**[The silent plague](https://nation.com.pk/12-Feb-2020/the-silent-plague" \t "_new)**

Kainat Taqi Qureshi February 12, 2020

We complacently reside in a society permeated by innumerable taboos, now possessing the power to catalyze the loss of young lives; taboos so resilient that parting from them is nothing less than a grave sin; taboos coursing through our veins alongside the blood from archaic times. Afterall, it is much easier to adhere to the accustomed.

Despite the exponential rise in suicide rates worldwide, statistics outlining such trends remain antonymous to credible in the sight of Pakistanis. Although mental illness is envisaged to occupy the topmost position amongst the causes of death by 2030, within our society, ‘health is wealth’ strictly refers to the physical state of individuals, and the very lack of official statistics regarding suicides and mental health in Pakistan enhances the gravity of the situation. With the criminalization of suicide and suicidal attempts under section 325 of the Pakistan Penal Code, seeking help from institutions is accompanied by increasing levels of difficulty, leaving the helpless victims of mental ailments imprisoned not only in their own minds, but the indifferent nature of the real world.

Adolescents are left isolated, befriending anxiety, depression, stress etc. as a culmination of the several mounting pressures characterizing the day and age. With acute shortage of mental health professionals and institutes in Pakistan- one child psychiatrist for every 4 million children suffering from mental health issues, and only four major psychiatric hospitals for the entire population - seeking professional help remains a lost cause for the youth, compelled to endure silent battles within themselves until it is too late. This impassive attitude within the nation can predominantly be traced to the ludicrous taboos clung onto by adults afraid of progression, and subsequently mournful of the stagnant state of Pakistan.

The seldom heard, courageous pleas of help by distressed adolescents are only always subjected to dismissal of mental illnesses as evidence of western indoctrination, phases, immaturity and delusion; a failure to realize that the cure ranges far beyond a mere glass of water or reduced time on gadgets etc. This overarching stigma inevitably manifests itself in a negative manner within the young, who are pushed towards indulgence in vices and increasing self-harm. The issue is not the lack of awareness regarding the ill they subject themselves to, rather it is the absence of any care or concern in light of the disillusionment.

In spite of the fact that conversations are highly necessary in the mission to alter this disconcerting narrative, it is merely the preliminary step. Only by detaching ourselves from the flawed, medieval ideologies, and the acceptance of the shortcomings of our society can the population progress and young lives be provided with coveted hope. In light of the financial constraints faced by the nation, the prospect of progression can become a reality only through minimizing expedient dependency upon government institutions, and for conscious common citizens, the true sources of impact, to recognize this bitter reality with a spirit of care and concern and start the necessary conversations with the young before the brief time passes. Doing due justice to their responsibilities, psychiatric institutions and health experts should collaborate with philanthropic organizations and citizens to address the signs of mental illnesses and indicative patterns, alongside arrangement of professional treatment opportunities of an accessible nature. Through the assistance of international research relating to the various sources of psychological distress, individuals can work upon maintaining a conducive and supportive environment at home, attaching importance to the sentiments of adolescents and remaining attentive towards any negative emotional and behavioural changes, and making it comfortable for adolescents to reach out for support and gain treatment upon need without any fear. Only by treating the psychological issues of individuals with equal alarm as any physical injury can the level of mental health in Pakistan be improved and a beacon of hope be shone for the young, because a healthy brain cannot compensate for an unhealthy mind.

Rather than simply condemning the decision of a teenager to end their own life, perhaps adults could manifest their maturity in which they take immense pride and question what tragedy actually leads the youth to commit such acts, because for each life lost, the responsibility burdens the society as a whole. And this is merely one out of the innumerable dilemmas silently yet profoundly plaguing our home, if only we escaped from our personal utopias and adopted the spirit of altruism.