



Resource Guide #3

Mental Health Advocacy for Zoroastrians



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Introduction

As the pandemic continues and many individuals are languishing, it's essential for Zoroastrians to know the evolution of mental health care over time, steps they can take to support themselves and others, and resources their communities can use. Mental health influences an individual's ability to cope with life events, handle stress and interact with others, which is why self-care and managing one's state of mind is essential.

History

Throughout history, people have not understood mental illness and many cultures viewed it as a form of religious punishment. These negative attitudes continued into the 18th century in North America which stigmatized mental illness and left those who were mentally ill in degrading and unhygienic confinement. It was first in the mid-19th century that activists fought for better living conditions for the mentally ill which led to governments funding the first psychiatric hospitals. This first step led to increased patient access to mental health services. As the mid to late 1900s rolled around, laws were passed in both the US and [Canada](#) creating Institutes and allocating government funds toward research, support, and education into mental illness. There was also a [push for deinstitutionalization](#) as there were reports of underfunded and understaffed state hospitals that had human rights violations and bad living conditions. This led to more outpatient care and focus on community-based care. The history of mental health in North America shows how cultural understanding influences national policy and attitudes towards mental health.

Pressing news

In recent years, the topic of mental health and self-care have become more socially acceptable to speak on and yet still over [half the people with mental illness do not receive help for their disorders](#). There is still a stigma around the topic which leads people to delay or avoid getting help or treatment. These people can fear being treated differently, losing their job, social repercussions, etc. According to a [poll from the American Psychiatric Association \(APA\)](#), workers are concerned about discussing mental health issues at their job while one in three were concerned about getting fired, retaliation, or being perceived as being incompetent if they tried to find mental health care.

Mental health in the criminal justice system has been a talking point in recent news. People with mental illness experience higher rates of incarceration, lack of mental health treatment during incarceration, and are disproportionately more imprisoned. [After being booked into jail, people with serious mental illnesses stay two to three times longer in pretrial and face longer sentences](#). It is estimated that at minimum [20% of all police calls](#) for service involve a mental health or substance use crisis. That paired with the inadequate mental health services means the police are usually the ones who respond to someone in a mental health or substance abuse crisis. This leads to the alarming fact that mental illness was involved in [25 percent of those fatally shot by police officers in 2018](#). There are many stories of people who called 911 for help with a loved one, neighbor, or friend in a mental health crisis only for them to end up shot or dead. One of those stories is of 13-year-old Linden Cameron, a boy in Salt Lake City with autism. His mother had called 911 to help transport her son to the hospital for treatment amid a mental health crisis. A police



officer responding to the call shot Linden, who is now still in the process of a long recovery from the shooting and still doesn't have use of his left hand a year later.

In 1987, the first Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training was created after an officer fatally shot Joseph Robinson who was having a mental health crisis and was cutting himself with a butcher knife. From there CIT programs spread yet despite this some key people who advocate for the program admit to it being misconstrued and misapplied by law enforcement. Ron Bruno, executive director of the Crisis Intervention Team international who spent 25-years as a police officer, says a handful of departments have done it right. But others, too often, see CIT training merely as a check-the-box, 40-hour exercise. "They're not doing anything about what a CIT really is," he says. Bruno suggests building community resources and building trained response teams that are not law enforcement to "get more people connecting before it hits that level of danger". This model is implemented in a few cities today. The 30-year-old program Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) in Eugene, Oregon dispatches a two-person team of crisis workers and medics that respond to 911 calls for people in a behavioral health crisis. [Of the estimated 24,000 calls CAHOOTS responded to in 2019, only 311 \(around 1% of calls\) required police backup, and in Eugene, CAHOOTS teams resolved almost 20 percent of all calls coming through the city's public safety communications center.](#)

Connection to Zoroastrianism

In the Zoroastrian religion, Vohu Manah literally means, "Good Mind." Before anyone can speak good words or perform good deeds, we have to start with a good mind. Therefore, even in Sasanian times, Gundeshapur had wards dedicated to the study of mental health. These studies included but were not limited to brain surgery, epilepsy, insomnia, and preventing headaches.

Taking some time to help us improve/maintain our mental health is a crucial prerequisite for having a good mind. By doing so, we will remain on the path of Asha, and continue to please the Wise Lord with good words and good deeds.

What can we do as allies?

We have listed resources such as book recommendations, social media accounts, podcasts, and other content Zoroastrians can use to educate themselves and their communities on mental health issues.

Volunteer and Take Action

- [7 cups](#)
- [Operation Beautiful](#)

To Read

- [Book Suggestions](#)
- [Health Line Suggestions](#)



Websites

- [National Suicide Prevention Line](#)
- [South Asian Therapists](#)
- [7 Cups](#)
- [CDC](#)

Social Media

- [South Asian Therapists](#)
- [Operation Beautiful](#)

Podcasts

- [NY Times Suggestions](#)
- [Oprah's Suggestions](#)

About Zoroastrians

Zoroastrians are followers of one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions founded by the prophet Zarathushtra more than 3,000 years ago in ancient Iran. Zoroastrians have long served as bridge builders in interfaith dialogue, believing in truth, righteousness, charity, beneficence, respect and care for the environment, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Zoroastrianism flourished as the imperial religion of three Persian empires, those of the Achaemenians, Parthians, and Sassanians, and was the dominant religion from Turkey and eastward to China during those times. North America's Zoroastrian community includes those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent, known as Parsis, and those who came directly from Iran seeking religious freedom.

About FEZANA

Founded in 1987, the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) represents a diverse and growing Zarathushti community in the western diaspora. Guided by the blessings of Ahura Mazda and the teachings of prophet Zarathushtra, the non-profit federation serves as the coordinating body for 27 Zoroastrian associations and 14 corresponding groups in Canada and the United States. The activities of FEZANA are conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, cooperation, and unity among all member associations, and with due regard for the Zarathushti principles of goodness, truth, reason, benevolence, implicit trust, and charity toward all mankind. Visit www.fezana.org and follow FEZANA on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook @TheFEZANA.



About ZYNA

The Zoroastrian Youth of North America (ZYNA) is a FEZANA committee dedicated to advancing thought leadership, engagement, and active participation among next-generation Zarathushtis. ZYNA aims to increase the civic engagement and involvement of youth in the Zoroastrian community through an established infrastructure. By working to educate and provide community engagement opportunities for young Zarathushtis in Canada and the United States, ZYNA is creating a sustainable footprint for future generations to advance Zoroastrian interests throughout North America.

Did you enjoy reading this guide and would like to be part of creating the next issue? Please reach out to Bita Kavooosi at bitakavooosi@gmail.com. To see all our resource guides please visit <https://fezana.org/category/zyna/resourceguide/>



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