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**Understanding ADHD**

Seven-year-old Subha was facing issues in reading, writing and spelling, and also found it very difficult to focus on a task for a prolonged period. She was not a differently-abled child; she had ADHD, a disorder that is manageable, though not many people know about it.

At the start of her counseling at a therapy center, Subha was reluctant to join the sessions, but after a short period of time, with some expert mentoring and guidance, she adjusted well. Initially, she was struggling to cope with the growing pressure of academic and social life at her local school, but today after two years of therapy, she has made remarkable progress and is much more confident with her academic and personal growth.

Subha is one of the luckier children, because her parents realized the deficiency in their child and instead of leaving her behind to suffer, they made an effort to make their child an efficient member of society. Unfortunately majority of children suffering from ADHD are not this fortunate.

Mental disorders like ADHD, Learning Disorder (LD) and autism are prevalent in all socio-economic segments of our society, but due to lack of awareness about these disorders, and thus remaining untreated, a child continues to suffer his or her whole life. In Pakistan, we have a stigma attached to mental disorders. People avoid going to psychologists due to a fear that if their friends or family discover this, they will be isolated and declared mentally unfit.

Ambreen Ali, a clinical psychologist at Kazim Trust, while sharing her experience, highlights that parents and guardians who bring their children for therapy tell their extended family, especially the grandparents, that they are taking their children for tuition. Ambreen is of the view that to eradicate or reduce various disorders, we should all join hands to create awareness. First, we have to accept the prevalence of these disorders in our society and only then we can fight against these.

According to reported statistics, only 2.49 percent people in Pakistan are suffering from ADHD but, in reality, this number is probably much higher. It is also erroneously assumed that ADHD & LD are present in children only. This is a wrong notion as even adults can be suffering from these disorders.

ADHD is a genetic disorder. A child with ADHD has 25 percent more chance of having a parent with ADHD. It’s also possible that a sibling also has ADHD. Vitamin D deficiency in expectant mothers also causes ADHD. According to research, risk of ADHD is 34 percent higher in those children whose mother had a Vitamin D deficiency during pregnancy as compared to those whose mother's Vitamin D level was sufficient during the first and second trimesters.

Frequent head injuries, premature birth, use of alcohol or tobacco by parents and presence of toxins such as lead in the environments can also cause ADHD.

Whereas many causes of ADHD are beyond our control, it is saddening to know that in a country like Pakistan where sunlight is available in abundance, some diseases and disorders are caused due to vitamin D deficiency. This failure is an indication that generally lifestyle and living conditions require drastic changes to reduce diseases in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, civil society and the authorities are not very vocal about mental disorders. Their lack of interest can be gauged from the fact that only a handful of organizations are operating in this field. In Karachi, which has a population of more than 20 million, the Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan Institute of Behavioral Sciences which is part of Dow University of Health Sciences, is the only prominent mental health institution; being the only organization dealing with mental illness, its scope is so vast that disorders like ADHD and autism are not even listed in their priority list.

We as a nation are fortunate that the private sector along with various NGOs and NPOs is working on providing solutions for various mental disorders.

ADHD is a state in which some parts of the brain tend to be a little smaller and/or take longer to develop in children with ADHD. This doesn’t mean that children with ADHD are lazy, crazy or intellectually wanting. They are actually smart and creative children who if provided proper guidance at an early stage can perform wonders and become efficient members of society.

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