

“Parents should never impose their own wishes on their children.”

A special conversation with Sonal Sonawani, a famous psychologist and founder of Centre for Depression Anxiety Relations (CeDAR) in Pune.

These days, people are stressed for some reason or the other. Many problems tend to burden us. However, it is possible to stay stable and lead a tension free life. Physical diseases can be seen but mental illnesses are invisible menaces. **Sonal Sonawani** chose psychology as her subject in order to help people maintain a good mental health and counsel them to not think of committing suicide. She has given insight into her life, her journey, the fascinating subject of psychology, its benefits to people, techniques of stress control and many more aspects that her centre CeDAR (Centre for Depression, Anxiety, Relationship) is primarily concerned with. In an exclusive interview with Life365, **Sonal Sonawani** shares her journey and route to success.



“These days people suffer from loneliness and depression. Personal relationships are also a reason for depression. Another reason for depression is work or being in the wrong career. Family issues, worries and financial issues also create a strain on the mind. People also get into depression because of broken relationships after marriage.”

psychiatrists do not do counselling. Abroad, psychiatrists do counselling and therapies too. The main role of a psychologist is to find out why a person is suffering from an issue. After speaking to that person, the psychologist has to find out who that person trusts completely. After getting to know this, the psychologist tries to help the person. The psychologist finds out everything about the person but does not debate with him, neither does the psychologist make any judgments about him. He has to handle the person with compassion. They have to help the person come out of the problem through their own strength. The person is unable to understand his own problems, hence, things have to be explained to him. Clinical psychology includes therapies too. In this, hypnotherapy is the most popular but it is not used by many. This also includes therapy on cognitive behaviour. Every therapy works differently.

Q. What is the reason for strain in personal relationships?

Sonal Sonawani: Many people like watching movies and serials on television. Similarly, some people like reading books. But movies, serials and books very often carry a lot of unrealistic stories. Relationships like father-son, mother-son, mother in law-daughter in law, friends are all displayed as per a very ideal scenario. But this does not happen in real life. Every person has both good and bad qualities. But due to some bad qualities, you cannot label a person bad. However, in reality, we expect relationships to be perfect, which is wrong. Due to this, there are strains on relationships. We need to think whether or not the expectation we have from others in any relationship is practical or not. Without this introspection, just expecting perfect relationships is not right and it brings about stress and strain in personal relations.

Q. What is the reason for tension and stress in children these days?

Sonal Sonawani: Usually the reason for tension and stress in children are their parents themselves. These days, parents are very conscious about their children. They want to show the world how intelligent they are. They want them to shine in every field, so they send them for football classes, tabla classes, swimming classes and at the same time, they expect them to do well in academics as



“Normally in Pune: There are 200 practicing psychologists. But out of these only 15-20 are successful and famous. Male psychologists are very few. In this field, there are more women.”

well. In reality, parents should not impose their wishes on children. They need to understand that the child has his own identity and own personality. If your child comes home crying, hear them out and ask them the reason, do not directly tell what to do. Ask questions on how they are feeling. What are they feeling? Let them then decide what they want to do and try to support them.

Q. These days everyone is stressed. How can one live tension free?

Sonal Sonawani: In reality, we can all live without any tension but somehow we have got used to living in tension. We get tensed because we do not see a problem just as a problem, we start linking it with other things. For instance, assume we are fat or overweight. No doubt being overweight is not good but we start thinking that since we are fat, our personality is not good. Being overweight means additional fat in the body which is something that takes place naturally but we give it a different meaning. If we just look at it from an angle of a natural occurring, then we won't get stressed and there will be a solution for it too. Hence while speaking to ourselves we must speak in different ways.

Q. What are the symptoms of depression? Do people usually come straight to you soon after they get into depression?

Sonal Sonawani: Not getting sleep at night, not feeling hungry or continuously feeling an urge to commit suicide are all signs and symptoms of depression. But still people who experience such symptoms, go to a general doctor. If they do not get cured with their medicine, then they go to a homeopathic doctor or to an Ayurved. Despite that they are not cured. Finally they reach out to a counsellor. Many times people who come to me have already made up their mind to commit suicide. Some people say they want to cry but don't know how to. Some of them have already attempted suicide once or twice. It is extremely important to build awareness about mental happiness and health amongst people. With the help of a counsellor, people can cure themselves from anxiety, depression and problems in relationships.

Q. What efforts do you take to reduce depression in people?

Sonal Sonawani: We have started a centre for depression, anxiety and relationships [CeDAR] almost 3 months back. The main objective of this centre is to cure people who are suffering from mental illnesses. There are a lot of people who need counselling. If you look at it, we are all counsellors. If a friend discusses their problem with us, we start giving them solutions. Even though the solutions may not help them nor will reduce their tension. We want to prepare new counsellors. We want them to learn to listen to people and help them. We will provide training to them. Our centre is also making an application. This app can identify one's stress levels.

Q. Was there any special experience that stood out during your counselling activities?

Sonal Sonawani: Let me tell you about one experience. Typically, a counselling session goes on for about one to one and half hour. One girl came to me for counselling and her session was about to finish in 15 minutes. People were waiting outside the clinic for the next session.

That moment that girl told me that she will again attempt suicide and will be successful this time. I did not react to her on listening to this and patiently asked her how she was planning to commit suicide. I told her that it is okay if she

CAREER GRAPH

- Date of Birth: November 16, 1989
- Working as a psychologist for the last eight years.
- Has counselled more than 1500 people.
- Specialist in dealing with depression, anxiety and relationships.
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has decided to kill herself and so we should fix the date for the suicide. But the date should be fixed for after 6 months. I asked her to keep these 6 months for herself and in case she does not succeed in her work then she can go ahead with suicide as planned. So the date was fixed. Three months later her sessions were going on with me and just a few days back she came to me with her wedding invitation.

Q. What is the general age of the people that come to you? What is the ratio of men to women?

Sonal Sonawani: Usually people from the age group of 18 to 60 years come to me. In youngsters, mainly relationship issues come forward. The ratio of men and women is that of 70:30 who come for counselling. Men also undergo depression but their ego does not allow them to express it. However, women who experience mental tension and depression show more maturity and understanding in getting themselves cured from a counsellor. On an average, treatment through counselling goes on for 6 months. Patients have to come once a week. Some people visit twice a week too. Depending on the case, sittings are decided. First session costs Rs 2000. After that the following sessions cost Rs 1500.

Q. Have you ever experienced depression? If yes, how did you manage to come out of it?

Sonal Sonawani: Once I was living in Mumbai alone for some work. I had gone into depression that time. I am usually very enthusiastic about work and can work non-stop at a stretch for many hours but somehow I was not feeling like working that time at all. I was not feeling hungry and had lost a lot of weight. Even I used to think of committing suicide. Since this carried on for a week, I realised I was getting into depression. That time I dialed a helpline number for mental health but did not get through. This created more depression within me. Then I got through another helpline number in Chennai, who counselled me on the phone. That's when I decided to come out of it. I set a goal for myself and worked towards achieving it. This is how I came out of my depression. I meditate to keep myself happy. As I am a little spiritual, it also helps me.

Q. What is needed in order to be a successful psychologist?

Sonal Sonawani: There is a difference between a good psychologist and a famous psychologist. If you are a good psychologist, then people will come to you for 2-3 sessions. When someone comes to you for counselling, he feels that his life is a failure. If that person is at a (2+) stage in life, a good psychologist can bring him to stage 0 and if he is more successful in doing so he can even bring him to a (+2) stage. A psychologist cannot let the person go into a (-2) stage again.

Q. What challenges did you face while counselling?

Sonal Sonawani: The biggest challenge in counselling is to hear the opposite person out very patiently without making any opinion about them. Also treating a person without imposing our views on them and helping them come out of it themselves is a difficult task. To understand what the person is going through, the psychologist has to be aware of those experiences. Also, winning the trust of the person, so that they can openly express their feelings is also a big challenge faced by a psychologist.

Q. Which university, according to you, is good for studying psychology?

Sonal Sonawani: In Pune, you can study psychology from Ferguson college, Modern or Wadia college or even SP college. In Bengaluru, you can do BSC or MSC in psychology from Christ University or even Ashoka University. Most students do their MPHil from Nimhans in Bengaluru or Manipal University.

Q. Can you please tell us about your family?

Sonal Sonawani: There are four people in our family. My father Sanjay Sonawani is a writer and philosopher. My mother Pushpa is a home maker and my counsellor. My brother Aniket, has his own business. Prateek Kharde is the co-founder of CeDAR and my future life partner.

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