The purpose of this audio documentary is to show the struggle of individuals who seek mental health treatment in secret because of their fear of society, and how the Egyptians consider it as taboo and misjudge the ones who do it.

Lead in: Going to therapy does not make you crazy, it does not mean that something is wrong with you. But, in Egyptian society this is not the case. We don't talk about depression, anxiety, or the fact that sometimes life is just really hard. The lives of people with mental health conditions are often defined by stigma as well as discrimination.

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Bortexx – Ability*

*NOHA FAWZY (NF): “After five years of marriage and raising a boy and actually unemployed I felt really overwhelmed with all the responsibilities that actually appeared. After having my child I became a very anxious person. I'm very stressed and I became very nervous.” (1:00)*

This is how it all started with Noha Fawzy, a 30 year old woman who has been married for five years.

*(NF): “I felt that there is something really wrong. I had a big conflict deep inside and I told myself so why not to talk with my close friends.” (00: 30)*

This is when Noha realized that how she feels and the stress she’s going through requires some more professional help.

*NAT SOUND: CLINIC*

*(NF): “I took an appointment with a psychiatrist and I did not actually tell anyone that I'm going to to see the psychiatrist. And I went there and I I actually talked about a lot. A lot of stuff that happened in the past and other stuff happening currently in my life.” (00:18)*
Noha started to feel more relaxed and calm after a few sessions. Her close friends did not notice it but of course, her husband did.

(NF): “When I started to take the medication and I became more relaxed he noticed a difference. So he told me so you became more relaxed. So what happened. I told him that I went to see a psychiatrist.” (00:40)

SOUND EFFECT: SOUND OF PILLS

Noha’s husband noticed a positive change in her attitude, but he did not approve the idea of her seeing a psychiatrist.

SOUND EFFECT: HEARTBEATS

(NS): “He was furious. And we had to fight because he thinks that going to a psychiatrist mean that you’re an abnormal person or you are insane or you are having something serious. But I told him that sometimes you just need to talk. You need to open up. So we had a big fight and he was not actually understanding at all.” (1:06)

As reported By Oxford University Press, cultural and social networks can influence the relationship between stigma and access to care. Social networks, including family members and friends, have a big impact on people’s decisions to pursue treatment, serving either to increase feelings of stigma or to encourage care seeking.

(NF): “What was really important for him is to keep my name and all the info about us and about him very confidential and that I should not tell my real name and his real name to the doctor.” (00:35)

SOUND EFFECT: PENCIL WRITING

Noha’s husband represents many others who believe in the stereotype that seeing a psychiatrist is a taboo. He cared about his image in front of society more than his wife’s needs and feelings.
According to the World Health Organization 75 percent of people with mental health problems worldwide do not get any form of care because of the stigma that exists within society. Noha is a victim of this stereotype. And she’s certainly not alone.

SALMA AHMED (SA): “A year ago exactly I had a very tough time finding a job a stable job and I had a lot of problems with my family.”  

That was Salma Ahmed, a woman in her mid twenties. To many people she appears to be a successful and confident career woman. Salma knew from the beginning that talking to her family and friends about how she feels will not benefit her so she decided to seek professional help immediately.

(SA): “There were a lot of financial issues and emotional issues that all came under my responsibility. It was very tough to handle alone It was very tough at first to take this decision but I thought that my mental health was the most important thing.”  

Salma started to feel better after a few sessions with the therapist, so she decided to tell her mother about it. Unfortunately, this decision led to a lot of conflict.

(SA): “She told me that I wasn't tough enough. She wasn't encouraging at all. She told me that it would be very unlikely for me to find a suitable bachelor to get married to and that it's a taboo in our country that people go and visit doctors especially psychiatrists because people think that whenever someone goes to a psychiatrist that he's crazy or he's mentally unstable which is not the case. It's all about the misconception about the whole the whole issue. She was very angry and she demanded for me to stop going.”  

Salma’s mother was worried about how society will view her daughter and what others will think about her seeing a psychiatrist, especially men as she was of the age of marriage. That’s because we as a society shame the mentally ill and see them as weak. But all of that didn’t stop Salma from attending her sessions because she believed that there is nothing to be ashamed of.
(SA): “I'm never going to accept the fact that I just give up on my mental health because someone doesn't agree with the outlet I use to get all my emotions out. And I kept going anyway regardless of what she thinks and I'm going to keep going until I get better.” (00:09)

MUSIC: FADE IN: Vissman – Moment of Truth

Noha and Salma represent two different examples of how to deal with the stigma of mental health. For instance, Noha stopped going to therapy but Salma continued because she thought that there is no shame in her continuing. Often times we are given the message that if we don’t talk about it, it goes away, or even that it does not exist. To know more about about mental health and stigma I decided to speak to Dr. Abeer Mohamed, Professor of Psychology at the American University in Cairo.

ABEER MOHAMED (AM): “Stigma of mental health from my perspective could be attributed to the social factors mainly because social stigma has been going in our culture since ages ago decades ago not only in our culture but its world wide I think that the first people of start to stigmatize it is the family members themselves they don’t want to show neighbors family friends that they have an issue.” (00:35)

As stated in the journal of experimental social psychology, Social stigma is structural in society and can create barriers for persons with a mental disorder. Structural means that stigma is a belief held by society in which persons with the stigmatized condition are less equal or are part of an inferior group. And that’s how, stigma creates inferiority. As a result of this perception people stop going to therapy.

(AM): “Even if the student feels that he needs the support and he is suffering from a mental health issue, he’s' always reluctant to come and approach us to give the service because of the stigma. I don’t like to be named ADHD student I don’t want to be I have a psychological issue or mental issue so from my perspective this stigma is inherited in the society and it is not going to go by all means unless we the people themselves start to disclose and be aware about it and learn about it.” (00:40)
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