



MENTAL HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS LEBANON AND STIGMA

Mental illness is a common condition that affects one out of four adults in Lebanon. It is caused by genetic, biological, social, and environmental factors. The stigma surrounding mental illness is largely due to the lack of knowledge people have. In the past, people with mental illnesses were considered “abnormal” and were shunned out of society. There has always been a belief that people suffering from mental illness are difficult, foolish, and incapable of making decisions.

Mental illness is characterized by a disorder in the brain. Advanced medical and psychological research provided evidence that the brain, like any other organ in the body, can sometimes struggle to function properly. This can be treated using medication and psychological support. Recovery is possible, especially if treatment begins at an early stage.

It is important that we examine and change our perception of mental illness in order to break the existing stigma. There is no shame in facing mental health problems, and taking a step towards replacing the negative stereotypes that we possess with educated and nurturing views is basic for people with mental illness to function normally in our society.

We need to fight the incorrect, hurtful, and abusive behavior present in our society today. In Lebanon, there is still a widespread stigma regarding mental illness, and people still hide their illness instead of asking for medical support. It is important to educate others about mental illness and play an active role in breaking the stigma to protect any family member, friend, or co-worker who is silently suffering.

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WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

In the short span of a year, Embrace has already had a big impact on shifting the stigma associated with mental health.

Due to the support and generosity of our sponsors, we managed to organize several events.

"Akeed Ra7 Fee2" Campaign, September 2014

In September 2014, Embrace organized the "Akeed Ra7 Fee2" campaign, which included a memorial walk for the lives of people lost to suicide. The walk reached our iconic landmark, "The Raouche Rock", which was embraced by our very own banner, to raise awareness for suicide prevention especially since one person is lost to suicide in Lebanon every three days.



"Into The Dawn" Suicide Memorial Walk, September 2014

"Into the Dawn" walk took place on Sunday, September 21 at 5:00 am. The walk was intended to provide a community support environment for those who have been affected by suicide. It was attended by a crowd of 150 people, amongst which were individuals who have themselves suffered mental illness and suicidal thoughts, individuals who have attempted suicide, families and friends who have lost someone to suicide, activists and members of the community who are affiliated with this cause, and healthcare professionals in the field of psychiatry and psychology. At 5:40 am, the crowd walked silently into the twilight until they reached the Raouche Rock and gave a note of hope, reflection, recovery and prevention.

Our generous sponsors and supporters made this possible: Bank Audi, 53dots, Pikasso and ASDA'A Burson-Masteller Public Relations.



Christmas Bake Sale Fundraiser, December 2014

On December 19, 2014 Embrace hosted what will be a yearly Christmas Bake Sale Event. The Bake Sale took place at the main lobby of the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC). Embrace members and volunteers contributed by selling delicious home-baked sweets in order to raise funds for Embrace and help allocate funds to its patient care.



Avant Premiere Fundraiser, January 2015

A private screening of the Lebanese movie "Single Married Divorced: Yalla 3a2belkon" took place on January 13, 2015 at Beirut Souks Cinema City. The raised proceedings from the screening went to support mental illness patients in need of treatment.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Beirut Marathon, November 2014

In this year's annual Beirut Marathon, our runners, Louay and Jana, ran the 42K and 10K marathons for Embrace in order to advocate for the cause of mental illness.

Find out what they said.

INTERVIEW WITH LOUAY SALEH

Q: Tell me a little bit about yourself

A: I'm a 24-year-old management consultant, sports fanatic, and Embrace supporter. I believe that sports is great for one's mind, body and spirit. It also helps to release everyday stress. I decided to train for the marathon because it is a sport that is similar to many obstacles in life. It requires a lot of dedication and hard work, and its results are not directly realized. Participating in the marathon teaches you to achieve great things by being patient, resilient, and strong.

Q: How did you first hear about Embrace?

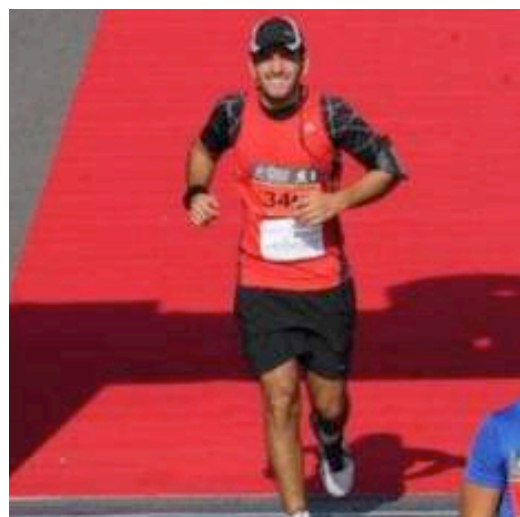
A: Through social media.

Q: Why did you choose to run for Embrace?

A: When I first heard that in Lebanon every three days we lose someone to suicide, I realized that this subject has been put in the dark for too long. Such statistics should be highlighted to enlighten the Lebanese society and induce a cultural shift.

Q: What is the message you would like to deliver to the Lebanese public about mental health and mental illness?

A: The subject should be less of a taboo in society. People should be encouraged to discuss their mental well being with their loved ones and take comfort in reaching out for professional help when needed.



INTERVIEW WITH JANA ARIDI

Q: Tell me a little bit about yourself

A: I'm a 25-year-old architect, sports enthusiast, and avid mental health supporter.

Q: How did you first hear about Embrace?

A: When the campaign of "Akeed Rah Fee2" started, I truly discovered Embrace.

Q: Why did you choose to run for Embrace?

A: I wanted to spread awareness about mental health issues and raise as much funding as I can. I will be doing it again next year since I couldn't complete it last year due to an injury. It was great to hear that people supported this issue. Even if they did not donate, the message got through to them.

Q: What is the message you would like to deliver to the Lebanese public about mental health and mental illness?

A: It is neither "Zeib" nor a pity to have a mental illness. It can be treated just like any other physical illness, and those who have it can receive the right treatment and move on with their lives to achieve great things just like anyone else. With the adequate resources and the right people surrounding the patient, he/she will overcome such an illness.



YOUR STORY

The excerpts from the stories below have been submitted to Embrace by two brave individuals who are facing the challenges of mental illness.

You are not alone; help others and share your experiences. Share Your Story.

Visit our website to upload your story: <https://www.embracefund.org/your-story.html>

Mira's story

"Around my family and friends and always during the happiest moments, I would get the most annoying negative intrusive thoughts; thoughts that are logical but very evil, and out of place. I continuously think of the details of that day; I analyze them and wonder what I could have done better. These repeated thoughts would later surge into obsessions. I would think the events over and over until I feel out of control, with these thoughts controlling my body. My heart would be racing. I would feel dizzy and out of breath."

Z.K.'s Story

"... I have been living with bipolar depression for almost 25 years... At the beginning, it felt like an earthquake rumbling inside... I was mentally destroyed and my family were shocked... The patience and support of my friends, family and colleagues at work, helped me survive through all that. I got married and had two great children, and I became a writer. I have already written two poetry books and three novels, and I am working on my 4th. The good side of bipolar depression is that it made me appreciate a healthy life more and come to understand the world and people around me better..."

GET TO KNOW

BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes severe high and low mood changes. Several factors cause bipolar disorder including: genes, stress, and changes in the brain's function.

Symptoms of a "high" mood include:

- Excessive happiness, hopefulness, and excitement
- Sudden changes from a state of joy to a state of anger, irritation, and hostility.
- Restlessness
- Rapid speech and poor concentration
- Increased energy and decreased need for sleep
- High sex drive
- Unrealistic plans and impulsiveness
- Drug and alcohol abuse

Symptoms of the "low" mood include:

- Sadness
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Detesting things that were once liked
- Concentration problems
- Uncontrollable crying
- Difficulty in taking decisions
- Irritability
- Increased desire for sleep
- Insomnia
- Appetite changes accompanied by weight gain or weight loss
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Suicide attempts

Bipolar can be treated with medication and therapy.

If you are experiencing or know anyone that has such symptoms, please seek immediate help from a medical professional.

EMBRACE, THE FUND

During the past year, Embrace has helped cover the treatment of 22 patients. Some received inpatient hospitalization for depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and suicidal attempts. Others received outpatient mental health services including neuropsychological evaluations and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) sessions.

How can you help?

Embrace continues to work towards its mission in Lebanon and cater to the financial needs of patients by providing assistance to underprivileged individuals who are unable to cover the costs of treatment.

Embrace relies on your donations in order to continue its mission. Every small donation is a step towards saving a life. Embrace is setting up a suicide crisis hotline in Lebanon. This hotline will provide callers with free anonymous support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The hotline will also provide access to trained crisis center counselors who will listen and offer help for patients experiencing intense emotional and/or physical pain. However, a suicide crisis hotline is not possible without the necessary funds needed to cover the expenses of running it.

To support Embrace's initiatives, donate:

Online

Donate a gift to Embrace Fund

https://secure.www.alumnicconnections.com/olc/pub/AVB/onlinegiving/showGivingForm.jsp?form_id=186445&preview=1

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Account Name: American University of Beirut

Donation Account Number: 0-600224-115

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Swift Address: CITILBBE

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