

# ART FOR HEALTH

Doctors Without Borders introduces creative mental health support to women in Kamrangirchar slums

PHOTO: COURTESY



all over the world. The process of using mediums of creative expression has been seen to aid in self-expression, promote positive self-esteem, social skills, self-awareness and overall mental health. "The method is used in private practice in very limited scope, but the idea of employing creative or expressive art therapy to help women from slums is indeed new and ground-breaking," explains Mental Health counsellor Farhana Naznin Mitu.

Mitu is an assistant Clinical Psychologist at a clinic in Kamrangirchar, Dhaka District, in the Urban-Slum Medical project of international medical organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), also popularly known as Doctors Without Borders. MSF's health clinics for women in Kamrangirchar were established in 2013 in order to provide community-based services that are easily accessible. The overall MSF project comprises of a range of services focusing on sexual and gender-based violence, adolescent reproductive health, and

family planning among others.

Guided by a female artist, the women and girls worked on a mural showing a sky with clouds made with cotton and butterflies painted pink, trailing the way to the Mental Health section of the clinic.

One reason why Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) survivors may find it difficult to access healthcare is a lack of knowledge about where to go to for services. "As it's a very personal issue, they are often reluctant to even go to a clinic in the first place, let alone to ask for directions once inside", explains Manisha Kumar, Medical Coordinator for MSF in Bangladesh. "The paintings of butterflies in the MSF clinic serve as confidential guides, leading the SGBV survivors to the area of the clinic that provides services for them." Many of the girls who partook in the painting activity were SGBV survivors—a whopping 30 percent of cases approximately that MSF has treated in Kamrangirchar this year on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), were young women below the age of 20.

MSF's teams have begun to spread this message in the community for SGBV survivors: just follow the butterflies. "We want to not only treat survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, but also to educate them about ways they can be comforted in ways that give them back confidence and happiness," said Maurice Van Gammeren, Project Coordinator of the MSF Kamrangirchar Urban Slum project.

"Symbolically butterflies represent the ability to fly at will. And that's what psycho-social therapy, and creative activities they can be eager to engage in, aims to achieve," said Mitu.

Indeed, eager they were. What started out as lines drawn by the muralist ended up filled with paint and glitter by girls of diverse ages and personalities. They smiled, competed, asked for markers to add more lines, and sang along to the familiar rhythm of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Projapoti, projapoti, kothae pele bhai emon rongin pakha!"

After finishing what happily became their own painting project, the girls sat

around a circle as Mitu chatted with them while teaching fundamentals of mental health, regulating one's own emotions—and of course, what it means to paint or sing or dance to feel happier. "I have watched professionals scribe advertisements around Kamrangirchar, but I never thought it would feel so nice to paint," says Rupa (name changed for confidentiality), an Adolescent Support Group beneficiary, as she proudly signed her name below her butterflies. "I can't wait for more of these activities!" They held mirrors gifted by the support group coordinators and journaled their emotions and goals after a period of self-reflection.

Many women suffer with mental health problems—day workers, mothers, daughters, children taking care of their young siblings. "In a population of 156 million, roughly 8 percent suffer from mental health conditions. You can do the math," Mitu further explains, adding that "social stigma prevents women from coming forward, especially when their partners are also perpetrators of violence. But patient confidentiality encourages more health-seeking behaviors".

MSF's clinics in different areas of Kamrangirchar treated almost double the amount of victims of sexual and gender-based violence in 2015 compared to the previous year - with 1,154 patients compared to 684 in 2014. The MSF-operated clinics remain the only health facilities in the area offering free and confidential psycho-social counselling and medical services to adolescent girls and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

— DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

## MENTAL HEALTH



## ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIĆ

(born 3 October 1981)

Born in Sweden, Zlatan Ibrahimović is a Swedish professional footballer who plays as a striker for Manchester United. He was also a member of the Sweden national team, making his senior international debut in 2001 and serving as captain from 2010 until he retired from international football in 2016. With his playing style and acrobatic finishing compared to Dutch retired striker Marco van Basten, Ibrahimović is widely regarded as one of the best strikers in the game and one of the best footballers of his generation. Ibrahimović was ranked by The Guardian as the third-best player in the world, behind only Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. In December 2014, the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter named him the second-greatest Swedish sportsperson of all time, after tennis player Björn Borg.



SKETCH: YAFIZ SIDDIQUI

“When people criticise me, instead of putting my head down, it gives me energy to do even more.

I think I'm like wine. The older I get, the better I get.

Some things is made by destiny, yes, other things by hard work, but quality you don't learn. Quality you are born with.

Nothing is written in stone, as a career is an unpredictable journey.

I read all the time that people think I'm arrogant. They say I am cocky, a bad character. I had that from a young age. But when they meet me, they say, 'That image doesn't fit you.'

Anything that happens in your life was meant to happen. It is your destiny. I was destined to have the life I have now, and I can't have any regrets.”

SOURCE: BRAINYQUOTES AND WIKIPEDIA

## STARDIARY

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## SPEAK UP!

In the past few days, several individual news on rape, that too on toddlers, have dominated the news media. Whenever I see such news I remember my cousin Salma who was a victim of sexual abuse when she was just 10-years-old. Salma's mother, my aunt, was a doctor who had to work late hours, leaving her at home with her entire family. There was lot of people to take care of her, even after that the house tutor who used to come to teach her cousins did something horrible to her that left a scar forever. She did not quite understand what was happening to her when he forced her on his lap. But she was traumatised, that I remember, and she stopped doing everything that a 10-year-old would do- playing, laughing and running around. After a week or so, she told her mother that she was terrified and what happened to her. My aunt was very upset and decided to give up her job. She decided to accompany her as she understood the fact that she cannot fully prevent the risk of her child being sexually abused. My aunt told my mother that she did not think that this could happen to her child, that she will never leave her children with strangers, that she would always keep her children within her



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

eyesight. My mother talked to her about why it is important to talk about body safety and that it's not always the strangers who abuse children. In many cases, the children know the perpetrators. Because like Salma, there are lots of children who have been sexually abused on play dates, sleepovers, in school, on playgrounds and unfortunately, also at home. Both of them decided to talk to us, all the cousins about healthy boundaries and uncomfortable touch. They were always approachable

and gave us the comfort of being someone we can talk to even when something has already happened. They asked us not to get afraid talking about these kinds of incidents. Most importantly they talk to us about why it is important for us not to harm others. They told us that it is not okay for us to use tricks or force to touch other people in a way that makes them uncomfortable. I am now 19-years-old and living in another city, far away from my family for my education. But I always

remember the valuable lessons that they gave us and why it is important to stand up, fight back, and talk about sexual abuse. Back then there were no available guidelines on how to talk about body safety to your children. But they did it anyway. It is always important to talk to your children about body safety early enough and help them be less vulnerable to sexual abuse.

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