.A. in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling, and now a PhD in Counseling Studies, and my pay in SC in Higher Education is only \$29,752.00, which causes heightened distress, and more anxiety because I am unsure why I have not been able to secure a better job or become promoted. My experience with mental illness was scary and caused a lot of insecure thoughts because I could not pinpoint what my problem really was or is. I was sexually traumatized as a young child, which continued on to the age of 14 years old. So, there were a lot of acute situations which showed during assessments in grammar school, middle school, and some in high school.

I actually was not diagnosed until age 30 when I began my research of Heuristic Study for my dissertation, which has now changed to a topic of The Homophobic Experiences of African American Gay Men, a suggestion from my dissertation mentor. I wanted to study myself so that I could find a way to move out of the zone of being mistreated.

During therapy, I was diagnosed with anxiety, a low mild depression, and some PTSD. Yes, I have insurance coverage and it was my insurance coverage that afforded me the mental health services I really needed. I am now currently with Blue Cross Blue Shield, but in the past I had UniCare. I have received EMDR Therapy, Psychotherapy, Therapy, Support group therapy, and Spiritual support group therapy to help me overcome the trauma afflicted upon me by the church in the form of spiritual abuse. I did not have to take any medications, but was encouraged to get medication to treat the moods of my monthly cycles. However, no medication was ever prescribed for me during any session.

I have experienced discrimination by employers. For instance, I am a qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, and am now working towards a PhD, and after interviewing with a state agency they actually offered me only \$30,247, over looking my skills and number of years in the human service field and higher education. On my job, I interviewed for a position that I am qualified for, which was assistant director of Leadership Development, a unit that I have been employed with for several years, and work performances and evaluations are 3-5 from previous supervisors and students. Nonetheless, I noticed discrimination, when they hired the daughter of the Human Resources Department.

My anxiety became even more apparent when I begin to isolate myself and move my way through the work place as to not aggravate any supervisor who might terminate my position at any cause. I do have four children who are good children, who are basic and advanced in their learning, and my oldest son is in the Army Reserve AIT Human Intelligence Collector. I live in a community that has been redeveloped. Meaning our community area is considered to be low-income, but since the re-construction and redevelopments of new houses and better communities most of us are all homeowners.

I am a homeowner for the past several years, my highest level of education is HS; BS; MA; and now a PhD, but my husband only has HS education and is a Pastor with the goal of going to trade school soon to obtain an associate degree. I enjoy singing, reading, watching movies, and learning.

My life right now is pretty confusing. Because of work budget cuts, and factors that hinder me from locating and obtaining suitable employment much greater than the current, my husband and I have been having some serious money issues; foreclosure, debts, and serious spiritual wars, and other battles which again affects my mental state.

If I could change one thing about how people think of mental illness, I would tell them to be careful how you treat those whose coping skills are not as stable as yours, because just as I may be treated today you all certainly can have the same issue as well tomorrow. It's most important that persons take their mental health as serious as their physical health.

A good mental well-being is priceless, and so many of us are still human and we are not CRAZY; unlike you all, we care about our mental well-being and although treated we have every right to be loved, treated well without discrimination, and we can do a job just as well as those who think they are mentally fit. All persons from time to time experience some form of mental battles, and none of us are free from stress or distress. So, think about your own mental health before you judge somebody whose mental needs are sincerely cared for.

The most helpful to me when working and coping with mental health problems is my passion, and compassion for mankind. I would also like to say be a help, give a chance to those whom you think that might not be able to handle a task, and you might just give them the real relief they need; a chance to show the world that I am functional, and I am capable of handling multiple tasks that most of you can not handle in a day of work. For example, I serve the school as SIC chairperson, I am working on my dissertation, teaching five classes per semester, managing a caseload of about 145 students, composing and managing three service learning projects a semester, and keeping in contact with a number of people by email, blackboard, and WEB/CT. So while you discriminate, I am yet working my way to strong mental health by attending my therapy sessions when I am able to, praying, writing daily in my journal, reading the word, and watching movies with story base lines that encourage my mind to think positively. I am making certain that I do not connect to persons that are only out to hurt me, and discredit my abilities because they learned of my mental illness. Anxiety, depression, and PTSD are now common among a lot of us, and we all need to be careful of our judgments and learn to help, advocate, and motivate!