



Sania Aziz

Pakistan

**Program Manager (Psychologist)
at Lord Sarfraz Foundation**

Sania is a Program Manager (Psychologist) at Lord Sarfraz Foundation. Her journey began working in a hospital, where she quickly learned that her line of work was not just emotionally demanding, but also came with its own unique set of challenges. “It was hectic,” she recalls, “not just because of the line of work, but because of the stigma surrounding mental health within the institution.”

As someone dedicated to raising awareness of mental health and helping others manage it, Sania found herself in an environment that made it difficult to seek help for her own.

“As a psychologist, it was hard to seek help from my seniors. People would judge you for needing support, questioning why an expert in mental health would require assistance or go through such struggles.”

Sania has also found herself in a situation where she has had to quit her remote job due to severe burnout. After transitioning to remote work with a research institute, she quickly realised that while the nature of work and the setting was different, it came with its own set of pressures. “There was a lot of workload and a lot of pressure,” she

explained. “When you work remotely, people tend to forget that isolation can be overwhelming. You have to regulate your own emotions, but it’s tough when you’re feeling cut off from the rest of the world.” She felt unsupported particularly as her mental health began to affect her work .

“They didn’t understand how much my mental health affected my work. I wasn’t able to perform the tasks I used to when I was more stable, but the expectation was always that work needed to be delivered, regardless of what I was going through.” In Pakistan, the lobbying and who knows who culture often makes it difficult for young health workers like Sania to access opportunities. Upon the completion of her masters, Sania was directly affected by this when she missed out on a mental health advocacy role in her hometown- a role she had been passionate about.

“It was heartbreaking,” she shared. “I had so much passion for this role, and I knew I could make a difference, but it went to someone with the right connections, not necessarily the right qualifications.”

This experience deeply affected her mental health. “It made me question everything—my passion, my skills, and even myself. I started to doubt whether I was truly capable, and it really affected my self esteem.” In Pakistan, the process of becoming a licensed psychologist is already challenging, requiring a master’s degree followed by supervised training, but the prevalence of nepotism in hiring processes only made it harder for her to gain the necessary experience. “I wanted to help raise awareness, but the doors were constantly shut, not because of my skills, but because I didn’t have the right references. It was devastating.”

Sania would like to see stronger policies that not only prioritise the mental health of the health workforce by providing accessible support systems but also ensure fair hiring practices

that will stop nepotism. She also believes there should be a clear and efficient licensing process for mental health professionals, allowing them to focus on their work rather than navigating bureaucratic barriers. Ultimately, she hopes these policy changes will create a healthier, more supportive environment for health workers across the country.

As for how Sania manages her mental health now, she shared, “If I couldn’t conduct a session, I used to feel bad and self-conscious, like I had failed my patients. But now I take time off to care for myself because I deserve to show up as my best self so I can provide the best support possible.”