

Hindustan Times - Guardian Health Chronicle

Out of reality

Name: Ira
Age: 26
Illness: Suffered from Schizophrenia
Currently: Holds painting exhibitions

I had had a chronic paranoid schizophrenia and multiple psychiatric hospitalisations. With proper and regular medication, and better understanding of the dear ones I could emerge out of it successfully.

I was first hospitalised at the age of nineteen, when I attempted suicide by jumping off the terrace, after my boyfriend cheated on me for another girl. I was doomed. I had thought everything was perfect. We went everywhere together, we liked each other a lot. Then why...? Suddenly the child inside me had become silent. My parents' heart bled seeing me quiet and submissive. I had started getting hallucinations. Finding a secluded corner I would often talk to myself. My condition was deteriorating. Once I took a cab with no destination in mind. My voice and mood changed very suddenly. Sometimes I would sound intelligent and other times I would become girlish. I even became violent towards my family.

I overheard my relatives telling my parents that I might have to spend my entire life in the mental hospital. My world collapsed. But my brother refused to believe that I am a hopeless case and took me to a psychiatrist and who diagnosed me as a schizophrenic. During the course of my hospitalisations I received individual therapy, antidepressants and antipsychotic medication. Not just that, during the therapy my doctor noticed my interest in the artwork in his clinic. He enquired from my parents about this love for colours and asked me if I would love to paint again. He got me beautiful colours and encouraged me to take up painting again. I was touched and felt good to see someone is actually caring for me.

I had become practically a non eater due to the trauma but my family took utmost care to get me whatever I liked. The love and care that they showered on me during that period cannot be expressed. Gradually I had started eating and sleeping well. I still love him and wish he'd talk to me, or say something to me, but I'm not hurting over him anymore. I have accepted my fate. I am back to reality.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

"Though there is no single cause of schizophrenia, research shows that it runs in families. If your parent had it, there is a 10 per cent chance you too would be afflicted by it," says Dr. Arti Anand, Psychologist, Sir Ganga Ram Healers Hospital. Caused mainly due to genetic factors and stress, it is a form of psychotic disorder or psychosis, which means it interferes with a person's ability to interpret reality. Individuals with this disorder may develop a radical change in their thinking, perceptions and behaviour as evidenced by the presence of a combination of symptoms: hallucinations, delusions or false beliefs, disorganised speech, highly irrational or disorganised behaviour, lack of concern and social withdrawal. No two cases of schizophrenia are identical; one person may experience one or two of symptoms, while another may experience many.

"The best results are associated with early and persistent treatment with antipsychotic medication and supportive therapies. Antipsychotic medication is highly effective, shortens the duration of psychosis in schizophrenia, and prevents relapses (but psychotic relapses can still occur under stress). People respond individually to antipsychotic medications, although agitation and hallucinations usually improve within days and delusions usually improve within a few weeks. Individual and group therapy aim to provide immense emotional support to people with schizophrenia. They learn to adjust with their illness, understand the symptoms and importance of regular medication. These supportive therapies help the patients to solve problems of their daily life, care for themselves, improve their relationships and play active role in the treatment. And if family members are also involved in the treatment, there are increased chances of faster recovery and rare chances of relapses," Dr. Ajay Pal Singh, Consultant Psychiatrist, Max Hospital, Gurgaon.

Schizophrenia is a chronic disease, but given effective and regular treatment, and supportive counselling, people with schizophrenia can work independently and live normal and satisfying lives.

DOSE OVER