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PERSPECTIVE

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POOR APPEARANCE AS A NEVER ENDING STIGMATIZATION FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Fauzan Saputra *

Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Bumi Persada Nursing College
Lhoksemawe City, Aceh Province, Indonesia

***Corresponding author:**

Fauzan Saputra, RN, MNS

Bumi Persada Nursing College, Alue Awe, Muara Dua, Lhokseumawe City, Aceh Province, Indonesia 24351

E-mail: saputrafauzan66@gmail.com

As a social creature, human will always try to have connection with the others. Unconsciously, in the middle process of the interaction, human is forced to behave like others' expectation. This situation is very common in adolescence, but it can be exist following the life cycle of human.¹ The term of expectation has two different impacts, which is not only motivating human to become a better person or successfully survive and adapt with the expectation, but also separating human from a better one or failed to fulfill the expectation. In this term, stigma may derive from the second impact of the expectation, when a person is being insulted or humiliated by the others for having different situation and condition, that alienates them from their environment.² One of conditions that may put person in stigmatization is a severe

mental health problem. People with schizophrenia, severe depressive disorder and bipolar disorder are easily to get stigmatized by other people.¹ One of reasons is because they tend to have poor appearances. People with those conditions are unable to take care of themselves, they refuse to take bath and change clothes. They let their hair, mustache and beard grow too long and unaware to smooth them. These typical appearances become common in community and are often described as people with severe mental health problems. In addition, the media worsen the situation by introducing young generations with the concept of stigmatization in the terms of "crazy", "mad" and "losing your mind" with all characteristics of poor appearances.³ At this point, recurrent misconception about mental health problem will result to

misleading belief, and if it starts from the children, they will treat it as true information.⁴

This situation is not beneficial for those people with mental health problems, because they are not only struggling with the illness, but also fighting with stigma from the community and themselves.⁵ The community may stereotype them as dangerous, incompetence and weakness people or tend to prejudice them as people who cannot control their anger and fear and discriminate them by avoidance, withhold employment and housing opportunities and withhold help. They will be rejected by the community, and this situation may lead them to another situation, self-stigma. People with mental health problems have a tendency to stigmatize themselves, they will also stereotype themselves as incompetence and weakness people, exhibit low self-esteem and low self-efficacy and fail to pursue work and housing opportunity.⁶ In the end, they will believe what the community believes and one of the consequences is that may delay their adaptation process toward their illness. They keep exhibiting poor appearances and the community keeps stigmatizing them, like a never-ending process. But, if we can cut the link, we may solve the haunted problem. In another word, we may try to minimize stigmatization by giving them an acceptable appearance.

Thus, in order to provide them with a good appearance, psychiatric nurses should put personal hygiene as one of important interventions. Start with asking and helping them to take regular bath, at least twice a day and brushing their teeth after dinner. They need to teach them how to choose the right clothes and make them like other people in their community. Nurses also may focus on how to make a good haircut, better than only making them bald and keep the nails clean. A good and

clean appearance will let them feel healthy and fresh because this feeling will help us to create therapeutic environment, in order to ease other mental-related problems. Soon, after their appearances literally change and they can control all of the symptoms, nurses need to reintroduce them to their community, by asking them to get involved and following the social activities that they ever did in the community. As professional psychiatric nurses, it will be better to put themselves more on how to make patients feel more acceptable by having a good appearance. In the end, it is expected that, “normal look” of people with severe mental health problems may minimize the never ending stigmatization and bring new hope to speed the progress of their illness. So, let the psychiatrist works with the injections and psychiatric nurse works with hair scissors and nail clipper.

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This study is the original work of the corresponding author.

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