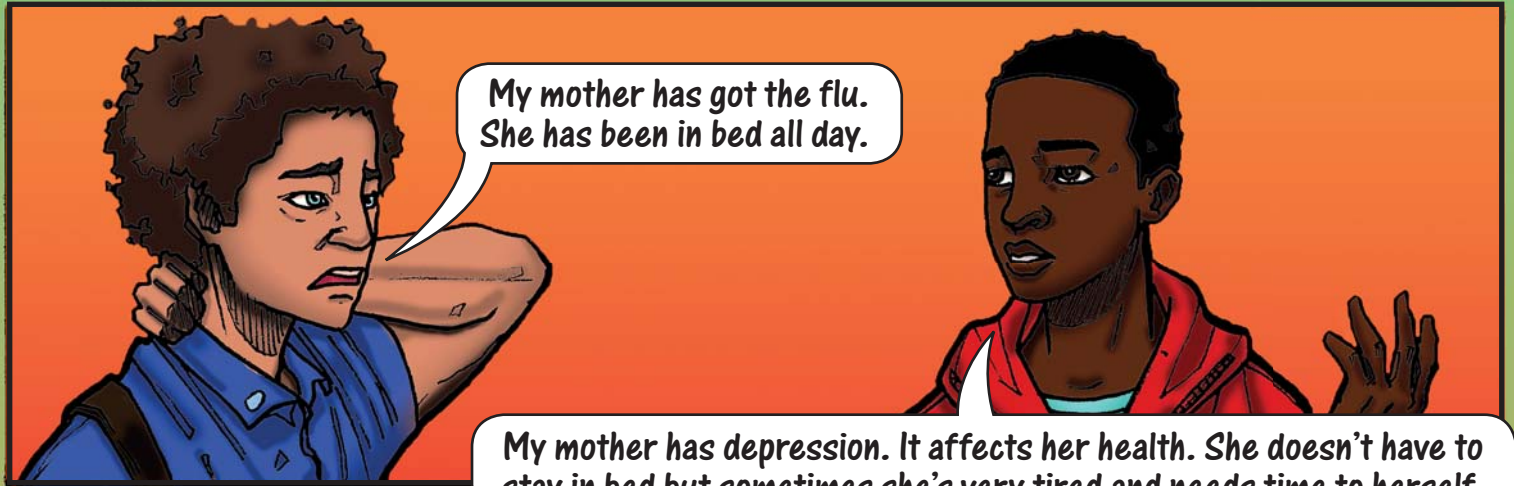


MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS: Recognising and responding to mental health needs in Namibia



Mental health is just as important as physical health. If you have a mental illness you can see a doctor to get help, in the same way that someone who has a physical illness will see a doctor to get help.



FACTS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IN NAMIBIA

There is very little data about the incidence of mental illness in Namibia.

The 2013 Namibia Demographic and Health Survey collected information from women and men aged 15-49 on:

- whether they had ever seen or heard things that were not actually there;
- whether they had recently felt worthless or hopeless or wished that they were dead;
- how often they had little interest or pleasure in doing things; and
- how often they felt low in energy, were in a bad mood, or felt sad all of the time.

The answers do not show whether or not a person has a mental illness, but they do show how common it is for a person's mental wellbeing to be affected.

Around one in ten people said "yes" to the questions about whether they had ever seen or heard things that were not actually there, and whether they had recently felt worthless or hopeless or wished that they were dead. This suggests that many people in Namibia may be experiencing some challenges with their mental health.



However, even though many people appear to have some mental health problems, few people seek help. People may not seek help because they do not know that help is available, or because of the stigma that some people attach to mental illness, or for some other reason.

THE NEXT DAY ...

My father said that your mother is not sick; she is bewitched.

No, a mental illness does not have anything to do with witchcraft - it is a medical condition. People talk about witchcraft because they do not understand mental illness. You should take the time to find out more about mental illnesses before you make silly and unkind statements.

AT THE LOCAL RESOURCE CENTRE ...

Mark is right. Depression is a medical condition. There are ways friends and family can support someone with depression. I am glad that I read this. Now I know how to be a better friend to Mark.

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION

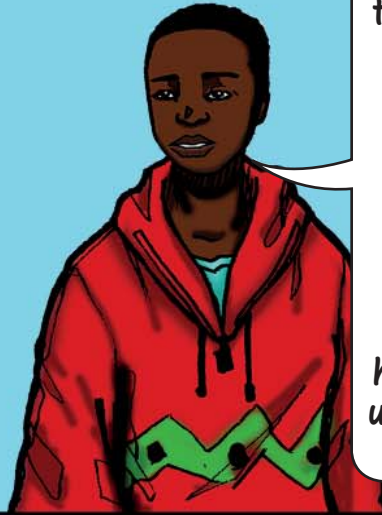
SIGNS of depression

Where to go for help
Mental Health

I spent two hours at the resource centre reading about depression. I know a lot now. You are right, mental illnesses are not caused by witchcraft. I am sorry I said that.

That's okay. Thank you for taking the time to find out more about my mother's condition. You are a good friend.

My cousin is in a correctional facility because he stole cattle. My mother says that he is a State President's Decision Patient because he has a mental illness. Do you know what that means?



Yes. Sometimes a person is accused of a crime, but the court finds that he or she cannot be held responsible because mental illness or a mental health condition prevented the person from fully understanding what he or she was doing. In cases like this, the person can be detained in a psychiatric hospital or correctional facility until he or she is well enough to live in the community again.

How long does that take?



It depends. There is a long process of assessments involving a chain of people before a person is released. Being declared a President's Patient is not a way to avoid being confined after committing a crime. But it is an important way to prevent someone from being wrongly convicted of a crime if they have a genuine mental condition which affected their ability to know right from wrong.

State President's Decision Patients

If you are accused of a crime, even a minor crime, you could be declared a State President's Decision Patient ("President's Patient") if, after assessment, the court finds that a mental illness or condition prevented you from fully understanding what you were doing.

This rule protects the rights of persons with mental illnesses or conditions. It should not be misused by people who want to avoid being punished for a crime. A person who is declared a President's Patient will be committed to a psychiatric hospital or correctional facility until he or she has gone through a rehabilitation programme and is considered well enough to live in the community again.



My mother wants to visit my cousin. He is in a correctional facility. She has asked me to go with her. I will tell you about the visit afterwards.



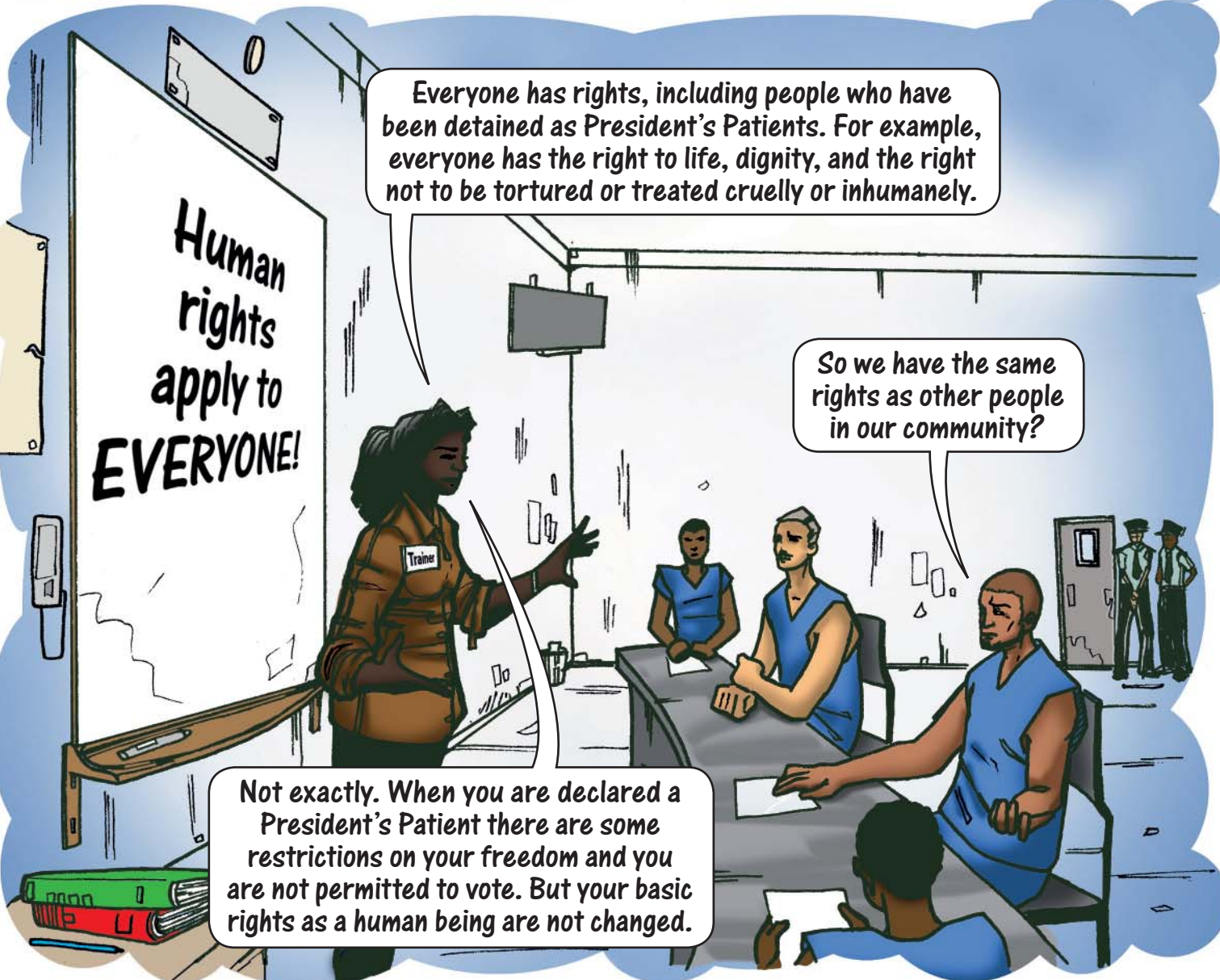
Hello Samuel. How are you today?

I am fine but it is so cold this winter and my room is freezing. Did you remember to bring me the blanket I asked for?



Yes I did. Are the Correctional Service officers treating you well?

Yes they are. Last week we were given a presentation about our rights.



Everyone has rights, including people who have been detained as President's Patients. For example, everyone has the right to life, dignity, and the right not to be tortured or treated cruelly or inhumanely.

So we have the same rights as other people in our community?

Not exactly. When you are declared a President's Patient there are some restrictions on your freedom and you are not permitted to vote. But your basic rights as a human being are not changed.

How can we respect the rights of President's Patients when they sometimes behave differently from what we expect?



It is not easy but we have to remember that all people have human rights. Sometimes we have to take extra steps to apply this in practice. A President's Patient often needs extra attention and support to make sure that his or her basic rights are protected.

Some of the patients never have visitors. They do not have anyone to talk to about problems they might be experiencing.




They could still write a letter to our superiors. Everyone has the right to be heard.



Did you see that there is a broken window in the corridor? This is not safe, especially in a place where people have serious mental health conditions. I am going to take steps to get the window fixed today!





My visit to the correctional facility was very interesting. The doctor who assesses my cousin thinks that he will soon be ready to live in the community again. The doctor asked if he could live with us. He needs our support. I am going to visit him every month from now on until he is released.

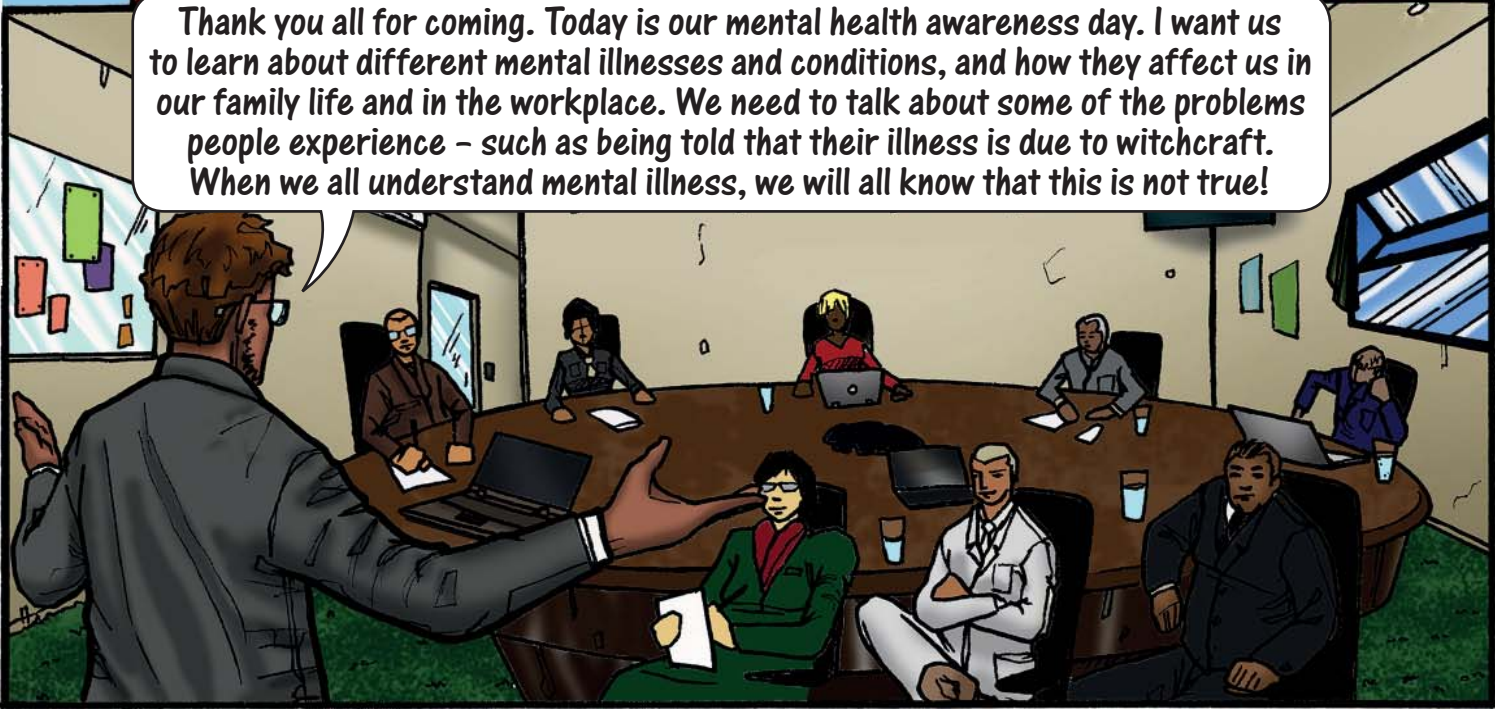
What mental illness does your cousin have?



He has an illness called schizophrenia. I went to the resource centre again to read about it. His symptoms are being treated.

What does your father say?

I explained all of this to my father and now he understands more about mental health. He is the Human Resources Manager at his workplace, and he is holding a mental health awareness day there today!



Thank you all for coming. Today is our mental health awareness day. I want us to learn about different mental illnesses and conditions, and how they affect us in our family life and in the workplace. We need to talk about some of the problems people experience - such as being told that their illness is due to witchcraft. When we all understand mental illness, we will all know that this is not true!

What is mental health?

Mental health is about how we all think, feel and behave. We all need to look after our mental health to make sure that we are able to deal with the challenges we experience every day. Some people have mental illnesses or conditions that affect how they think, feel or behave. Some people may feel sad. Others may feel anxious. Some people may feel they have voices inside their heads talking to them. Others may feel they cannot concentrate. These are just a few examples. There are many different types of mental illnesses and conditions.

What causes mental illnesses and conditions?

Some people are born with a mental illness or condition. Other people may develop a mental illness or condition at some point later in their life. Some people may need support for their mental health during a time of grief or after experiencing some other stressful life event. We do not know what causes some mental illnesses or conditions. If you have a mental illness or condition, a healthcare provider can help you understand the illness or condition and talk to you about the treatment options which may help you.

Are mental illnesses and conditions caused by witchcraft?

No. Mental illnesses and conditions are not caused by witchcraft.

If you think you have a mental illness or condition, what can you do?

You can see a healthcare provider to talk about the symptoms you are experiencing. A doctor may prescribe medication or other forms of treatment, such as counselling or therapy. The doctor or another healthcare provider may give you information about how you can cope with the symptoms by yourself.

What happens if a person with a mental illness or condition is accused of a crime?

The court may find that the person accused of the crime cannot be held responsible for it because mental illness or a mental condition prevented them from fully understanding what they were doing. In cases like this, the person is called a "State President's Decision Patient" (or "President's Patient") and detained in a psychiatric hospital or correctional facility until he or she is well enough to live in the community again. It can take many years before a President's Patient is released back into society.

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