

# III. WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY

## 1. HELPING FAMILIES OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

All of the management suggestions under section II Ways to Help should be taught to the family of the person with a severe mental illness.



Before the Family Can Help They Need to Know:

- the "Warning Signs" of serious mental illness P. 19-20
- the problems medication can cause and what to do P. 23
- the use of Routine Activities and Familiar Places P.28-34

### Important Messages to give the Family

Families often feel guilty or confused about the strange behaviour. It is important to reassure them that the behaviour is part of the illness and that there are ways to help.

The family should know that the person often can not control the strange behaviour and should not be blamed.

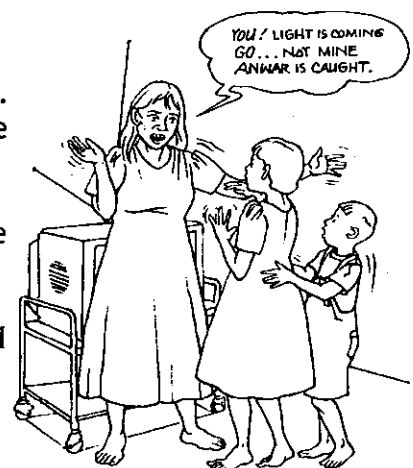
People with mental illness need to be treated with kindness and encouragement even when they are angry or violent.

### What the Family Can Do ?

Have the family identify the types of activity or events which make the person with severe mental illness worse. Then make a specific plan about how to deal with these activities or events.

Work with the family to make activities simple and easy for the person with mental illness to do.

The person with serious mental illness should not be punished even if her behaviour is difficult e.g.. she does not want to do anything or is very angry. Punishment will not make the person change. Often a person with a mental illness does not know what is wrong or right so will not understand why she is being punished.



## Family support

The whole family can be upset when one of its members is mentally ill. The family often does not know what to do when the person's behaviour becomes very strange. Often they are embarrassed, worried, angry or sad.

Because family members are often the people who can help the mentally ill person the most, it is important to try to help them also. Families may need someone to listen to them especially if a family member is often ill or has been mentally ill for many years. The CBR worker can help at first and then find a volunteer, neighbour or another family member to also listen and give encouragement. Sharing the stress and difficulties with another person makes it easier for the family member.

The CBR worker can also help to find someone to "look after" the person with mental illness for a few hours so that the usual care giver in the family can have a rest or break away from the house.

This is especially important when the person has severe mental illness and needs family members to watch them all the time.



### LEARNING ACTIVITY Helping the Helpers

Mr. Viet has been mentally ill for about 6 years. He is very sad and sometimes says nothing at all for 3 or 4 days. Last month he tried to kill himself by drinking rat poison but Mrs. Viet found him in time. Both of them are older and their children are very busy and live in other towns. Lately Mrs. Viet has been getting very tired and sad herself. Because she can not leave her husband by himself, she does not visit friends or go out.



You are CBR worker and have been asked to visit the Viet's.

1. Why does Mrs. Viet need help ?
2. What kinds of help can you suggest ?



## Helping Nila's Family

Nila is a 30 year old girl who has been mentally ill for the past 4 years. Last year she spent 6 months in a hospital, but her parents ran out of money and she had to come home again. Nila talks too much and sometimes what she says does not make sense. In the morning she starts to get dressed but then before she is finished she starts cleaning her room or some other activity. She never seems to finish anything and her parents must help her with all her daily activities. Nila wanders all over the neighbourhood and sometimes she goes into other people's houses and throws things around. Yesterday she burned herself when she was trying to take a hot pot of noodles from her neighbour's house.

In a large group, choose a group leader and discuss this story. Then:

1. Make a list of Nila's problems;
2. Make a list of Nila's family's problems;
3. Describe at least 3 ways that the CBR worker could help the family.

## 2. TEACHING COMMUNITIES ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

People with mental illness are all members of communities. They live in villages, towns and cities. They have husbands and wives, children and parents.

Most people who have a mental illness will get better and are able to return to doing routine activities and jobs they had before. They will be able to participate again in community activities like going to the market and to weddings and festivals.



A few people will have a mental illness for their whole lives. Some of these people will have severe mental illness and strange behaviour like those described in this manual and will be a worry for family, neighbours and others in the community.

But community members do not usually understand mental illness and try to avoid or even make fun of people with mental illness. This makes it difficult for the person to feel normal and accepted. Even if the illness is over, the way the community treats the person may cause problems.



## Before The Community Can Help, They Need to Know That:

- strange behaviour can be caused by a mental illness.
- severe mental illness is a disease-it is not the person or their family's fault
- people with a mental illness can get well and return to doing routine activities and often to work or school
- the way the community treats the person with mental illness can be part of the problem. If people are afraid of the mentally ill person, ignore him, or laugh and make fun of him, this can make the illness worse.



### What the Community Can Do To Help the Person with Severe Mental Illness

The community can help: 1) the person who has a mental illness now; 2) their family; and 3) those people who had a mental illness in the past and are now well.

Community members can learn about mental illness and how to react to people with severe mental illness;

Learning who can help people with mental illness (e.g. doctor, CBR worker) is important especially if the person is very ill and needs attention immediately.

The person with a severe mental illness sometimes needs protection from people who do not know that they are ill. Children sometimes throw stones or laugh at a person with mental illness.

### What the Community Can Do to Help Prevent Severe Mental Illness

There are many things that can be done to recognise when people are very stressed: avoiding situations which upsets a person, giving a person help so they do not become stressed, keeping the environment calm and using routine activities.

Some people who had a mental illness and are now well and are able to return to routine activities and work. People in the community should give them a chance to slowly go back to the activities the person used to do.



People who had a severe mental illness and are now well should be greeted and spoken to by all people who meet them on the road or in a shop. They should not be an outcast in their community. People should not point at them or talk about them. Children need to be taught to treat them with respect.

Watching for the “warning signs”. If family and friends take the person to the doctor before his behaviour becomes very strange, it can prevent the mental illness from happening again.

### **How The CBR Worker Can Help the Community Learn**

Community education usually works best if the community already has a problem or concern. A general talk about mental illness to a large group may not work well. A talk to a group of concerned people about a kind of mental illness that they know about will work better. An example is an education session with a community women’s group who are worried about the crazy people living on the street. In the meeting, they might learn about how to use routine activities to help a person with mental illness.



Often workers in the Health and Social Welfare agencies have little or no information available about mental illness. The CBR worker can work together with these agencies to make brochures, plays for schools, and so on.

Working with children and young people is important because it is easier to teach them positive attitudes than to change negative ones when they are older. Child to child activities in schools and youth groups can be effective.



## LEARNING ACTIVITY

### Teaching the Community About Mental Illness

Joey is well known in the town of Sumu. He is about 25 years old but no one knew his age for sure or where he came from. Every day he walks up and down the main street going through the garbage talking and smiling to himself. Other people go through the garbage too and try to sell what they find but Joey is different. He carefully collects all the bright coloured papers and then just throws them in the air and watches them fall on the ground. Sometimes he makes clothes for himself out of newspapers but other times he walks down the street naked. He sometimes sleeps in front of the bread store and the owner feels sorry for him and gives him some rice or day old bread to eat in the evening.



The ladies voluntary group are upset about Joey. They think he is a bad example for the children. Some call him stupid and think he is "retarded". A few of them think people who talk to Joey might catch his disease and become just like him if he breathes on them. They want to throw Joey in jail or just put him on a bus to another town.

They know that the CBR worker visits another mentally ill person in Sumu so ask the worker to help.

Role play the meeting. The person who plays the CBR worker should make a list of the community education points he or she wants to make at the meeting and afterwards these should be discussed with the group. It might help to first review the sections: "Can Anyone Become Mentally Ill? Can you Catch Mental Illness? Are There Different Kinds of Mental Illness? Does Mental Illness get worse? Can Mental Illness be Cured?".

The people playing the women's group should try to role play common beliefs and opinions about people like Joey, for example that mentally ill people have an evil spirit that others can "catch".



## LEARNING ACTIVITY

### Using the Newspaper For Community Education

#### BAFFLING DISEASE

It cannot be denied that medical science has made great progress in recent years. But likewise new diseases, such as AIDS and streptococcus (deadly flesh eating bacteria) which I read about in Time magazine dated June 20, 1994, have made history at the end of the twentieth century. However, I believe there is an illness which brings great and underscribable sorrow to a family: the illness of the mind called schizophrenia.

I know of many cases, where students of prestigious universities suddenly became depressed, their minds went blank as if he or she were in another world and they lost all

interest in what was happening around them. I believe that this sickness baffles even the best of physicians in the medical world, because I know such patients who are incurable. Of course, people used to invent causes of such an illness, saying that the brain is overburdened by excessive study, others attribute it to black magic by someone who hates the family of the patient. But I have yet to hear of a plausible cause of such an illness.

In Jakarta's Menteng area, there is a man who wanders aimlessly in the neighborhood and people in Menteng regard him as someone who has lost his mind. One day he accosted me in Dutch and from the

way he expressed himself, I take it that he enjoyed a good education and he must have come from an affluent family, but of late he is very careless neither his appearance nor his clothes appear to have had contact with soap and water for a long time. Rumors have it that he was a mathematician gone crazy. Is it possible that a person can lose his mind by excessive study?

A. DJUANA  
Jakarta

# The Jakarta Post

SATURDAY, JULY 15, 1995

You have just read this letter in the local paper and think it is a good chance to educate the community about mental illness. Write an answer to Mr. Djuana's letter that could be printed in the newspaper the following week.