

SOUL CARE TERRACE - NURTURING THE SOULS

SHAHAB MUHAMMAD KHAN

Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan.



CORRESPONDENCE: **SHAHAB MUHAMMAD KHAN**

E-mail: shahabmuhammadkhan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Institutionalisation of mentally ill patients throughout the history has a plethora of negative connotations attached to it. One most momentous is the feeling of entrapment, compromising autonomy. In Pakistan, models of provision of community psychiatric care are still developing. Institutionalisation is deliberated where mental health professionals are dealing with severe mental health issues. Providing a safe green space for such people is a blessing in disguise which will help in healthier outcome and conceivable healing and rehabilitation. A green outdoor space crafted with empathetic dedication, is one of its kind initiatives taken at Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital, Karachi. We have named this space as Soul Care Terrace. We envision Soul Care Terrace to not only contribute towards recovery, but also to add valuable data through research.

BACKGROUND

Until the early 20th century, asylums were considered as the main form of care for patients having serious mental illnesses, but that started transforming with the work of many, especially Goffman.¹ Before these efforts made to deinstitutionalise psychiatric care, the indoor psychiatry facilities resembled prisons like institutes,² making patients placed in those institutes lose their usual identities. Deinstitutionalisation made it possible that the mentally ill patients received least restrictive means of treatment in a least restrictive environment in a more open community-based care. The effects of deinstitutionalization vary across countries based on their health care and social welfare systems, and the specific sets of national traditions, socio-cultural context, and the level of available resources.³ In a country like Pakistan and its scarce resources, it is common to approach spiritual and traditional healers for physical and especially for mental illnesses.⁴ In Pakistan, institutionalisation is still considered as a mainstay treatment for the sufferers of severe mental health disorders,⁵ and the persisting stigma associated with mental health has left this population at a disadvantage.

INTRODUCTION

The foreword by Margaret Chan, MD, to the World Health Organisation's Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020 stated, "good mental health enables people to realise their potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities.⁶ Recently published data from a randomised clinical trial suggest that the greening of vacant lots can result in meaningful reductions in psychological distress.⁷ This can help in improving mental health by restoring capacities, building capacities, and reducing harm.⁸ Green spaces have become essential in the face of increasing globalisation and modernization,⁹ which have adversely affected lifestyles and immunity due to the absence of green zones. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has stated that urban green spaces are a "necessary component for delivering healthy, sustainable, livable conditions" and have highlighted the need for evidence to

support more effective urban planning.¹⁰ Another scoping review showed that positive associations between mental health and green space characteristics.¹¹ While policymakers address the lack of recreational areas, providing such spaces to hospitalised patients suffering from severe mental health disorders remains a challenge, especially in countries like Pakistan that are still evolving from traditional psychiatric practices.

Initiative at Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital

Keeping in mind and addressing the multidimensional impact of green spaces on mental health, Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital, conceived the concept of "Soul Care Terrace." With the help and support of like-minded people keen to promote mental health, we crafted a safe haven for the most marginalised people, i.e. suffering from mental health illnesses. This innovative project aimed to infuse a much-needed green touch into psychiatric care facilities, breaking away from the prison-like settings that stigmatised mental health patients.

Design Concept

The department's members ranging from consultants (Dr Rabbia Mushtaq and Dr Fariha Iqbal) to all postgraduate residents (Dr Asfia Waseem, Dr Juhaina Azhar, Dr Hafsa Arshad, Dr Hassan Iqbal, Dr Minnahil Ali and Dr Rubab Zehra) meticulously designed every aspect of the "Soul Care Terrace." Our team left no stone unturned in transforming this dream into a reality. An all-cement usage for construction ensures minimal maintenance efforts and resistance to natural elements. This terrace features spacious sitting areas, a screening zone with projector settings, faux grass patches, an artificial rockery with a natural soothing sound of waterfall and illuminated by gentle lights, and a small barbeque area. A decorative wall adorned with hanging plants further enhances the aesthetics, creating a tranquil environment. The walls, reinforced to prioritise safety and well-being, reflect a collective labour of love of individuals passionate about psychiatry. Hence, we provided our patients with a secure place to let go of the worries, at least for the stay.

Changing Reality

In a country where patients battling mental health challenges face stigmatisation and mistreatment, improving their in-care experience sets a precedence for their headway in the outside world. It additionally poses a crucial question: Do we want our patients treated worse than convicted criminals or with humane care and empathy? The "Soul Care Terrace" becomes a symbol of the department's commitment to changing the narrative surrounding mental health.

Future Plans and Research Initiatives

Looking ahead, Department of Psychiatry, PNS Shifa Hospital, envisions not only maintaining the "Soul Care Terrace" but also plans to expand its impact through research initiatives. The department is committed to conducting studies to quantify the positive impact of this innovative space on the mental health of hospitalised patients. By collecting data and analysing outcomes, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the broader field of psychiatric care and rehabilitation. With our research, we aim to further emphasise the importance of green spaces in the healing process.

CONCLUSION

Amidst the comfort of today's world, the lives of those afflicted with mental health disorders often remain disadvantaged by the challenges they face. The "Soul Care Terrace" stands as a testament to our department's dedication to offering a small yet impactful stride towards reducing the stigma and offering enhanced care to patients battling psychiatric illnesses. We envision the Soul Care Terrace becoming a sanctuary for rejuvenation and healing—a tangible commitment to fostering empathy and understanding for those in need.



REFERENCES

1. Goffman E: Asylums; essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates. Garden City: Anchor Books; 1961.
2. Chow WS, Priebe S. Understanding psychiatric institutionalization: a conceptual review. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2013;13:169. doi:10.1186/1471-244X-13-169
3. Fakhoury W, Priebe S: The process of deinstitutionalization: an international overview. *Curr Opin Psychiatry*. 2002, 15:187–192.
4. Shaikh BT, Hatcher J. Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Pakistan: Prospects and Limitations. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med*. 2005;2(2):139-142. doi:10.1093/ecam/neh088
5. Nizamie SH, Goyal N. History of psychiatry in India. *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2010;52(Suppl 1):S7-S12. doi:10.4103/0019-5545.69195
6. World Health Organization. Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2013.
7. South EC, Hohl BC, Kondo MC, MacDonald JM, Branas CC. Effect of Greening Vacant Land on Mental Health of Community-Dwelling Adults: A Cluster Randomized Trial [published correction appears in *JAMA Netw Open*. 2018 Aug 3;1(4):e182583]. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2018;1(3):e180298. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.0298
8. Markevych I, Schoierer J, Hartig T, et al. Exploring pathways linking greenspace to health: Theoretical and methodological guidance. *Environ Res*. 2017;158:301-317. doi:10.1016/j.envres.2017.06.028
9. Barton J, Rogerson M. The importance of greenspace for mental health. *BJPsych Int*. 2017;14(4):79-81. doi:10.1192/s2056474000002051
10. Urban Green Spaces and health - A review of evidence (2016) [Internet]. WHO; 2016 [cited 25 September 2023]. Available from: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/publications/2016/urban-green-spaces-and-health-a-review-of-evidence-2016>
11. Callaghan A, McCombe G, Harrold A, et al. The impact of green spaces on mental health in urban settings: a scoping review. *J Ment Health*. 2021;30(2):179-193. doi:10.1080/09638237.2020.1755027

COPYRIGHT
Copyright ©2023 JPPS. Published by Pakistan Psychiatric Society. Re-use permitted under CC BY-NC. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt, build upon this work non-commercially, and license their derivative works on different terms, provided the original work is properly cited, appropriate credit is given, any changes made indicated, and the use is non-commercial. See: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

