

Book Review ‘ The Orchid Project: There Is Still Love’

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1. Introduction

The stories in this book are written by mental illness fighters, carers and support groups. The events narrated involve sensitive issues such as attempted self-harm, suicide, sexual harassment, bullying and violent acts. If the reader faces problems related to mental illness or is at risk of being affected by knowing this kind of situation, the reader is not advised to read this book and immediately seek the help of mental health professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists and certified counselors. Mental illness should not be taken lightly and the lack of knowledge or sharing to deal with this problem has led to an increase in many such cases in Malaysia. The issue of mental illness is not a new issue in Malaysia. However, the increase in cases related to mental health is very worrying. The reason for this increase is possible because many people think that mental problems such as stress, depression, extreme anxiety and so on are only temporary and will pass away. Not many people know what treatment can be taken, the therapy that can be used and the importance of strong support from family members, friends and employers in helping mental patients. This book is the result of the experience of patients who faced mental health problems but managed to overcome these challenges and rise again. All writers who are willing to share their stories and life experiences are not something to be ashamed of but rather a bravery and will be a guide and guideline to other patients who have the same problem. This book can inspire anyone who goes through a similar experience.

Awareness about mental health in the community needs to be expanded. The 2017 National Morbidity and Health Survey reported that 29 percent of Malaysians suffer from depression and anxiety disorders compared to

12 percent in 2011. This shows that 3 out of 10 people in our environment may face this problem. This survey also reported that the desire to commit suicide among teenagers aged 13 to 17 increased from 7.9 percent in 2012 to 10 percent in 2017. The information in this report shows the seriousness of the issue of mental illness in Malaysia. Mental illness is now the second highest disease experienced by society after heart disease. The Orchid Project gathers the stories of survivors of mental illness that have been looked down upon by society. Orchid flowers were chosen as the title of this book because orchids symbolize perseverance and strength of soul. The green ribbon is a symbol in the mental illness awareness campaign. This book project was implemented to support the government’s efforts to raise awareness about mental illness. Bullying, sexual harassment, parental pressure, sibling pressure, academic pressure, workplace pressure, being cheated on by a lover and emotional stress affect an individual’s mental health.

These problems may occur for years before they result in mental illness. In this book we will delve into the feelings and challenges experienced by patients with Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Depression and Schizophrenia. Bipolar disorder, anxiety and depression are among the most common mental illnesses. In addition to survivor quotes, there are several stories written by patient caregivers and doctors who have treated mental patients. At the end of the book, articles by psychological practitioners and psychiatrists are included. This section is very important for patients and the general public to read. The issues and challenges highlighted in the survivor’s story are expected to create empathy and not mere sympathy. Empathy makes us more considerate members of society and not worthy of punishment. We can provide better support to the mentally ill in the recovery process. Hopefully with this level of awareness, many patients will recover completely. The author’s hope is that with the production of this book, more people will be aware of mental health. As individuals too, we should be aware of what we live every day. If there are signs or symptoms that may be related to mental health, quickly seek help from a professional. Readers can refer to the list of government agencies and NGOs that offer mental health-related services at the end of this book.

The conclusion is that mental health is an issue that is often in focus lately. Almost every day this issue is displayed in print media and social media. Although mental health issues are getting more and more attention in society, the acceptance of mental health issues and mental problems still has a negative stigma. Awareness about every aspect of mental health is still less compared to physical health. There are still those out there, when we say mental, it definitely means crazy. They also imagine madness with the condition of a person who wanders, is unkempt, dirty, collects food in garbage cans and most frighteningly disturbs the public. Not all mental problems are related to insanity. We cannot assume that those who look perfect on the outside, have a strong career and financial position, cannot suffer from stress and mental health problems. Mental health problems

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can happen to anyone just like physical health problems.

Reference

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