

## **Episode 1: Coping Through Difficult Time**

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Hello,

I welcome you to the mental health podcast program held by SMRC (Southern Migrant Refugee Centre).

My name is Malahat Kamali, an employee of this organisation.

I am here to host today's podcast.

Today we have two precious guests with us, both whom are residents of Melbourne, Australia.

These are the immigrants who left Afghanistan at young age and spent their lives in different countries. These are young people who had very valuable experiences as immigrants, which is very valuable in terms of personal life, education and work.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Our first guest is Najma Jan, who was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. Who immigrated to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2011.

After staying there for three years, they settled in Melbourne, Australia.

Najma Jan completed her higher education in the city of Melbourne and recently graduated from Monash University in psychology and physiology.

She has a very good experiences of studying and dwelling in Melbourne.

She also has valuable works in the field of supporting immigrants and refugees.

Najma Jan has a curious mind about human behaviour and actions, that she constantly studying and researching in this matter.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Our second guest is Mr. Mirwais Janbaz. He was also born in Kabul and he spent 20 years of his life as a refugee in Islamabad, Pakistan. And in 2018, he settled down in the city of Melbourne.

Mirwais Jan is a talented artist, a skilled athlete and an active member of the Afghan community in Melbourne.

He completed his education in the field of mass-communication and media under the title of journalism at the International Islamic University Islamabad in Pakistan.

Mirwais Jan's work of art are painting on wood or pyrography. It has been exhibited by various foundations, including UNHCR and the Brazilian Embassy in Islamabad.

Mr. Janbaz has a special in art of Brazilian Capoeira, that he was a sports coach for four years and travelled to Turkey and Brazil for learning and training.

Based on the life of our two young guests, they have very valuable experiences in different countries such as Pakistan, Brazil, Turkey and Malaysia. They have dealt with the problems of migrant life in their own ways.

Today, they share their learnings and experiences with us as an Afghan immigrant far from their homeland.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Welcome to this program.

**Guest 1:** (Najma Ahmadi)

Thank you!

**Guest 2:** (Mirwais Janbaz)

Thank you!

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Our first question is to both of you Najma Jan and Mirwais Jan. We want to hear about your valuable experiences during the years of travelling, how did you overcome the problems of life in a difficult time and what procedures did help you with?

**Guest 1:** (Najma Ahmadi)

Thank you so much Malahat Jan for having us today in your podcast program so that we can share our experiences with our compatriots.

For me, going from Afghanistan and leaving it, and after that going to Malaysia and then coming to Australia, so many things/factors helped us. As soon as we left the country and went to a place where we were strangers, we did not know anyone.

Some compatriots, who were there, helped us a lot in terms of language and in terms of finding a job/work, as we did not know anyone there.

Our compatriots there helped us a lot, as those who could speak our language helped us whether it was in school or finding a job/work sooner. They helped a lot.

Secondly, when we were out of our country like: Malaysia, we used to get together with some of our relatives, for example: on Eid days, new year (Nowruz) etc. Those gatherings or get-togethers lessened the pain of being away from homeland a bit.

And they helped us to become a little stronger mentally and psychologically despite being far away from our homeland.

When we came to Australia, there are more Afghans here and we can live more freely. Because we are no longer considered immigrants, we feel part of the country of Australia. This has made the pain of being away from Afghanistan a little less.

Secondly, even though we knew the language, we were not familiar with the country of Australia and the culture of Australia.

The few acquaintances that we had here, helped us to become part of the Australian society and to be able to study, find a job and serve Australia.

For psychological support, just like in Malaysia, got support from relatives and they helped us get along with them in special days like Eid days or any other celebrations. They also helped to find jobs/work sooner. All these aspects/supports help to be stronger mentally, and psychologically and lessen the stress.

In addition, in the incident that happened recently in Afghanistan, Australia supported the people of Afghanistan. We also were hand to hand to support our people. The act of helping and supporting actually gives pleasure and satisfaction to ourselves as this strengthens friendship among our people.

Thank you.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Thank you, Najma Jan.,

**Guest 2:** (Mirwais Janbaz )

Thank you so much Najma Jan, Malahat Jan and the administration of SMRC for organising this podcast program.

As Najma Jan mentioned in connection with leaving the country (Afghanistan) itself is has a great impact on the human soul/spirit. I will give an example of myself, when the civil war begins in Afghanistan, I was a child and we moved to Pakistan at that time. Getting settled there was not easy for us. As it was totally a new way of living, culture was different.

As Najma Jan mentioned earlier, some of our friends, relatives and other Afghan people cooperated with us.

If I share my personal experience. I used to keep myself busy. On the other hand, the support and help from friends boost mental and psychological energy within us. And this does not give us the feeling of being a stranger despite living in a foreign country.

There were Afghan schools and UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) used to provide support.

To add to procedures support, I used to keep myself busy. In 24 hours, I rested only 6 hours and the rest of the time, I kept myself busy with study, going to language classes and reading newspapers. In newspapers, I see the advertising page they used to publish different programs like art, sports and many more. I used to participate in most of them. In my spare time, I used to do painting. These made me to be a supporter/helper for my family as all were affected mentally and psychologically. I made my parents, sister and brother busy.

My sister and brother got admission in schools, they should be busy and should come out of the psychological dilemma. The only way, if someone wants to come out of mental and psychological issues, is to keep herself/himself busy,

Being busy is not going out and working. I used to help my mother with her household activities. For example, I cleaned the house with her and sometimes cooked meals. In this way, one can keep herself/himself busy.

This is my personal experience but, I am not sure if this has been proven professionally in terms of psychology or not. But I adapted myself and saw a positive outcome.

Even though I came to Australia, here as well, out of 24 hours, I sleep 6 hours and for the rest of my time, I have set a schedule because I do not keep any spare time, where any thought/worry should bother me.

If someone has free time or is kept free for longer. We have an example that says, "All evils start when you have nothing to do ". This means when you are idle. So, it is better to keep ourselves busy.

**Guest 2:** (Mirwais Janbaz)

Over to you Malahat Jan.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Yes, these are important points. According to your personal experience, we can see that healthy activities are effective.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Thank you both.

Najma Jan, as we understand that beliefs and culture play a very important role in the life of every human being. How did the beliefs and culture help you in struggles with problems in your lives?

**Guest 1:** (Najma Ahmadi)

As Mirwais Jan said, in Afghani we have an example that we should never sit idle. From being idle, if nothing else happens, confusion begins. As Mirwais Jan mentioned, we try to keep ourselves busy with household chores. More specifically in Afghan culture, we help parents and family or be present for the family, help in the kitchen like Mirwais Jan. I also try to be by the side of my family when they need me or if I need them, I talk to them and take their suggestions on any matter.

In terms of what I believe or my faith, personally as a Muslim, I always believe that God himself helps if there is any problem.

It is true that a person should try hard enough to solve the problem on their own but, there are some issues or problems that humans cannot solve. For that, it is necessary to pray personally, it is important for me that whenever I have any problem, I pray, and I always remember God and he helps me. Despite this, I get help from my parents and take their suggestions.

The issues/problems that I can't solve by myself or it's beyond human resources, I always rely on God for the solution of my problem.

In addition to this, I personally do things that help my mental health because I believe that as Mirwais Jan said, I always should work but, sometimes we must take a deep breath and practice mindfulness even if only for a minute.

On those days that I am stressed or most of the days, I try to sit at least for five minutes and do nothing, close my eyes and try to sit quietly and not think about anything, free my mind from external or any kind of thoughts and take a few deep breaths.

Thank you.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

“Very well,

Thank you, Najma Jan.”

The conversation that you did, how much the beliefs and culture helped you, the conversation seems very very simple, because this is a norm for us. It is a normal thing in our life that we are close to our families. To the family who are very close such as parents and the family a little further away, such as aunts, uncles and their children. For us, the relationship between family is a strength, as Najma Jan said. This is a strength in life. This is the strength in life that helps us to fight many problems, and this comes from Afghani culture. This means in Afghan culture family ties/bonding is very strong. And we always feel its strength.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Thank you, Najma Jan.

**Guest 1:** (Najma Ahmadi)

You are welcome.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Mirwais Jan, as a witness to modern Australian culture, that you have spent here, what have you accumulated regarding mental health? This is the first part of my question; the second part of my question is: How important do you see that we ask for help when we need it? When we think we are under pressure and mental torture, considering the problems of the time, how important do you think, is for us to ask for help?

**Guest 2:** (Mirwais Janbaz)

Thank you so much Malahat Jan.

As I am living in Australia for almost four to five (4-5) years now. Most probably four years. While I lived in Pakistan. I did not have much knowledge about mental

health. In fact, I even did not have any idea that someone can have anxiety, or someone thinks about something that makes her/him stressed. I used to think that he/she has that kind of behaviour and did not associate that behaviour with mental health. Because we did not have information about what mental health was.

**Guest 2:** (Mirwais Jan)

When I came here, I found a lot of information about mental health in these four years that this is a normal thing. For example: if any person has anxiety, her/his anxiety does not come within her/him without any reason. Someone has a problem or is worried that anxiety has appeared within her/him. And this state of a person is related to mental health, mental health is indeed a reality. Specially we Afghan.

People do not have much knowledge about it. Because Afghanistan is a backward country, the immigrant in Pakistan do not have enough time to think about such things. But, when I came to Australia, the government gave me a lot of information about mental health. They said that if we had problems or anxiety this had an association/connection with mental health. So, one should see a counsellor or a psychologist to get help.

The second part of your question was that you asked, “What is the importance of asking a friend for help?” Of course, this has a very huge importance. Especially in Afghan society, they do not share their problems with friends or family members because they are afraid that people will think he/she is crazy. This is an example of Afghan customs. But here we learned that if you suffer from mental problems, you should try to share with your friends, share with your family, share with your teacher if you are studying or even at your workplace share with your boss. This is not shameful. This is very important if you want to reduce your anxiety, you should talk to your friend about it. It is not shameful, no one is going to make fun of you. Like, in our general/common terms, that someone will make fun of you as you have done something wrong. This has huge importance in human life, as sharing with friends and family can improve or worsen the mental health of a person.



**Guest 2:** (Mirwais Janbaz)

Over to you Malahat Jan.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Yes, you are right.

Thank you, Mirwais Jan.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Najma Jan, when someone comes to you as a family member and shares his problems, what do you think, you can do for him/her as a family member?

**Guest 1:** (Najma Ahmadi)

Thank you.

As Mirwais Jan said, as soon as you go and talk to someone, this talking itself will help to reduce anxiety and worries.

Secondly, if you go and share/talk with your family, no matter what the problem is. As I said earlier that I go and talk to my parents because they know better than me and are more experience than me. So, they can bring a solution to our problem.

If it is possible, you should talk with your family members but, if you don't, you can talk to your friends, they might find a solution.

One thing that Mirwais Jan said that mental health problems or psychological issues, or mental illness that exist at the moment, not only among Afghans but also in Australia as a whole, people do not talk much about it or they feel embarrassed/ ashamed that what other people will think about them.

As Mirwais Jan said, there is no shame in talking to your family, to your colleagues, and now here in Australia, there is a special mental health section, where you can go and talk to them.

Personally, when I was in university, sometimes the pressure of studies became too much and there were times that I could not pay attention to my studies. I

myself had mindfulness classes for some time. They did exercises to try to pay attention to their mental health and take deep breaths. There were classes that we attended and that helped a lot. And I still practice whenever I have time.

Also in your university, as Mirwais Jan said earlier, you can talk to your teacher. Most of the universities have their own services who are specialised in mental health, whom you can talk with. I consulted myself and there is no shame in it. On the contrary, I realized that what I was worrying about was not anything to worry about. Chatting helped me find the solution myself.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Najma Jan, there is another question from you, earlier you talked about the fact that sometimes one can get a consultation from the doctor or a counsellor. First, a person starts with close ones like family members, friends and after that if more help is needed, or if the person we help, we see if they need, we suggest them and refer to professionals.

Do you know, what services are available for the Afghan community in Australia and where to go when we want to get psychological help?

**Guest 1:** (Najma Ahmadi)

Thank you so much.

Like I said before for example: for Afghans, it does not matter what age they are, or if they are in school or university, they can be referred to the services through that. But those who have a language problem and prefer to talk to an Afghan who understands her language better. They can talk to their family doctor first, and then then they can the referral and can see a counsellor or psychologist. It is very important that they should have a referral. It is very important that they have a referral letter to someone they want to talk to, this not only helps them financially but also family doctor know more about which services are better for you to refer to.

Except for family doctor, Foundation House in Dandenong, and several other places can help. If someone has any problem, they can go to a psychologist who speaks our language or who is Iranian, as they also speak Persian and can help.

If the psychologist who speaks the same language as us do not have time, because they are very busy and our countrymen need someone to talk to, their problems are many and they need to talk urgently to someone. They can call the lifelines. Lifelines are most of the time in English language but, they have the services or the ways to get an Afghan interpreter.

As we all know that our Afghan interpreter or any language interpreter has no right to tell anyone what you told him/her.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Thank you so much Najma Jan.

These are very important information that we all should have access to. This is basic information but very important for us to understand, where to start and from where we can get the help. Because there is always help everywhere to support our people. Unless, how we get access to them, it is very important.

According to Mirwais Jan's and Najma Jan's precious theories, we should consider some important points about our mental health and those around us, which I am going to share with you:

- We should always talk openly about our mental problems with someone we trust.
- We should increase our information about mental health.

We always think/have a mindset that if we have a physical illness, we will the treatment and get well and try to choose the best treatment. In the same way, in the same level of importance, we should be aware of and pay attention to our mental health as it needs attention.

- For those who have mental problems, we should have compassion and patience for them, try to help them and understand them.
- Always as a person who has mental problems, we pay a lot of attention to the person who has physical problems around us, but at the same time, we should understand a person who has mental problems also need help, compassion and attention.

- And the last point, speak up with courage about mental health.

**Interviewer:** (Malahat Kamali)

Dear guests thanks a million for your precious opinions and experiences.

So kind of you.

We express our gratitude to the viewers of this podcast who see and hear us.

“MAY GOD PROTECT YOU ALL.”