GENERAL HEALTH

The Harmful Impact of Self-Diagnosis on Mental Health

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Over the years, with the rapid rise of technology and social media, mental health information has become easy to find. This increases awareness and reduces stigma, but also leads to more people self-diagnosing disorders without guidance from licensed practitioners.

What is Self-Diagnosis?

Self-diagnosis refers to the act of identifying and labelling oneself with a disorder without consulting a licensed healthcare professional. This typically begins with individuals using search engines like Google or browsing social media platforms where users share personal experiences. As a result, individuals may conclude that the symptoms they experience correspond to mental health disorders found online.

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Why do People Self-Diagnose?

Several factors drive the rise in self-diagnosis of mental health disorders, including ready access to online information, persistent social stigma around mental health, and the reluctance many people feel when seeking professional help. Limited availability of mental health professionals also contributes, prompting individuals to search for answers on their own. Consequently, many turn to social media for explanations and validation.

Although self-diagnosis may seem convenient for understanding one’s symptoms, it can often lead to significant and potentially harmful consequences in the absence of professional evaluation.

1. Misinterpretation of Symptoms:

Many mental disorders present with overlapping and closely related symptoms, making it challenging for individuals to accurately distinguish between conditions without professional evaluation. Additionally, everyday experiences such as temporary fatigue, academic stress, situational worry, and short-term exam-related anxiety are often misinterpreted as clinical symptoms of a mental disorder.

2. Delay in Treatment

Self-diagnosis may cause individuals to delay seeking treatment, as they may conclude that they have already identified the correct mental disorder based on their own research. This can worsen mental health over time if the condition remains untreated.

3. Unnecessary Worry and Increased Anxiety

When people read about mental health disorders online, they may start linking normal emotions or minor symptoms to serious conditions like depression or anxiety disorders. This can lead them to self-diagnose, causing unnecessary worry and stress instead of helping them clearly understand their mental health.

4. Impact on Self-Image

Self-diagnosis can significantly undermine an individual’s self-esteem, as they may prematurely label themselves with a mental health condition without proper professional evaluation. This can distort how they perceive their abilities, emotions, and overall identity, potentially damaging their self-image even when their

experiences may not actually reflect a diagnosable mental disorder.

?Importance of Clinical Assessment.

Clinical assessment must be strongly prioritised over self-diagnosis, as licensed healthcare professionals and clinical psychologists are essential in accurately evaluating and guiding individuals about their mental health. Mental health conditions are highly complex and multifaceted, and relying on self-diagnosis can delay timely detection and appropriate treatment, potentially worsening outcomes.

Consulting a mental health professional ensures correct symptom assessment, provides support without mislabeling, and helps individuals focus on both their strengths and challenges.

One of the reasons individuals may avoid clinical assessment is cultural and traditional influence. In many societies, including India, seeking professional help for mental health concerns or openly discussing them is sometimes considered taboo. Individuals may hesitate to disclose their mental health struggles due to the fear of being judged, particularly by their family members or friends. Mental health conditions, as well as normal emotions such as stress and fatigue, are often dismissed as physical weakness or laziness.

As a result, individuals may avoid seeking professional help and instead depend on self-diagnosis for emotional validation. Therefore, clinical psychologists play a vital and authoritative role in advancing mental health awareness and delivering accurate, evidence-based support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, self-diagnosis may seem helpful and validating, especially when access to professional care is limited. However, relying on it over time can lead to misinterpreting symptoms and delaying appropriate treatment. Prioritizing guidance from qualified healthcare professionals ensures accurate diagnosis, timely care, and the right support, ultimately leading to better mental health outcomes.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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