



WAIRIMU NDUNG'U

Understanding Comorbidity in Mental Illness

My Personal Experience





Psychoeducation
made simple

What Is Comorbidity?

Comorbidity is the presence of two or more medical conditions in the same person.

For instance, I live with both bipolar disorder and ADHD.

- Bipolar is episodic; that means I experience a hypomanic episode for a certain period of time (usually about four days) followed by a depressive episode that lasts more than two weeks.
- Conversely, ADHD is more of a flare-up in that I may struggle with task initiation and concentration on just one day/every other day and because of a particular task while executing other tasks very well.



@wairimukendungu

wairimundungukenya@gmail.com | www.wairimundungukenya.wixsite.com/website



Psychoeducation
made simple

My Experience: C-PTSD & Bipolar

I also live with Complex PTSD due to repeated exposure to traumatic events as I was growing up and it's mostly what I tackled in therapy when I started going.

While I was genetically more likely to get bipolar disorder, I also believe that the stress from the adverse trauma triggered my first depressive episode. Also, throughout the years that followed, the C-PTSD was a consistent trigger for subsequent episodes.



@wairimukendungu

wairimundungukenya@gmail.com | www.wairimundungukenya.wixsite.com/website



Psychoeducation
made simple

My Experience Continued

Understanding what could trigger one illness into the other.

As you gain a better understanding of your symptoms, you may have some insight into how PTSD (or another mental illness) triggers other conditions.

For instance,

- when C-PTSD isn't managed, I'm more likely to get anxious or agitated; last year some heavy news made me super angry and triggered hypomania followed by depression
- when ADHD flare-ups like procrastination drag on, I start getting anxious and experiencing intrusive thoughts about being a failure and in steps a depressive episode



@wairimukendungu

wairimundungukenya@gmail.com | www.wairimundungukenya.wixsite.com/website



Psychoeducation
made simple

Why Does Understanding Comorbidity Matter?

1. Different conditions require different treatments that can at times be conflicting e.g. antipsychotics for bipolar can clash with stimulants for ADHD for most people
2. One condition may be more adverse than the other e.g I need to manage bipolar before managing ADHD or one condition may be masking another that requires treatment first e.g. addiction may be masking ADHD/major depression
3. As a patient, knowing what condition triggers the other for you helps you build a routine that manages your symptoms and discuss the best treatment regimen (medications/therapy) with your doctor eg. CBT works for my ADHD so I no longer take a stimulant but I'm on a maintenance dose for bipolar



@wairimukendungu

wairimundungukenya@gmail.com | www.wairimundungukenya.wixsite.com/website



Psychoeducation
made simple

Conclusion

Ultimately, seeing a therapist to help you articulate your symptoms is a great next step. They should ideally pull out the DSM-V, the diagnostic manual psychiatrists used to diagnose mental illnesses including personality disorders. However, psychologists are also well-acquainted with it and should be using it to clearly identify your symptoms.

References

1. "Can Mental Illness Be Cured?" YouTube video by Dr Tracey Marks
2. "Bipolar Disorder Versus Depression" YouTube video by Dr Tracey Marks



@wairimukendungu

wairimundungukenya@gmail.com | www.wairimundungukenya.wixsite.com/website

