

8<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress on **MENTAL HEALTH**

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**Poverty and Schizophrenia****Anna Cornelia Beyer***University of Hull, United Kingdom*

I am highly intelligent, member of Mensa and Intertel. I had a decent life as a kid before we left Eastern Germany. When we came to Western Germany when I was 12, we suffered poverty, my family had to start from nothing. I started to work hard at school and became a model student, liked by the teachers. I also took up my first job at the age of 13, distributing papers, later I worked in bakery and sold meat for a supermarket and started to always search for work. I have worked most of the time ever since, and always tried to get my hands on a job. I have to admit that I started also meandering on the dark side. My mum asked me to stay slim (it was her idea of discipline), and I started to compensate for our misery with eating chocolate. I needed that emotionally, because I lost the love of my mum and dad as soon as we came to the West, they were too troubled to continue to love and raise us, so I spent my afternoons after school with my little brother in front of the TV, munching chocolate and watching McGyver. I friend told me what to do, a dirty little trick, put your finger into your throat, and you can eat and stay slim at the same time. So, I developed bulimia. Mind you, I was a traumatized young girl, with little guidance. I started to steal chocolate and money from my parents. I felt first like McGyver. That was what I was now raised by, mind you. Only when I became a little older, I realized I was wrong. When I moved out of my parents' house, I was given so little money that I could only pay the rent for a tiny room in a shared flat. I did not even have enough cash to buy food. I had to cut my own hair with kitchen scissors (that was in the year 1997 or so!). Never even to dream of having my own car! I never did. Not even now, at 45! The money from the chocolate is now paid back, by the way. I was sent to a therapist, to help me with my bulimia. She told me to follow my dreams, and I imagined I would find the love and happiness back that I had as a little kid if I went back to Berlin. So, I went back to Berlin. I was very lonely there but found my first job at University. I figured that this is what I want to do. I lived very frugally. I could not find a boyfriend. I think also my poverty was repulsive. No one likes being around someone who cannot even afford to sit in a café for a drink! I had my first psychosis in 2002, I was working very hard, starving myself (I ate literally only one bag of sweets a day and maybe an apple because I thought I need to be slim to find love), and lived in a dark basement apartment. I was poor. I had an out of body experience then and psychosis, which felt like spiritual guidance. After this, my lot improved a little. I got sponsored for an extended visit to the US, and then when I came back, I managed to find work. I found a partner at a conference in Turkey (not a happy relationship) and migrated for him to the UK. We separated as soon as I arrived, but I had a good job in the UK. Schizophrenia became chronic. I was tormented. I did not have a lot of money, and while I managed to find friends, because I am basically a smart and nice person, I did not manage to find love again. I worked very, very hard. I struggled with my schizophrenia. I was lucky after some years and was promoted. Finally, I had some little cash. I met a lovely man and we fell in love. When that happened, I realized how poor I had always been, because even if he was not rich himself, he lived a more or less normal life. He had a normal house, a little normal car, and some savings. All things that I never had. The evil thing that happened was that as soon as we were together and I had my better job, we fulfilled our dreams and travelled a little. I think people got envious of me and wanted to force me into having a baby, just because. It got so painful to me that in fact I complained with the International Court of Human Rights! At least I imagined that my family wanted a child out of me. I think it is credible. That's what happens to women. That became so disruptive, that I could not manage to keep my job and ended on disability income. That's awfully little money. Poverty knocks again. So, again I live in utter poverty. I can't even afford to take out a loan. I never owned my own car at the age of 45. I am discriminated in finding work. For some strange reason, my boyfriend still endures my misery. And the brilliant thing is that my intelligence is becoming recognized and I am allowed to study at Harvard! I wish more would come of this. I have the same dreams as anyone else, living a decent life, secure and with enough money. I am already sterilized and in early menopause, so kids are not anymore in the game, and to be honest, I don't want any. I did not have a happy childhood and I rather crave professional luck than being a mother. I don't even desire a car. But I want to live DECENT life with the feeling of being loved and respected and having success.

**Biography**

I am a scientist with schizophrenia. I want to elaborate on something maybe obvious, that poverty and discrimination are intrinsically linked to schizophrenia.