

# Reflective journal

Health & Medicine, Nursing



## Social Exclusion and Stigmatization in Individuals Diagnosed with Mental Illness

The way society perceives mental illness has been a subject of great concern. There is a general unwritten agreement that mentally ill individuals are incompetent when it comes to taking care of themselves and others especially those under their care. This perception has resulted in the discrimination and stigmatization of mentally ill individuals further adding to their plight.

### Event

I remember that it was on a chilly evening and I had just left work and I was heading to the grocery shop to buy some groceries. I was walking alone but on reaching the shop, there was a crowd that had gathered right outside. There were people shouting and one particular voice caught my attention. This was a man's voice and what caught my attention was the way he was shouting incoherently. I could not understand a word he said and immediately I knew that he had some form of mental illness. Getting closer, I saw that there seemed to have been some form of tag of war between the shopkeeper and the man shouting. The man was pulling a bag of oranges that the shopkeeper was holding, shouting that it was his. Those gathered were busy trying to help the shopkeeper get back his merchandise when the man pulled out a dirty broken bottle with what appeared to be mud inside. It took the intervention of the police and the ill man was bundled into the police car without "his" bag of oranges and taken away presumably to be locked up.

### Feelings

I felt like helping the helpless man, as it seemed no one wanted to listen to his side of the story. Later when he brought out the dirty bottle, I felt that he was not to blame, but I was at the same time angry with him for disturbing the peace. His aggressive action and reaction to this situation angered me as I felt that had he sought professional help, this whole incident would have been avoided.

### Evaluation

This was an avoidable situation. Mental illness had predisposed this man to acting in an irrational manner. The shopkeeper and the public failed in their part when they resolved to take sides against this sick man. The situation should have been handled better. The shopkeeper and the man should have been allowed to resolve the issue. However, given the physical state of the ill man, it was understandable that the onlookers, me included, would have reacted as they did. This experience did not go as it should have and the manner in which the ill man was dealt with was somewhat unfair.

### Analysis

The reaction of the onlookers was not appropriate and they should have tried to resolve the issue in a calm manner and not presume the ill man to be the one in the wrong as compared to the shopkeeper. This situation did not go well, as eventually it was decided that the ill man was obviously the wrong doer given his physical and mental state. This goes to show that discrimination is rife, especially when it comes to mentally ill individuals. This situation showed that the public in general presumed that any mentally ill person was incapable of being competent or truthful.

### Conclusion

This situation proved that public perception of mental illness is full of misconceptions. The onlookers automatically assumed that the shopkeeper must have been the wronged party in the situation without stopping to think that the opposite might be true.

### Action Plan

Presented with a similar situation, I will act differently. Instead of being a passive onlooker, I will intervene by asking that the individual be allowed to have his way and then try to approach him when he calms down. I would also ask the police, if present, to take him to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation instead of arresting him. I would try to talk to the onlookers, explaining that mental illness is just an illness like any other and that this does not make mentally ill people any different from the rest of us.