

Interpersonal Engagement

...The Key to Prevent and Overcome Mental Illness

Loneliness is heavily stigmatised. People deny and ignore it. However, loneliness is a growing and dangerous condition contributing to mental health struggles.

Major progress is being made in the fields of behavioural, neuro and social sciences. However, there exists a void between these scientific findings and their implementations designed to help people overcome mental health struggles. Victor LeBouthillier, through his organisation Health Factors, aims to bridge this gap. He says, "Just like some children in developing countries who don't receive immunisation, have diseases that are totally curable, there are many people in the world that accept mental health struggles as a life sentence."

A significant development in behavioural, neuro and social sciences has been to understand the impact of loneliness on a person's psychological functions. Despite having increased interconnectivity due to advancement of technology, people are lonelier today than ever before. Dr. John Cacioppo, a pioneer in this area of research observes that humans are hardwired and intrinsically in need of deep interpersonal connections to maintain healthy psychology. When individuals suffer from loneliness, they have an increased fear of being hurt by other people - thus getting isolated even further. Our body has developed neural, hormonal and genetic mechanisms to support relationships since they are crucial for survival. As adults, despite the inordinate importance placed on autonomy and independence, our strength lies in our brain's ability to communicate, reason, plan, engage, play, laugh and work together. Hence, as Dr. Cacioppo puts it, "Our survival depends on our collective abilities, not our individual might."

Loneliness is heavily stigmatised. No one wants to be a loser; so people deny and ignore it. However, loneliness is a dangerous condition. Dr. Cacioppo's research reveals that the lonelier the brain, the more vigilant it becomes, thereby increasing the likelihood of defensive interactions since one is constantly looking for a threat. Loneliness decreases activity in the brain's temporal parietal junction which lessens empathy and concern for others. Loneliness also disturbs sleep and prevents detoxification of the body after a stressful day. All of this results in high chances of mental illness and early mortality for the lonely individual...and no, online networking does not replace the comfort of human connections and touch.

Victor LeBouthillier's work over the last 15 years with those experiencing mental health struggles recognises that lonely people have decreased resilience as well as a difficult time trusting others. Therefore Health Factors is a residential in-patient retreat centre where individuals live and work to overcome mental health struggles through the use of 10 treatment modalities, of which many are focussed on rebuilding strong interpersonal connections. LeBouthillier likens his wellness centre to a greenhouse where people have a safe environment to experience engaging relationships and treatments that work to restore clients' mental well being. When they do experience these, they come alive and thrive just like a plant would in the perfect conditions of a greenhouse. The Health Factors team uses advanced behavioural, neuro and social sciences treatment modalities to

accomplish this goal. LeBouthillier says, “Our approach in administering the 10 treatment modalities includes: Mentoring, Psychotherapy, Cardio, Studying, Fun/Play, Nature, Nutrition, Healing Circles, Spirituality and After-Care Support.” For more information, visit www.health-factors.com.