SEVERITY

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We exist in emotions. It is as fundamental to us as breathing air and to have it crippled is like running a marathon with crutches. It is not impossible, but it definitely isn’t easy. It takes effort to exist in the days when things get hard and having it be disregarded like a Twitter hashtag over a regular teenage inconvenience hurts, to say the very least. Imagine being the blind person in a group that always whines about the discomfort of being in a dimly lit room, even temporarily.Multiply the scenario tenfold to be welcomed into the modern age of mental health disorders.

We have all been guilty of using words or phrases that mean something completely different from the context we were using it in. It might be because we didn’t realize the difference of the meaning or had misunderstood it but once made aware, we don’t usually go back to the same pattern, do we? Then why haven’t we extended the same courtesy towards mental health terminology? At a time, where the world is spreading itself to include and accept so many of us, are we ready to stay behind in the darkness?

So often I have come across people casually throwing remarks like, “This post is triggering me,” or “Sorry, I have OCD so I need to arrange it this way,” or even worse “God, she is being so bipolar with me.” All of these are assumptions of a temporary situation being exemplified to pass as remarks. To be triggered is not just to feel angry or upset, but when something sets you off so bad that you fall under the clutches of panic/anxiety attacks because of past experiences with PTSD and such. To have OCD is not a simple urge to set things straight in your mind, but it is an unending spiral of irrational anxiety taking away your peace. To be bipolar doesn’t have anything to do with random mood swings stemming from stressful situations, but an actual free reign of the brain to twist your emotions randomly which even you are unaware of.

All these comments being spewed are not just insensitive and rude towards people who have actually been medically diagnosed, but also contribute to desensitization of the topic of mental health. When we hear things so often, we start growing immune to it the same way advertisements repeated on the tv have a higher probability of being skipped than something that is being aired for the first time. This trivialises disorders that have been known to harm public and personal safety, but sadly things are only severe when they tally up as statistics.

There is always a flurry of activity when someone kills themselves, be it a public figure or known ones, but trace back to all the times they may have mentioned something or acted a certain way that you dismissed as a bad time. True, we all go through ups and downs, but when things start leaning more towards the latter than the former, it might be something worth looking into. Today if someone coughs or has a fever, they will immediately either be home quarantined or tested for COVID-19, but disorders like depression or anxiety are never taken that seriously, despite both being health hazards that have biological causes.

This reaction is sometimes also due to the misrepresentations of certain disorders as something with just one set of symptoms. That’s not always the case. Just as cancer has several types and each type has its own array of symptoms, so do mental illnesses. There is no one state of being and whatever each one is going through is just as viable as the next in their own way. When people feel like they have to act a certain way to fall under a category, it often adds to the stereotype and more importantly, might lead to them being misdiagnosed with something they don’t have.

Though we are becoming aware of it and developing ourselves and our sources of knowledge, somehow that spread of information has also become synonymous to everyone claiming to go through it. It could be perceived as being used as a trend to relate to the exceeding number of people coming forth with their history of mental illnesses. That is not to say that every claim is false or invalid, but if one truly feels they are going through something similar, it can only be confirmed through a professional diagnosis and not self-diagnosis or a hypothetical condition proposed by someone who isn’t qualified in the field, the same way you would treat any suspected illness by a certified doctor and not just a familiar because we all know how Google likes to mess with our health reports.

I think the worst part of it all is that, at this point, mental illnesses are becoming a trend. People say “I’m depressed” on social media, without actually being diagnosed, because they think it’s trendy or cool. When in reality, having a disorder is far from ‘cool’. It’s a real struggle that people have to face every single day. A lot of these same people try to use their self-diagnosed disorders as a way to pass off behaviour because they didn’t want to deal with the repercussions of their actions. All of this adds to the misconceptions which surround mental health as a whole. They’re the reason why so many of us cannot take the subject seriously, and honestly, I think it’s time to do something about it.

To be fair, I too am guilty of some of these but we are growing and we need to understand that mental disorders aren’t social constructs of validation but the actual imbalance of neurons and hormones as proved by science. Until we do that, those around us will continue feeling as though their extremely real problems are valid because we don’t treat them with the severity they deserve.