



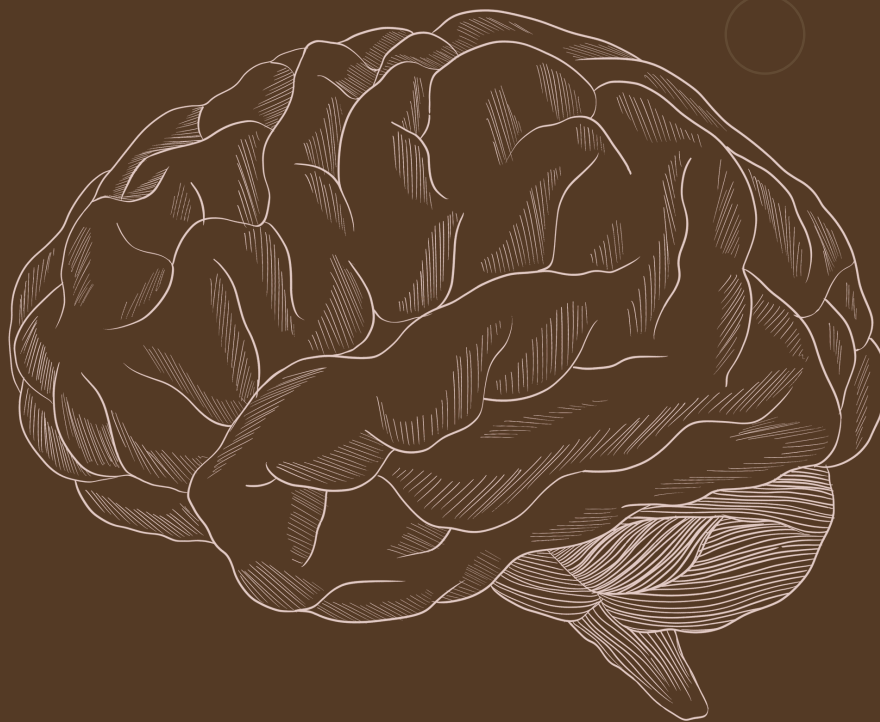
# *Mental Health Awareness*

CONNY VUYISWA MQQOCO

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Many people who suffer from mental illness are not able to manage their condition because of the socio-economic issues that affect them and their communities. For the majority of those affected, their mental illness is rooted in the traumas and challenges that they have had to confront as a result of their socio-economic situation. This makes it difficult to manage their condition, as they are subject to their situation, and would have to navigate beyond it in order to sufficiently improve their mental health.



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These underlying factors are extremely harmful to a person's psyche. The issue of mental illness is rife among the youth, who feel that their lives are stagnant as they are not exposed to opportunities which could improve their situation.

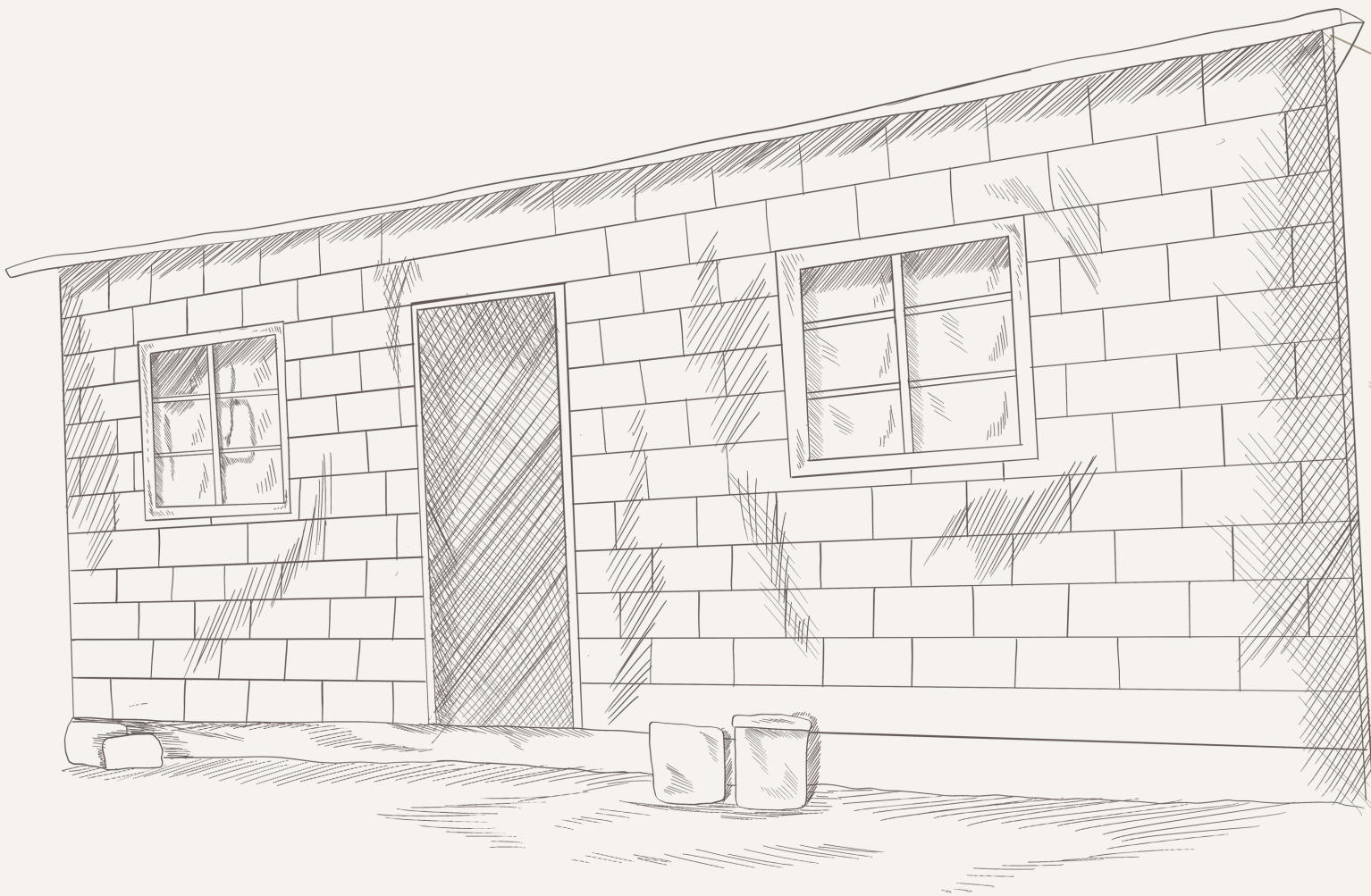
The lack of resources in our communities is a significant factor to consider when analysing how an individual's socio-economic situation affects their mental health. Lack of access to resources such as healthcare services, suitable housing, capital and job opportunities affect peoples' wellbeing, and ultimately crushes their hopes and dreams because they do not have the necessary tools to change their socio-economic or mental situation.

It is very hard for people to get the necessary and correct medication. This is often because clinics are distant from our communities, and many cannot afford transport or even walk to receive medical care.

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Many houses are leaning over and falling, which is dangerous for everyone in the community and causes much anxiety and dread for those who live there.

The shacks are also not safe because they become flooded when it rains, and they are also vulnerable to fires and other environmental factors.






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For years, this has been the situation.  
There has been little to no improvement,  
or even maintenance and development,  
in communities such as ours.

Most people who live in these environments are unemployed due to lack of job opportunities. In recent years, the factories have been relocating, which means that many of those who were employed have been retrenched or can no longer afford the transport to attend work. What makes matters worse is that the community leaders are not managing to create employment opportunities, which would lower the unemployment rate.

Mental illness is an issue that is not widely understood, particularly in our communities. There is a need for greater education and awareness with regard to this issue.

Many people do not even understand the concept of mental illness, let alone how to support those who are suffering from it. Individuals who are unable to manage their mental illness are perceived to be 'crazy', as communities do not understand that there is an underlying condition which affects their behaviour. As a result, those suffering from mental illness face rejection and are judged harshly.

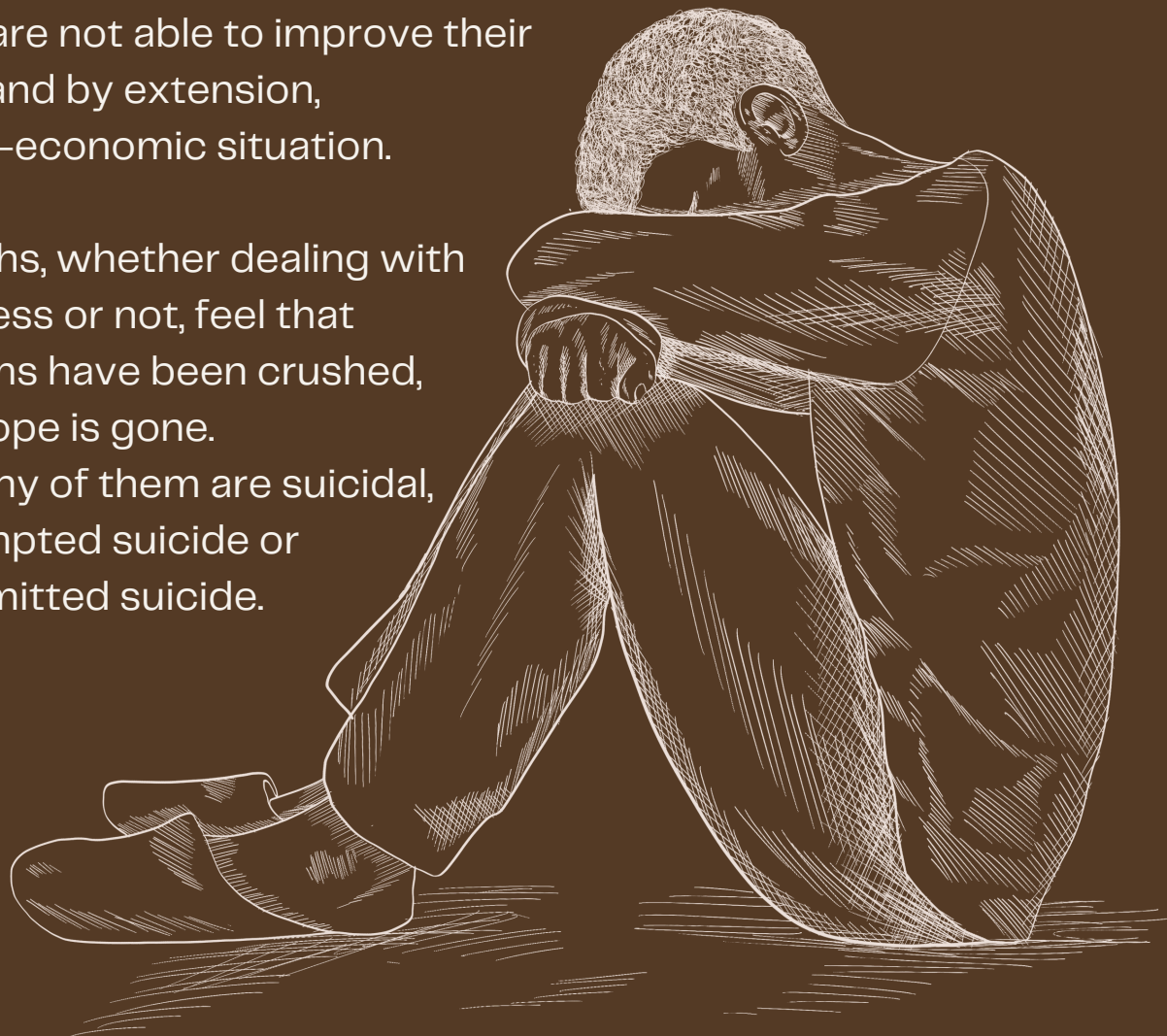


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There are various signs which may indicate that an individual is living with mental illness. Some of these signs include: anti-social and toxic behaviours, excessive sleep, insomnia, confusion, overeating or starvation, difficulty communicating, a tendency towards frustration or irritation, or even speaking and laughing excessively. These are some signs that people who understand mental illness may be aware of. However, people tend not to react well when engaging with a person who displays these signs.

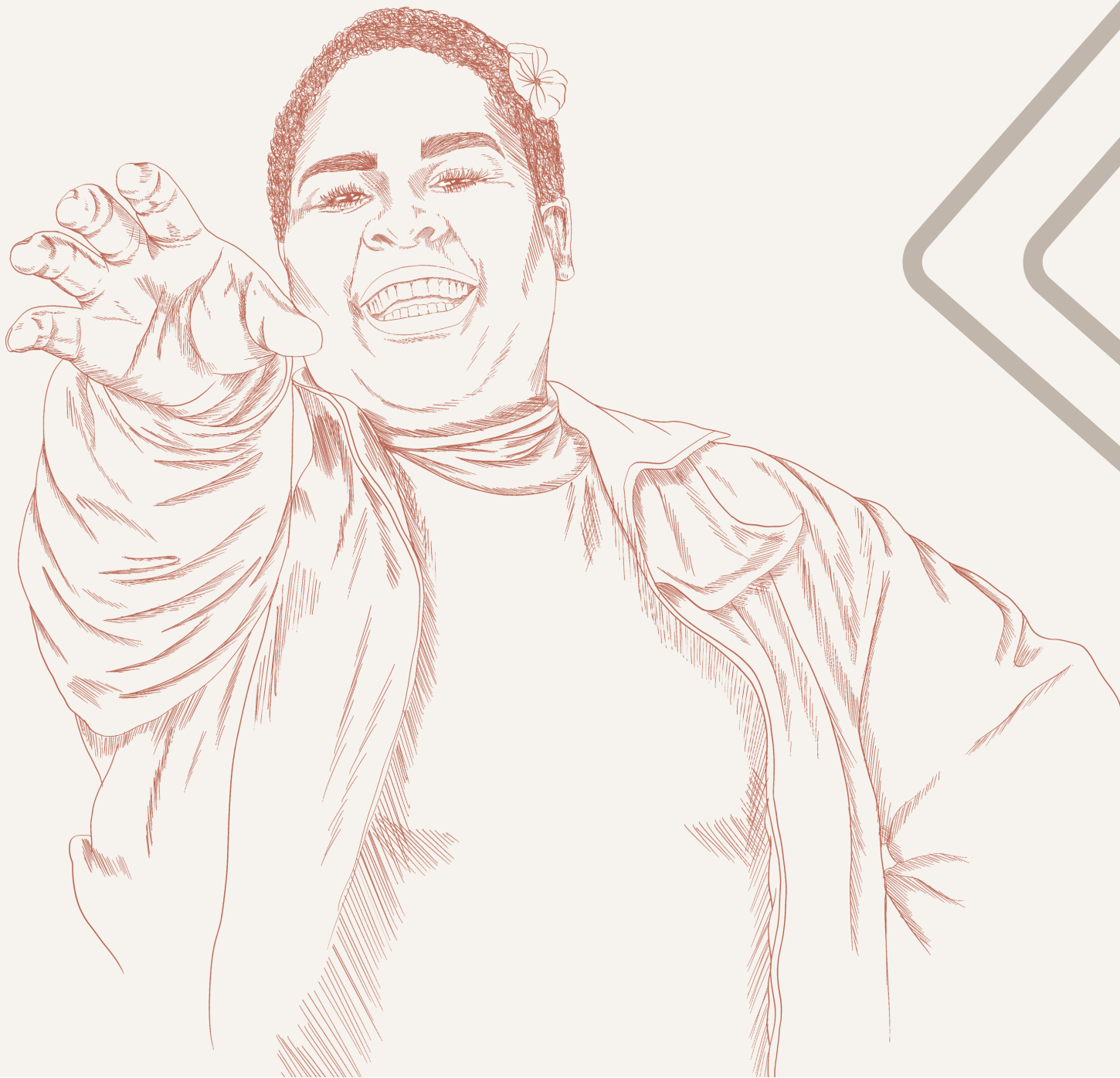
Youth living in these communities are significantly affected by mental illness because of the pressure placed on them by family and friends, who expect them to manage their condition on their own. Those suffering tend to put themselves under further pressure because they feel that they are not able to improve their condition and by extension, their socio-economic situation.

Many youths, whether dealing with mental illness or not, feel that their dreams have been crushed, and that hope is gone. Hence, many of them are suicidal, have attempted suicide or have committed suicide.



Mental illness is not visible to many, but it is very dangerous. The unemployment rate is the most significant factor contributing to this critical condition. After all this time, it feels as though the unemployed have been abandoned. We, as youth, have given up.

We have been caged inside our own thoughts, drowning in our sorrows because we lack motivation and support. We live in fear, as small communities that are not taken care of. It feels as though the nation's leaders do not care about us, and it scares me that the next generations will be confronted by what we are going through. We have to fight for them. It won't be easy... but we need to create a better future for those to come, a future in which they live lives full of opportunities, and where their mental health matters.



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