

Review

When I was first informed about the one day conference on depression by Lade Olugbemi (Director, Nous Organisation), I was immediately struck by a key fact I read on the invitation: 25% of the population will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year. 25% is an astonishing figure to say the least, but one that quite frankly does not surprise me.

Throughout my years, I've been faced with a number of adversities and trials that have had a significant bearing on how my life has been shaped. Admittedly, I do not claim to have a mental health problem, and perhaps I will never truly understand. However, the Nous Organisation's Conference on Depression reminded me that in fact each individual battles their little problems and if not dealt with can grow and fester until it feels like an immovable weight. The Nous Organisation's Conference reminded us all that depression is a silent killer in our community.

While Dr Kaplana Dein and Dr Yomi Owoso spoke on depression and its effects in society, Nicholas Bygraves gave a harrowing discourse of the statistics and Amanda Bedzrah narrated her battles with depression, I sat in the conference wondering why there were not more people listening. More people needed to understand and take heed of the warning signs and symptoms of depression. More people simply needed to pay attention. The Nous Organisation performs a fantastic role in raising awareness of mental health issues in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Communities, but without more organisations like The Nous standing up and taking the lead, people will continue to suffer at the merciless hands of depression.

Interestingly, The Nous' conference on Depression struck a chord with my personal experiences, experiences I detail in my book titled: 'A New Life' (the sequel to 'The Unexpected Truth'). Within my books, I explicate my emotional journey from where my childhood is mired in dirty secrets to how I'm driven to the limits of desperation and hunger. I particularly remember when I was sitting down in a lecture theatre with my friends in late March of 2010. It was the last lecture of the semester, and you could feel the anticipation of everyone in the theatre waiting for the words: "That's all for today". Yet, those words didn't come. Rather a seemingly harmless and ostensibly mind-numbing lecture on children and cognitive bases of behaviour had become one of the toughest emotional experiences of my life. A nerve had been touched. Tears flowed down my eyes at the end of the lecture, and while I may have stopped crying then, the pains remain as a scar today.

While I suggest reading my books to find out why those tears flowed, the relative importance of The Nous' conference has continued to grow on me. But then I also believe that its relative importance is negligible. Depression is an important mental health issue period. It is relatively important to everyone. Why? Because at least 25% the population will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year.

Six years on from my experience in the lecture theatre, I have since spoken to a psychologist and constantly battle my everyday insecurities. But like most people, I try focus on the positive things in life and keep moving forward. I speak to young people about my experiences to help them cope with their worries and anxieties. For some people, this simply is not possible and that is why we need – no, we must – work together to support the Nous Organisation in raising awareness of mental health issues in BAME communities. Now is the time to pay attention; and that is why I have never felt happier to recommend The Nous Organisation.

By Mr Femi Senu, Executive Director of Reachout Empowerment Force