

Transcript for Episode 313: “World Mental Health Day: We Will Face This Together”

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.

KARTIKA LADWALI: This is something that all of us are in together and that we all need to talk more about, that we all need to invite ourselves into each other's stories, just to realize that, you know, this is not something that's an individual struggle, or even a cultural struggle, it is something that we all need to come together for, because I believe that the less we talk about something, the more shame is attached to it. And so I strongly believe that, you know, empathy doesn't hold space for shame.

[music playing]

LINDSAY KOLSCH: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. Each episode we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery.

[music playing]

CHAD MOSES: Hey everyone, this is Chad Moses, TWLOHA's Director of Outreach. I'm here to bring you the final episode of Season Three. This Saturday, October 10th is World Mental Health Day. It's a global moment to pause, reflect, and address the importance of mental health, the progress that we've made, and the work that is still yet to be done. This day matters every year, but especially this year. A year when we have all been overwhelmed by heartbreaking loss, fear, and uncertainty. Today, to honor our podcast listeners from all over the globe, we'll be joined by a few friends hailing from an array of countries. Their voices and stories will allow us to see a glimpse into the ways in which mental health plays a role in everyone's lives no matter where they call home. We want to learn how stigma continues to impact this conversation in different cultures and regions and how access to professional help depends on far too many factors in many places. Along with exploring this topic, we also want to remind you that hope is universal and that your mental well-being is important. You are not alone and we will face this together.

First up, I am joined by Kartika Ladwal, who is from India, but is currently studying psychology in the UK. This is what she has to say about the deep-rooted stigma that exists in her home country, along with the stigma she didn't expect to find in her brief US stay before the COVID pandemic took hold of the world.

KARTIKA LADWALI: The culture that I come from is very largely patriarchal. I think it's also important when we're talking about mental health and mental health stigma that it's important to talk about it in the context of the social, economic cultural context that we live in is that is very

directly tied to the way we experience mental health. With patriarchy, I think the biggest struggle is, you know, the subjugation of women, and just these unrealistic standards of machismo that they have for men, and I think affects everyone, regardless of gender, in the sense that, you know, women don't feel free enough to express who they are. And men feel like they can't express their emotions. And I think that does a lot of harm. And it starts very early on where, you know, there are societal structures that expect you to believe behave in a particular way. Apart from that, I think, growing up mental health is never a normal conversation. I think emotions are just not talked about enough, if at all. Even if there is someone who's struggling with a mental health issue, it's always you know, the conversations always about how we don't let that out of the house. So how you know, someone outside the house shouldn't know that, you know, someone inside is struggling with mental health, which is very disheartening, honestly, because it makes a lot of space for shame to breathe in. And it can be very, very harmful, or, perhaps an added struggle for someone who's already trying to, you know, understand the struggle of mental health issues.

KARTIKA: I'm privileged, in many ways, in the sense that I have an education, I have access to information, I have access to the internet, there are several parts of India that don't have access to the internet, you know, especially rural parts. And, you know, it goes back to the fact that the concept of mental health is not acknowledged in some places. And so even if someone you know, is struggling with a mental health issue, they probably aren't even aware that there's a mental health issue that I could be struggling with. So it comes back to the conversation, that, these conversations are just not being had. Which is, which is very disheartening, because I mean, as a student, as a, you know, a young person in, you know, a privileged space, I can bring this conversation to my spaces. But I think there are so many spaces that this conversation is just not reaching.

CHAD: Why do you think that a global day of recognizing the importance of mental health is needed? Or why do you think it matters?

KARTIKA: Before I traveled to the United States, in my head, it was almost like, you know, because I'm from an Eastern culture, that's more, you know, collectivistic tends to be a little more conservative. It's also brilliant in several ways. But in my head, the idea was, your Western culture would be more open to these conversations, access to help would be much easier. But honestly, to me, the stigma is just as deep rooted. And I feel like my experiences outside of my culture, both in the United States, and now in the UK, and I'm still learning here. But it just makes me realize how connected we all are, and how our humanity just brings us together, you know, several ways and there are different contexts to our struggles. Yes, there are different things we struggle with. There are different battles we fight, but at the end of it, we have, I think our humanity just brings us together and I think on global day that recognizes this need is it's almost like a call for action, you know, an invitation to share our stories with the world and to realize that we're not as different as we think we might be.

CHAD: Next you'll hear from our friend Yentl Reynders, who was born and raised in Belgium, discussing what mental health care and accessing it commonly look like where she lives.

CHAD: So using your history, using your experience of being a Belgian citizen, what do mental health care and stigma look like in your part of the world.

YENTIL REYNDERS: If we're talking about mental health care, I would say, overall, it's close to non-existent. Of course, there are facilities and individual options like therapists and psychologists, and all that, like, of course, that exists. But it's highly inaccessible. I recently found out that if you're a student, and you're still sort of officially under the financial wings of your parents, for some reason, you get coverage for your costs up to like 90%. So say you pay like 50 Euros, which is close to like the dollar amount. For one session with a therapist, you would receive back almost like 45 Euros, which is a lot. Whereas, like, when you're sort of independent and paying your own bills, you get coverage, of, in my personal case, it was 10 euros for one session, which is usually around like 50 euros, and there was a limit of 10 sessions. So I would only get that tiny little refund for 10 sessions. And that's not a yearly limit that's across my lifetime. So it was like I had this one shot at connecting with a therapist, and it was like, you get these 10 sessions, and you better be fixed by then.

YENTIL: It just doesn't help. You take what you can get. And you start to develop this idea that like, you know, whatever is out there, I'll just be grateful for it. But if you look at some other countries, I feel like we're definitely kind of lagging behind.

YENTIL: So health care wise, I feel like mental health is still like the black sheep within the overall health care family. It's just so strange. Like, I can go to my chiropractor and get my back taken care of every week and get like almost a full refund. But as soon as there's something wrong with my mind or going on with my mind, then that's like not catered to in the same way.

CHAD: And now here's what our friend Harry Allen from the UK had to say about both the progress and the stigma he has witnessed in his country, especially when it comes to the male perspective.

HARRY ALLEN: As far as working with the young people that I work with, I'd say most if not all of the young people I come into contact with will acknowledge and have the language to say that they struggle with their mental health in some way, which some could find discouraging, and say, you know that poor mental health is on the rise amongst young people, I'm encouraged by the fact that the young people I work with, have the confidence in the language to be able to acknowledge that they are struggling in some way with their mental health. I remember being their age and thinking about the sort of benchmarks or the loopholes, I felt like I had to fit through before I could say, 'I'm ready to access treatment,' or 'Okay, this is, you know, now serious enough for me to garner, you know, diagnosis or for it to be a serious thing.' And so it's encouraging for me to be able to see them just use language to say like, 'Oh, yeah, no, I am someone that gets anxious.' Or, 'I am someone who struggles with depression.' Because yeah, I am a big advocate for mental health and I think it's not something that you

need to reach a certain benchmark or reach a certain level before you can access some sort of help.

CHAD: There certainly is this stereotype of British culture of kind of reserved stoicism the Keep calm and carry on, you know, like stop motion, we'll get through it. And even you know, kind of accentuated through the dry humor that makes up so much of British pop media. Do you see any kind of correlation with those overarching themes and culture that have determined how mental health is portrayed or even encouraged in conversation?

HARRY: I think there is definitely truth to the fact that as a British people we are quite reserved and I'd like to think, at least among my circle or my generation, or maybe my sort of demographic that that sort of stiff upper lip soldier on attitudes, which is so inherent in this British culture isn't super prevalent in people talking about the mental health, but I'm also very confident it definitely exists. You know, and as I said, we can see that in the numbers of, especially young men who are choosing to take their lives, and not actually feeling like they can be really open and really honest about, you know, the fact that they are struggling. And, you know, I think that's in part this sort of, as you've described, British stoic, keep calm and carry on, but this also, I guess, stereotype behind men just being expected to buck up, carry on and not be able to sort of show those emotions or show that weakness or vulnerability.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: Hey everyone, this is Lindsay Kolsch, here to let you know about an upcoming sale happening in the TWLOHA Online Store. At To Write Love, we believe that hope is universal and your mental health matters no matter who you are or where you're from. One of the ways we sustain this movement is through our merch. Not only does it help fund our efforts, but it acts as a conversation starter and a reminder to those wearing and seeing the merch that hope and help exist. We believe even something so simple like a tshirt can introduce someone to the mission of TWLOHA or maybe encourage another to reach out and ask for help. So on Saturday, October 10th, in honor of World Mental Health Day, every order of \$25 or more will receive free international shipping. No matter where you'll live, the cost of shipping will be taken care of by us! There's no code needed, just pick out what you want on October tenth (10) and we'll ship it to you for free.

If you're looking for other ways to make a difference and support TWLOHA, you can get involved from wherever you call home. Whether that's by donating your birthday to TWLOHA on Facebook or finding out how you can use your voice online to be a source of hope. To learn more, visit TWLOHA.com and click on get involved.

And as always, thank you for caring about and supporting this movement. We couldn't do it without you.

[music playing]

CHAD: Next we talk with Shannan Wong. She was born and raised in New Zealand and speaks generously about the cultures that have informed her worldview, ranging from her Chinese family roots to the indigenous Moari people. Shannan is a long-serving volunteer for a mental health helpline in Aotearoa, where she trains fellow volunteers to be able to hold space for those who need it and offer a supportive, external perspective.

CHAD: So given your background, working in the field of mental health, and working with personal development, what do mental health care and stigma look like where you call home?

SHANNAN WONG: I have both the amazing opportunity to sit alongside people doing this really hard work. And also on the other side, I'm journeying along young people who are also navigating these seas of change that are happening across the world at the moment. We often talk about TL Pio, the world of a young person and I had a joke with some young people that I worked with the other day, I don't think I would have survived as well as they have in the environment if I was their age right now, I think young people are really unlucky and unfortunate, and yet at the same time, are building resilience a whole lot faster than myself, and maybe some of my older family members have had to. Stigma is a real big thing here and Alterra and yet, at the same time, our country knows it. We recognize as having quite a high suicide rate. We recognize having quite high diagnoses. A bunch of universities got together, and they made a survey so that high school students could answer about their mental health, their general health, substance abuse, relationships, concerns and worries about the world. And they found, actually, that there is a persistent and growing mental health inequity between Maori, our indigenous peoples and other minority groups versus other ethnic groups. And I think that we have to talk into that space. And we have to talk about the fact that colonization has really severely impacted our Maori people, and particularly, our young people of altura. Yeah, I just think that there's a lot of acknowledgement that we know this, that all of these pieces of research are so important. But they are just validating a story that a lot of us are already hearing. One thing I think I'm proud of is that our pandemic has allowed us to reach into ourselves a little bit more. There are really amazing mental health campaigns by awesome advocates here and Alterra that reminded people to check in on each other, check-in on your neighbor's, check-in on your community, your family can't physically be around them, but you can visually or audibly hear them, check-in on yourself and be kind to yourself during this period of time. And it also resulted in really rapid research and reports being made. The Health Promotion Agency here rapidly made evidence reports about young people and how to, I guess recover after COVID. And then also, as I referred to, before, there was a youth 19 survey with young children or students in schools, and also a really important commentary from academics

and psychologists that came out of the University of Auckland urging greater response to Youth Mental Health and Altior. So these are the things that we know. And now we're being bolstered by amazing research and evidence and also voices of young people speaking into this situation.

CHAD: I remember some of the travels that I've been fortunate enough to take to Australia and It autorola. And just noticing the the uniqueness of the of the cultures that have all combined to make these countries make these places. You were talking a little bit about your history being a descendant of, of Asian immigration, and we're talking about just a couple hundred years of British colonialism, and we're talking about thousands and thousand years of, of indigenous expression. And this is all taking place on what is not a very huge landmass. I'm wondering if there are any, I guess idiosyncrasies that you've picked up on, on how these cultures have maybe combined to, to combat or maybe to, to expound on stigma? Or I guess, how different cultures interact with mental health in different ways?

SHANNAN: What our country has actually chosen to recognizes that we have been gifted with really rich mataranka, really rich information, knowledge, and spiritual perspectives from Maori. And because of the real damage that has been done through colonization, the rising tide of voices that talk into mental health and suicide, and poor, general health, the voices of Maori and Pacifica, academics, and icons, and we're listening. Something that I think really ties it together is that I had the opportunity to share one of our mental health frameworks when I came to the MOVE conference, and that's called Te whare tapa whā Tea Party [unsure]. And it's really widely recognized across Altaira is a beautiful way to check-in with self and acknowledge the resilience and importance of having other support networks and other things in life that bolster our health or our whole order. And that was developed by an amazing human called Dr Mason Durie is Maori. And because of that, because of I think the accessibility of this framework, the recognition that we all have knowledge, and sometimes we just need a pathway to access that knowledge. Our government, last year convened a government inquiry into mental health and addiction. And they had a roadshow and Dr Mason Durie was in that he was part of that inquiry. And so they went across all of otira and specifically into communities that were affected by mental health and suicide. And they had these townhall like conversations and they had one on one interviews. And the recognition is there. I think people do have ideas and strategies and plans and knowledge about how we can try and attempt to decrease the prevalence of mental health and suicidality in these communities. And that when those pieces of information and frameworks and plans are shared, then more and more people will have the opportunity to speak into them and to implement and utilize them. And how amazing is that, that a government could say, 'Actually, we know, we're hearing you. You're saying you've been saying for a really long time, we know that this is like a really big issue for Altidore. And in order for us, as a country to grow and develop, well, we need to actually dig in and see what's going on, and hear these stories.'

CHAD: Our last guest, Elvin Schouten, who calls the Netherlands home. Elvin joined us to talk about why a global day recognizing mental health is important and how awareness campaigns are opening up conversations around mental health in the Netherlands.

ELVIN SCHOUTEN: I would even feel like people are so divided up into categories, like nationalities, and you're American, or you're European, or you're Australian, or whatever country you're from, and I feel like that almost, it goes way, way past what's every person in the world shares. And that's just everyone wants to feel loved, and everyone wants to feel connected. And I also think that people around the world share in the same kind of issues like loneliness, and heartbreak and suffering and the whole range of mental illnesses. So I think it's very good for people around the world to realize that they're not alone in whatever they're facing. And I truly believe that a day like world's Mental Health Day can bring people together and can make people feel less alone in whatever they're facing during this point in their lives.

CHAD: You recall your first exposure to conversations about mental health happening in kind of the physical health world that as you went to go for your regular checkup to see your doctor that you would see these pamphlets jumping off from that point, who do you feel is really driving the conversation of change within the mental health world within the Netherlands?

ELVIN: I do think the government plays a role to some extent. So, for example, at the beginning of this year, the government launched this campaign and the campaign was called, 'Hey, it's okay.' This government's campaign was giving very practical tips to people who are suffering with anxiety and depression to look for help in their communities with a psychologist or psychiatrist but also, a big part of the campaign was to talk to people around you about the struggles you were facing. And I feel like the Dutch people are very down to earth kind of practical sort of people. So they actually also gave some tips you could use when you wanted to talk about the anxiety or depression you were facing. And one of the pointers they gave, which I thought was so clever, is that it says, 'Describe the feeling you're having.' So for someone who has never, never struggled with anxiety, or depression, him or herself, it can be very difficult to understand what you are going through when you're in an episode of anxiety or depression. So what this tip specifically told us was that, try to relate it to the person you're talking to. So for example, when you're talking about anxiety, tell this person 'Hey, do you know the feeling when you need to get a presentation? And how does that make you feel?' And then tell the person, 'That's something that I feel all the time?' Or, 'Do you know what it feels like when, for example, your dog dies or a loved one is very sick. So that's something that I feel all the time when I'm depressed.' So I feel like that's something that really opened up the conversation about mental health.

CHAD: And finally, we asked each guest to tell us what this year's World Mental Health Day statement: "We will face this together" means to them. You'll hear first from Kartika, followed by Yentl, Shannan, Harry, and then Elvin. Here's what they shared:

KARTIKA: When I first heard that phrase, I think uh what I began to think about is it's just not a journey that you take alone. It's a journey that a lot of people take with you. I can say that I wouldn't be where I am today, if it wasn't for the people who stood by me when I needed them. Yeah and it's just this idea that you know, I understand that we differ in culture, we differ in the ways we live lives. But at the end of it, I think this is something that affects us all, regardless of who we are, where we come from. And when we say we will face this together, it means that, you know, this is something that all of us are in together and that we all need to talk more about, that we all need to invite ourselves into each other's stories, just to realize that, you know, this is not something that's an individual struggle, or even a cultural struggle, it is something that we all need to come together for, because I believe that the less we talk about something, the more shame is attached to it. And I strongly believe that, you know, empathy doesn't hold space for shame.

YENTL: On a grand scale, I think we can only like achieve better mental health for individuals, which is essentially a global concern, by facing it together, and by stepping up together. And whether that contribution is like, on a very small level in your day to day life. Just by being like kind to other people and being more open minded. And learning not to judge someone when they tell you a story that doesn't immediately fit with your own reality. But I think also on a on a bigger scale, speaking up in what we demand and expect from our government. I know so many people who would love to sit with a therapist for the first time, but they just can't afford it. What if all those people would actually have their voice heard and express in some way like, 'This is not okay.' If I look at a more personal level, you just can't do it alone. 've been through hell and back with my own mental state. And I have like a very specific list of people that I will, like, if I'm on my deathbed one day, I will thank them for that one conversation that might have pulled me out of a dark night, years ago. If that could be like any kind of message that I could give to someone else, it's that there are always people around you, you might think that you're alone, but there's always that one person who is perfectly welcoming to you reaching out to them. I think again, when you're like in that place, it's so easy to forget, or like there's this voice in your head that makes you believe that you're just a burden to people or you shouldn't talk about your problems with someone else. But people in essence are very empathetic creatures. And there's gonna be someone out there who was gonna just like welcome you with open arms.

SHANNAN: If we have something that's a global time to bring together, experts and fields, advocates who have been doing this hard work, people's stories being disclosed in safe ways, then what we have is just like a massive think tank that could really allow for greater

accessibility to resources and information, and potentially better outcomes for our communities and populations. I also think it would be a really beautiful time to stop take and acknowledge the small gains and the small wins that are happening across the world, because it's a really hard time right now. And it is really hard to acknowledge and take that moment of gratitude, when so much as wearing us down. And so I like to think of like these global days of and these weeks of as opportunities to really celebrate small wins and the people that are achieving those small wins.

HARRY: We will face this together can be, you face it with you, your counselor, your therapist, but I think having someone else alongside you, and by you is that that's the important thing, it doesn't need to be about feeling like you have a duty to share your story or you have a duty to, you know, let everyone know what's going on for you. If that's not quite where you're at. And then that's totally fine. You know, your story is your own, you don't have a duty or responsibility to share it. But I mean, if you feel led too, and if you feel comfortable, too, I think it's the idea that, yeah, our stories can help each other. And our stories can help give language to people that don't quite have that language.

ELVIN: When I hear the phrase, we will face this together. It means that you don't have to feel alone when you're struggling with these very human things. There's actually this really beautiful saying in Dutch, which I don't believe translates to English quite well. But in Dutch, the saying goes, gedeelde pijn is gelijk aan de helft van de pijn. And if I were to translate that word for words, it would mean that shared pain equals half the pain. So whenever you share your pain, whenever you share your suffering with someone else, maybe that's a friend, maybe that's a family member, maybe that's a colleague, or maybe that's a psychologist or a counselor. That means that the burden on your shoulders that can sometimes seem so overwhelming and almost too heavy to carry, whenever you start sharing that burden with someone else. The load becomes easier to carry. Because you're not carrying it alone anymore.

[music playing]

CHAD: We want to say thank you again to our guests today that offered us a look into their own personal experiences with mental health and the mental health conversations that are taking place in the countries they call home. Although TWLOHA hails from the US and Central Florida, we believe that hope and help are and should be universal. That's why we're always working to grow and expand our FIND HELP database, which includes international resources. If there is an international resource that you would like to see added, please submit your recommendation by completing the survey in our show notes. We also want to thank you, our listeners, for tuning in this season. It has been our pleasure connecting with you and all of our season three guests, and we can't wait to bring you more honest and heartfelt conversations

again very soon. And stay tuned for a few special episodes that will be released before we close out 2020. And as always, we're glad you're here.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: We hope this episode has been a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and that you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it is okay to reach out and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website twloha.com. That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

Or, if you need to talk to someone right now, you can always reach out to our friends at Crisis Text Line.

Simply text the word TWLOHA—that's T W L O H A—to 741741. You'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

Finally, if you've enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we really hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get this podcast. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really like for you to write us a review.

It'll help more people find this podcast and the mission of TWLOHA. If you have any feedback or questions, please send us an email to podcast@twloha.com.

A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Lindsay Kolsch, with editorial support by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor.

I'm Lindsay Kolsch, thank you so much for listening.

To Write Love on Her Arms is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery.