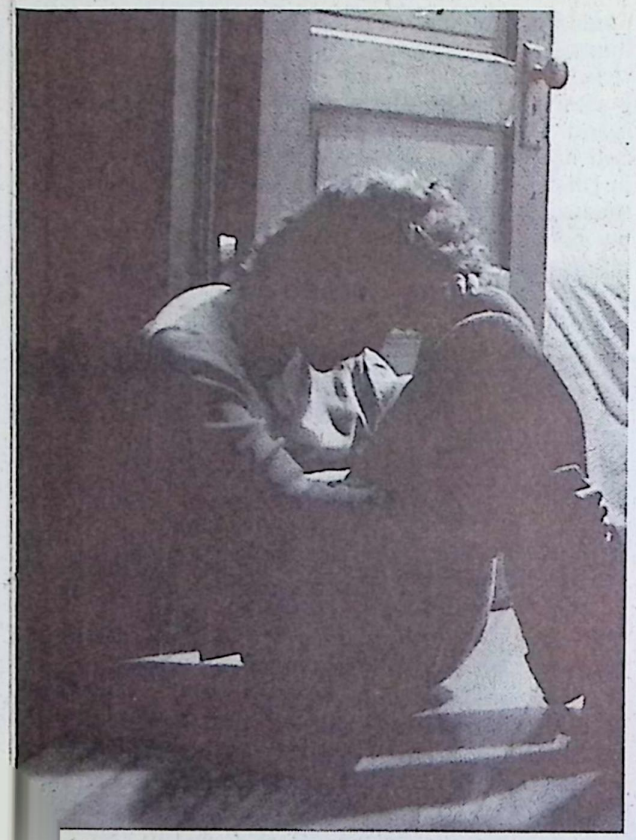


Depression is an ailment that concerns both physical and emotional sides of a person.

Although one in every six persons in the country has some form of depression, there is very little awareness about this mental illness. It is often seen as a character flaw by friends and family. Most men often do not seek treatment in fear of being stigmatised by the society. Women are more conscious.

South Asian countries. Right after having a baby, a lot of young mothers feel depressed because they get overwhelmed with the day to day running of the household. Family members do not understand it and often misunderstand her for being sad at such a joyous occasion," says Dr Rahman.

The prevalence of depression in old and young people is more than in middle aged people. There is no significant difference in the depression rate in developed countries and developing countries. "Contrary to popular belief, there is no historical data to suggest that depression is on the rise. We do not have statistics to support it, but I would say that the suicide rate in our country is not as high as in other countries such as Japan and Eastern European countries," says Dr Rahman. "It is an interesting fact that people who have suffered rape, torture, ethnic cleansing or disasters are not the ones with the highest rates of depression."

Asked about some challenges of treating depression, Dr Rahman says, "A lot of people try to self medicate. But it is dangerous. And sometimes they get impatient. After one week they expect a drastic change. It takes at least two to three months to show signs of improvement. Polypharmacy (the use of multiple drugs without any rationale) is also a major problem in Bangladesh."

Dr Rahman believes that since it is a biological disorder, those who have a tendency for it, will have it. But reduction of external stress in one's life may help. According to WHO, effective community approaches to prevent depression include school-based programmes for the prevention of child abuse, or programmes to enhance cognitive, problem-solving and social skills of children and adolescents. Interventions for parents of children with behavioural problems may reduce parental depressive symptoms and improve outcomes for their children. Exercise programmes for the elderly are also effective.

Some evolutionary psychologists have tried to find out if depression has any upside. Particularly interesting to them is Darwin, widely believed to have depression, who wrote in his autobiography, "Pain or suffering of any kind, if long continued, causes depression and lessens the power of action, yet it is well adapted to make a creature guard itself against any great or sudden evil... it is the sadness that informs as it leads an animal to pursue that course of action which is most beneficial." For Darwin, the darkness was a kind of light.

As preposterous as it may sound, the idea that depressive disorder may come with some mental benefits — has a long intellectual history. Aristotle wrote in the fourth century BC "that all men who have attained excellence in philosophy, in poetry, in art and in politics, even Socrates and Plato, had a melancholic habitus; indeed some suffered even from melancholic disease."

But ancient aphorisms aside, depression is a disease that severely affects the lives of a large number of people. The good news is, a solution is often at hand. Awareness must be raised on the individual, community and national level to educate ourselves about depression and support those who are suffering from it.

Faria now realises that she has a medical problem that needs to be treated. She is back in Australia and is seeing a psychiatrist.