

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Introduction

Mental health is one of the most misunderstood issues in society today. According to a report by O'Connor et al (2021), many people are secretly suffering from various forms of mental health issues. The report further indicates that a majority of those suffering from these forms of mental illnesses are not even aware of the problem and thus appear very okay from the outside, yet deep within, they require various forms of treatment as far as their mental wellbeing is concerned (Bhugra et al, 2019; Kendig et al, 2019). I got to interact and understand this issue when I volunteered in a community-based organisation that creates awareness regarding issues of mental health in society. The voluntary placement, which took three months, opened up new frontiers of knowledge to me regarding mental health and entirely changed my perception about mental health and the strategies that need to be applied to address the problem. In this regard, this reflection essay discusses in detail the three-month experience and paints a picture of what I witnessed in the course of my engagements. This reflection shall apply the Gibbs model of reflection. It shall first describe the particular experience that I had and then proceed to discuss the feelings and thoughts regarding the experience. Further, the reflection shall evaluate the good and the negative aspects of the experience and analyse the situation. In the conclusive section, the reflection shall give an action plan that is meant to outline how I would deal with the same situation in case it arises in future.

The experiences

A while ago, I had a rare experience that allowed me to change my perspective about life in general. Well, my friends and I decided to undertake a voluntary programme within our neighbourhood to gain the right experience in community issues. The voluntary placement was a part-time engagement and was meant to take three months; a period that equipped me with very important skills in the community and overhauled my understanding of different issues in society. Before I discuss these experiences, I shall endeavour to describe the organisation and its mandate and how it operates in supporting the community in general.

Mental health issues in men

I was supposed to be part of the team that organises for the referrals of the members to the other professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists as well as clinicians who would deal with the problem at an advanced stage. This, of course, exposed me to quite a number of cases that opened my eyes to the state of mental health in society today. One of the main issues that I observed therein is the subtle nature of mental health issues. I realized that one can appear very normal from the outside in terms of their mental health state yet still suffer immensely from mental health issues.

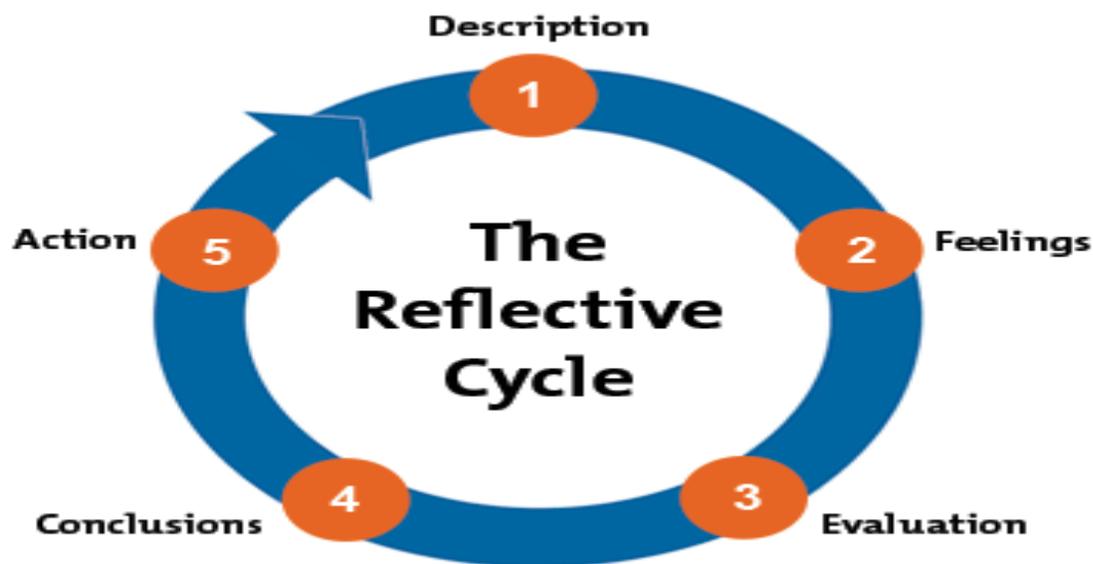
I had a case of a very successful community member. A middle-aged man, who had gone against all odds to make it in business, was a client that gave me a new understanding of how mental health issues manifest. In my opinion, he seemed to be doing very well in business. He had a great family, to which he was greatly committed. The individual whom I referred to as CJ owned a very successful technology company operating in software development. Having graduated with first-class honors from one of the Ivy League institutions, it was easy to assume that CJ was on a path to success.

However, during our engagements, we became very close. On many occasions, I wondered why such a wealthy young man would seek the services of a community based mental health wellbeing, especially when I considered that he had all the resources to seek services in top-notch hospitals in the country. However, during our engagements, CJ opened up about his struggles with depression and how he has been unable to arrest the condition successfully in the past.

Looking at CJ and the manner he carried himself out, it was nearly impossible to realise that he had a mental health problem. He was very composed with all the finest things in life for a middle-aged man. He appeared to be on top of his career, sealing deals with millions and millions in the software and technology industry through his entity. Even in terms of family, CJ was doing great, a man who seemed to have put everything in control considering the various aspects of his social and economic life. However, this was far from it.

Over time, I gathered enough courage to try and understand his predicament with life. This allowed me to understand the details about his life and further, understand in general, how mental health manifests itself in individuals. CJ had been struggling with rejection all along after his parents divorced. However, this was a feeling that he had hidden since his childhood. He mentioned that even his wife of nine years had no idea of what he was going through. He had no friends at all, yet he was a very serious extrovert and social person. But while he had three siblings, they were not very close to each other as each of them was busy pursuing their own lives.

One of the most important issues that caught my attention through the voluntary engagement was how people can live lives that appear to be very normal and satisfying yet deep within, they are struggling with issues that they cannot deal with adequately. As I mentioned earlier, mental health issues manifest themselves broadly. In some individuals, the issues are very clear for everyone (Ellis et al, 2020). According to Kowal et al (2021), certain circumstances of mental health problems can be easily noted by third parties. However, most of the cases cannot be easily observed. This was the case with CJ. He would come to the office where we would talk freely about life. *The Gibbs reflective model is presented below.*



Feelings

My interaction with CJ opened up my eyes about what people go through in life and how sometimes, such issues may be concealed under an aura of refinement. Many men particularly,

appear to be doing very well from the outside but are not fine on the inside. While I was sympathetic to CJ, I knew that so many other people are going through such experiences in life yet they do not have any individual to engage in trying to find a solution.

There is also a level of disappointment in society, especially on the mental issues of men. I felt very disappointed when CJ indicated that as a man, he has been socialized never to reveal his weaknesses and inner feelings even when overwhelmed with the issues of life. Generally, society has been engineered to portray men as very strong people who are not required to show raw emotions even when they are suffering inside. This, in my opinion, has exposed men to several mental problems. I, therefore, felt very disappointed for this social engineering aspect that has led to the destruction of many lives.

Evaluation

I was kind enough to offer a shoulder to lean on. While the whole experience elicited bad emotions in me, I picked up a positive end to it in the sense that someone trusted me with a secret that had been bothering them for a while and considered me to be a crutch onto which they could lean on when things were not working. This opened my eyes to forming good relations that can support others in times of need. From the perspective of mental health and social support, Bhugra et al (2019) suggest that it is important to provide a listening ear to others to ensure that they can vent off their frustrations about life. According to Saadat et al (2015), this is a good way of relieving their mental pressure and reaffirming their confidence in life. Therefore, the experience humbled me in terms of how I use my time to support those that I consider being in the greatest time of need.

Further reflection on my engagement during the voluntary duties equally offered me an opportunity to review the modalities of how society perceives and address issues of mental health. I asked myself why such a successful man would be confined into such a solitary life without anyone noticing. But it did occur to me that people who are undergoing extreme cases of depression can manage to hide the effects of depression for a very long time. As discussed by Chen et al (2020), one can be very calm and successful in terms of how they manage their affairs in life yet remain depressed. The experience is thus not very good.

Analysis

The suggestions of Chen et al (2020) indicate that the worst mental health issue is that which cannot easily be identified. There are people you see and get convinced that they are doing very well. To a number of these people, you admire how they carry themselves out and how they have built their lives. However, this is not entirely true. As discussed by Bayram and Bilgel (2008), some of the most depressed people in society appear to be doing very well at the surface. They have everything going on well for themselves. Their issues seem to be working great but deep within, they are engrossed in deep issues that would betray their calm mien that has been exposed to the general public.

The situation reveals the socialization of men in society and the effects of the current socialization model on the mental state of men today. What has been observed is that there is a sense in which men are generally inclined to be silent to prove their strength. The suggestions of Proto and Quintana-Domeque (2021) give credence to this assertion in the sense that those men who generally show open emotions are considered to be very weak.

What I learnt from this has been the theme of several studies on the mental health of men and women. According to Norton (2017) and Saadat et al (2015), women have a better way of dealing with stressors in life. They keep friends who are keen on helping them siphon off the issues of life that are likely to affect them further (Gomez et al, 2019). In a systematic review of the difference between men and women in terms of how they handle various forms of stress, Heywood and Lyons (2016) argued that men tend to keep by themselves as opposed to women who are likely to talk out their issues in the open thus making them better at handling these issues.

Conclusion

It is irrational to judge others as doing well just from their physical look as well as their economic and supposed social wellbeing (Bayram and Bilgel, 2008). In concept, the theme being advanced herein is that there is a need to develop very detailed and comprehensive discussions to have a deeper understanding of how issues of mental health surround individuals. This is largely because mental health issues can be very lethal when they go unnoticed, yet the very best strategy is to constantly engage these people so that they understand how to effectively deal with these stressors in life. The table below is a plan of how to deal with the situation if I find myself in the same situation again.

Action plan

Skill	The approach of getting the skill	Duration	Key performance indicator
Social skills	Broaden my social skills. I seek to enroll into several community-based groups to enhance my level of interaction with others	Between 3 months to 6 months	Increased number of friends; broader social circles
Communication skills	Enhance my ability to listen to people and to encourage them to tell their stories. I plan to register for a certificate course in communication especially in guidance	3 months	Better listening skills Better correspondence and general communication skills
Guidance and counselling	Register for a guidance and counselling session to improve my ability to reach out and address issues of mental sickness in the society	1 month	Improved ability to guide those with mental health issues

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