

The Role of Seasonal Triggers and Intellectual Disability in Bipolar Disorder: A Study of Jen Gotch's *The Upside of Being Down*

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Summary

Background: a subjective change which occurs rapidly in the external environment causes depression, stress and anxiety in an individual, which in turn works as an urge to experience certain fluctuations in his/her constant behavior. Symptoms of depression may vary according to the lifestyle of the individual and the syndrome exhibits diverse patterns of disabilities. The traumatic experience in childhood increases chances of depression and fear in an individual's mind, and the longevity or the depth of such events is often determined by the severity of these experiences. These traumatic experiences gradually develop into psychiatric disorders and eventually manifest as bipolar disorder which is considered as the higher form of all depressions. Individuals with bipolar disorder experience intellectual disability due to certain seasonal triggers. **The aim of paper** was to examine the cause of bipolar disorder and its anomalies with the real-time experiences shared by Jen Gotch in her memoir novel *The Upside of Being Down*. **Method:** analyzing the text aims at creating a genuine understanding of the complex problems faced by bipolar patients in the society, to make them realize and prioritize mental health over physical health. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of a proper and scientific understanding of the seasonal triggers and how they are considered a boon rather than a curse to the society. A number of bipolar cases were thoroughly investigated, and a large number of patients were screened, and their reactions and observations were meticulously recorded to make the study possible. **Conclusion:** from the qualitative and quantitative study done, it is clear that understanding and controlling seasonal triggers is crucial for people with bipolar disorder. Mood disorders, especially bipolarity in particular can be seriously influenced by the changing seasons. The optimal approach is to view mental and physical health as complementary, with both playing essential roles in one's overall health and quality of life.

Keywords: Depression, Seasonal Affective Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Optimism and Mental Health

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INTRODUCTION

Disability studies is an interdisciplinary and academic discipline which examines, the social, cultural, psychological, medical and personal dimensions of disability, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the disabled. It is a social phenomenon which focuses on the interplay between the traits of an individual's body and the structure of the society in which he lives. There are countless mental health conditions associated with disability, based on their severity and impact on an individual's daily life. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Major Depressive Disorder, Personality Disorder, Eating Disorders, Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia are some of the mental ailments commonly associated with disability. Among all these, bipolar disorder is the most common, and it affects millions of people worldwide.

This paper aims to examine the cause of bipolar disorder and its anomalies with the real-time experiences shared by Jen Gotch in her memoir novel *The Upside of Being Down*. Jen, the novel's protagonist, proceeds with the way in which her personal story is addressed in an approach to look at the disorder as a gift rather than a disease [1]. Depression and anxiety are the major causes of bipolar disorder, and this can happen equally to men and women between the age group of 18 and 35. Analysis of the text offers many ways to normalize anxiety and depression, create a genuine understanding of the complex problems faced by bipolar patients in society, and also make them realize and prioritize mental health over physical health. This research paper also aims to construct bipolar as a mental disability by studying some of its psychological features like seasonal triggers, manic phases, symptoms, and eventually the traumatic events and finds how these seasonal triggers enhance and help individuals realize their own emotional intelligence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the evolution, catastrophe and stages of bipolar disorder.
- To witness the real-time experiences of Jen Gotch's Bipolar disorder through the novel "The Upside of Being Down".
- To demonstrate the act of prioritizing mental health over physical health.

Bipolar Disorder and Characteristics

Bipolar disorder is defined by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), United States Department of Health and Human Services, as, "a mental illness that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy, activity levels, and concentration". A person affected by this disorder experiences extreme mood shifts, mania, and depression and they seem to be sad, happy, irritable and at times aggressively energetic concerning the situations they face. This extremeness is divided into two episodes namely, manic episodes and depressive episodes. Manic episodes are about the extremely happy, energetic, or angry moods of the affected person. On the other hand, depressive episodes deal with the affected person's terrible sadness, hopelessness or indifferent moods. There is also a separate category called hypo-manic episode, which is about the occurrence of manic periods with less severity. With the occurrence of these three types of episodes and the time it prolongs in the affected person, their disorder is categorized into three types, namely, Bipolar I, Bipolar II and Cyclothymia (NIMH). In bipolar disorder, individuals experience alternating periods of mania and depression which have distinguished symptoms. For manic episodes, the symptoms (prof. Chandak Sengoopta, www.bbk.ac.uk) are restlessness, hostile behavior, fits of rage, anger and irritability, extreme hopefulness, excitement, and happiness, poor judgment and concentration, rapid speech, agitation, less need for sleep, increased energy, setting unrealistic goals and many more. Freud addressed 'mania' in two writings, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1927) [3, 4]. He contends in the first that insanity is founded on the same material as melancholia but in the direction opposite. Rather than being overpowered by the loss of the object, "the ego should have gotten over the absence of the object" or to put it another way, "the manic subject vividly exhibits his emancipation from the thing which was the source of his misery" (p. 255) [5]. For the depressive period, the symptoms are loss of energy, weight gain/loss, suicidal thoughts and efforts to commit suicide, need for more sleep or sleeplessness, loss of curiosity or liking in daily activities, trouble concentrating and making decisions, etc. These symptoms are said to prevail in a person for a week, month, or even years and can significantly impact the mood and behavior of an individual. Such alterations in the moods and behavior of an individual are called seasonal triggers, which potentially contribute to conditions like seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

Seasonal triggers are related to patterns in which these episodes and moods happen in the affected person. This is related to the disorder called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Overview of Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective disorder is a kind of unipolar mood disorder that portrays recurrent episodes of depression which appears at particular seasons of the year typically beginning in late fall or the early winter. Mood often defines a strong diurnal variation in a person's emotional state where they may experience the nastiest morning scores and sleep disruptions leading to temporary dis-regulatory and disruptive disorders. This often disturbs an individual's emotional psyche by instigating persistent feelings of sadness or depression and results in episodes of depression, manic and hypomanic states. These major depressive disorders include Bipolar disorder, Cyclothymia, Persistent depressive disorder and premenstrual dysphoric disorder, Hypomania, and a range of other similar conditions. Extreme mood swings, excessive energy, depressive lows, profound sadness, and hopelessness are commonly seen in bipolar patients. In the chosen autobiography, Jen's consistent amount of taking Adderall causes serious problems to her psyche. The need for the drug is an essential practice for patients with bipolar disorder, but it can also reflect many serious issues, "Some impaired my judgment, others impaired my vision, and one combo caused me to stay up for two days straight" [1]. A significant feature of bipolar disorder is the development of two distinct personalities (referred to as "dissociated parts" or "alters"). A person may experience passive influence, in which one part exerts indirect authority (for example, alien thoughts, emotions, feelings, preferences, and so on), or a total dissociated intrusion, in which one party takes control of the body at the expense of another part. There is no cure for dissociative identity disorder, and treatments and diagnoses are still debatable [5]. Major depressive episodes disturb a person's life, resulting in emotional distress, impaired cognition, strained relationships and increased suicide attempts by patients. Treatments can cause such individuals to experience significant improvements in their psychological well-being and also stabilize their mood and reduce the severity and frequency of the manic episodes. Psychoeducation and cognitive behavioral therapy help bipolars cope with mood changes, handle stress and restore stability in their lifestyle. Proper medication, lifestyle adjustments, support and care from family and regular monitoring by health professionals can enhance their quality of life, reduce symptoms and improve the functioning of body and mind.

Symptoms of SAD begin in late fall or early winter. This might be cured in spring and summer. It is known as Winter Depression, and some people might have symptoms in spring and summer which is called Summer Depression. It is considered a type of depression that is recurrent to seasonal patterns lasting for about five

months a year [6]. The symptoms and signs of SAD include major depression, along with symptoms that differ in winter and summer patterns. The symptoms of major depression might include feeling depressed all the time and experiencing changes in weight and appetite, losing interest in activities, feeling worthless or hopeless and having problems with sleep, difficulty in concentration, low energy, and having persistent thoughts of suicide and death.

SAD has become more common in people with bipolar disorder, depressive disorder, and mostly bipolar disorder II. This is connected to frequent hypomanic and depressive episodes. Additionally, people with SAD tend to overeat, become hyperactive, and experience panic or anxiety disorder etc. With an optimistic approach, Jen Gotch makes the readers aware of these symptoms in the early stage of life and the dire importance of providing proper medical attention. “I was talking about mental illness on my Instagram Stories and my podcast and creating jewelry at the ban. do to raise awareness about mental health” [1].

The traumatic events of the past can have a huge impact on an individual's life. People don't get proper guidance on depression and anxiety at a young age. Similarly, Jen had no idea about these terms; she just knew that something was wrong. The traumatic incidents of the past started when she didn't get her parents' full attention. “Did my eyes lie to me?” [1], she asked after receiving many comments from her mother. “These incidents were related to my childhood as a normal kid who wanted attention from her parents”. These incidents didn't mean anything serious at that time of her life. All these traumatic incidents that came out of her distressing past confirmed that she had an anxiety disorder and depression at a stage of her life when she really needed her parents' attention. In Indian studies, poor family support, poor economic status, being far from the hospital, being unaware of the illness of the patient's family members, and co-occurring substance abuse were all linked to non-adherence.

Some of the episodes in the autobiography show how the seasonal triggers affected Jen Gotch. “If my grandfather's death had caused a mood swing and I was entering a hypomanic state” [1]. Her grandfather's death caused a mood swing in her psyche. She seemed normal to others, but her actions and gestures showed something different. She was a completely different person who was happy even in a melancholic state. Most people suffering from depression or stress take drugs like opiates, which cause them to be very creative. Jen was questioning her ability to do things, but she could do them. Stylings, photography, and modeling helped Jen understand the many possibilities in life. Her creativity kept her on the new elevated path, and she found peace in her soul. She spread awareness about her psychological problems through her company, leading and protecting the Bipolars, which became her new job as an advocate for mental health [7].

Mood Disorder and Intellectual disability

Mood disorders and intellectual disability are interconnected and affect the mental health of an individual. The term Intellectual disability means that a person has certain limits in the cognitive functioning and skills such as conceptualization, social interaction and professional competence. These restrictions may make a person more likely to learn and develop more slowly in ways that are unusual for a normal human. This type of disability can occur at any time before birth or even before a person turns 20 years old.

The individuals suffering from this disorder might have some underlying neuro-biological aetiology or seizure-related or psycho-social factors often leading to persistent feelings of sadness or erratic mood swings. Anxiety and depressive symptoms can significantly impact daily functioning, and the emotional well-being is compromised, causing persistent sadness, hopelessness, or irritability. The interplay of various mood disorders and intellectual disability complicates the diagnosis and treatment since their symptoms may coincide or exacerbate each other. The co-occurrence of mood disorders and intellectual disabilities gives out subtle challenges that depend upon tailored interventions to address the cognitive as well as emotional well-being of individuals. Individuals grappling with mood disorders such as persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia), cyclothymic disorder, major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder may decrease the productivity, impair daily functioning, increase the risk of other health issues, disrupt mood, experience fluctuations between extreme highs and lows etc. In some severe cases, mood disorders may contribute to suicidal thoughts and actions.

Individuals who suffer from mood disorders have significant traumas and impairment in educational, social, occupational, or another important area of functioning [8]. These disorders make individuals lose control and interest in the usual activities; the symptoms might be severe and last for many weeks by interfering with education, work, social life, and relationships. Many individuals might appear to function normally, but this might increase the effort required for individuals to perform daily tasks as they contend with emotional challenges, affecting their energy, focus and motivation. Disabilities can't change the person's inner self. Hence society should change the stereotypical attitude towards disabled people and treat them as normal human beings by developing empathy and acceptance [9].

In the autobiography, Jen mentioned about her past where she grew up with undiagnosed bipolar disorder and anxiety, and she couldn't fit into a job for a longer period as she had no control over her mind. Bipolar disorder makes it difficult for individuals to have a steady income, which causes social disadvantages. Laurels, Jen's therapist, wrote a letter to Jen's parents mentioning the income support she requires for the treatment process. “In terms of your current and future participation in her financial support, let me be blunt.

If you pull the complete financial support from her, now I believe that you will engender many feelings that will be hard to overcome in the future" [1]. Such patients usually remain silent for most of the time; generating a path to address a situation and creating awareness among people about depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and many triggers that might help the public know the tactics for handling their psyche with patience. In this aspect, the autobiographical memoir of Jen has become a documentary for the readers to understand and feel comfortable about the system and give them a feeling that they are not left alone but instead have similar sufferings and guided path to overcome the triggers in the years by documenting the struggles Jen had and the tactics she practiced. One way or another, initiating the path with solutions might help a few individuals.

Propellants of life: Happiness, Optimism, and Humor

Jen, the co-founder and chief creative officer of Ban. do shares her personal experiences and practical advice for readers and ruminators through her candid memoir *The Upside of Being Down*. Jen has expressed her story through a familiar narration of first-person narrative; to build a strong relationship with readers. Bipolar disorder mostly affects women more than men and they have to face everything to its extreme. Jen, a courageous person, created a role for her job. "I'm also proof that if you know the job you want, and you can't find it, you can create it" [1]. This life explanation indicates her optimism in life, resilience and positivity towards any challenges she encountered.

Humor was the approach that Jen took to make her life colorful. People tend to create something independently to find peace and keep their surroundings happy. Depression or anxiety makes people in need of attention from their loved ones, therapists, and psychiatrists. To get rid of all the emotional outbreaks, Jen tries to make herself busy by engaging in many activities and being active on social media platforms etc. Spreading happiness and creating awareness was the main role in her life. However, Jen had a busy career and divorced; she chose a path to keep herself busy by sharing awareness with people, which includes the employees in Ban.do and the customers who approached her. "I am so busy with all this growth" [1]. Though she has faced numerous struggles, she somehow found her way out of all the issues that kept swallowing her. This attitude of Jen encourages others to learn something from her so they can succeed in creating happiness. Awareness was her main motto; Jen thought of carving a safe place for people to talk about their moods and emotions.

When Ban. Do, the company that Jen started expanded, she faced many struggles to be in this phase of life. Having the right people at the right time in one's life will guide them to create a safe place. Before the attempt to write a novel, she made a podcast and a few videos on her account to share about her mental illness; she took all the steps to share her issues not only to increase the

profit of the company but also to raise awareness about bipolar disorder, its causes, effects etc. She talks about the ways to treat the minority group in the society, the various issues they face in their day-to-day life, and the way their inferior treatment might even push them to commit suicide. These emotional breakdowns at times will evoke negative thoughts within them, but Jen advises her readers to see the voice as "you should treat it as a roommate who lives inside your head to put just a tiny bit of distance between you and your thoughts" [1], (Egan) mentioned in the *New York Times*.

A supreme group of the population considers mental illness as a disease, but it is a gift and a chance to understand one's body and mind deeply. "Learning about mental health has taught me that living your life with hope, optimism, lightheartedness, and humor (lots and lots of humor) is a tremendous gift you can give yourself" [1]. Personal experiences of Jen led her to a path where she saw success over many failures. Looking back on life and commenting about her personal experiences with humor made every situation look easy and simple. Jen knew something was wrong with her, but that didn't stop her from finding the best version of herself [10]. This helped Jen find a temporary solution and the courage to handle her emotions wisely if she tends to cross depression again in her life.

Building mental strength

The motto of Jen "Challenge yourself to look for the upside in any crisis" announces the tendency to help others to have a healthy relationship with people who can guide them in the right direction. In an interview [11], Jen stepped out of her shell and used her social platforms to talk about mental health issues "We will slow down and de-prioritize being busy, and we will have a healthier relationship with our thoughts, with ourselves, with our friends and with our families [1]. Taking control of one's life can greatly change the perspective of seeing matters. *The Upside of Being Down* made Jen find ways to develop comfortable outcomes for her. Reading is a great habit that can encourage people to adapt to new things and implement them in daily practices. Initiating step to "Ask for help and accept help. Those are two things that are difficult for many of us, but you don't have to struggle alone" [1]. Her previous relationship with a boyfriend was completely beautiful and it was he who advised her to meet the therapist, Laurel. Her life became better with Laurel's therapy sessions "After years of working with Laurel and nurturing my own increasing interest in mental health. I had developed a good amount of emotional intelligence" [1].

Before starting Ban. do, with the help of Laurel, Jen, took many jobs working in many domains and learning new things accepting the fact she failed and succeeded in all the jobs she worked. "I was still struggling with my mental health, so it was hard to be consistent about pursuing or maintaining jobs" [1]. Experiences gained from life will always help in the future, depending upon the life the individual decides. As Jen tried many roles

in her life, all those pleasant and bitter experiences molded her to try new things and become the Chief Creative Officer of Ban. Do. Building mental strength from personal trauma, accepting the effects, and trying to escape the struggling path where the things Jen Gotch courageously did to reach out to greatest success in work and life. Documentaries of personal trauma and self-analyzing gave them a place to change their behavior according to the situation “I loved the styling. It called on my creativity and natural problem-solving abilities” [1]. Problems might arise and get solved naturally; this was where she learned to adapt and use the ideas in action.

Life can take people to any extent of happiness or even to traumas; there is a strong connection in letting the universe led the way to success. This path might be strange, a person with bipolar disorder doesn't have to be completely different from others. It requires some attention from therapists, psychiatrists, attention and patience of loved ones [12]. Depression or stress can make a person seek attention: “You would think I'd be grateful that maybe I'd avoided punishment, but I was looking for drama. I wanted the focus back on me because, at that age, I felt simultaneous like my parents paid too much attention to me and completely ignored me. Adolescence is complicated” [1]. Adulthood makes people worry or yearn for some things, and it hits differently for each individual. Starting a company is not a small step. This shows the creative side of Jen and her efforts to remain active on the public platform. Jen, being optimistic and using her humour as a tool, established an organization with all stepping stones of failures and successes. Jen and the company intend to “Exist to help you be your best” [1]. Adapting the burning desire to bring life to things through a true level of emotions gave Jen a space to talk about mental health.

Prioritizing mental health

Mental health is the fullness of our well-being, embracing resilience, self-care and strengths to manage life's challenges. People focus on physical health and external beauty, but prioritizing mental health is the true intention of The Upside of Being Down. Prioritizing mental health is a principal task for people who are bipolars, monitoring their emotional changes, understanding personal experiences, and tackling critical situations takes immense time and patience. At forty, Jen Gotch got her experience by understanding her emotions. As Jen underwent many struggles in her past, she wanted to help people and care for their family members. Suicidal thoughts and the idea of killing someone made her lose her close ones [13]. Long terms of medications, advice from psychiatrists, and training from therapists made her become a mental health advocate. This also groomed her as an optimistic and she gained self-satisfaction by using her humor and emotional intelligence as tools to help others person. As normal humans, everyone requires a change in life for personal growth, adjusting to new circumstances, pursuing goals or responding to evolving

priorities. Depressed or not, people tend to learn or even try innovative things to gather experience. In the case of Jen, styling jobs and modelling gave new thoughts to her.

As a chronic bipolar patient, Jen was familiar with the nooks and crannies of her mood swings, eating disorder, and insomnia caused by the misuse of drugs. Jen considered breaking all the boundaries and writing a novel about her life. She lost her grandfather when she was very young. When her lover Andrew left her, she felt lonely, which caused her to eat a lot to numb out her emotions. The medications caused her to gain weight. After this incident, Jen's sense of dress completely changed. First, it caused her to experience a depressive episode, and she came to accept the truth that they had not been a happy pair for the previous eleven years. She was able to control her emotions after dealing with this circumstance for a considerable amount of time. She knew that she needed psychiatric care, including medication and consultation. She viewed this as an opportunity to become single once more at the age of forty and was also eager to have a fresh life. The current generation is experiencing a high level of negative energy, and it is difficult to accept this reality. Jen's experience was not typical of the current generation, as she was exposed to magazines, movies, and advertisements that encouraged her to compare herself to others in order to feel inadequate. Depression and anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors that lead to a prolonged period of sadness. Even the fact that she had been banging her head against the floor since she was three years old did not help her parents to understand her condition.

Seasonal triggers are mostly responsible for bipolar individuals' capacity to lead regular lives. Jen's seasonal triggers and inability to understand her feelings were recognized, so she found a way to treat herself with medications and specific behavioral changes that would help keep her stress-free. When she was aged, she couldn't cope with the pressure, so she started spending too much time at work to distract herself from what was going on. This is the real reason why depression and anxiety are so common in today's world. Hence, prioritizing mental health can help you stay healthy and stress-free. Sharing your life is a big step for someone with bipolar disorder, but if you are a person who loves to help others, you'll make an impact with your work. That is what Jen did through her lifestyle company Ban.do. which produced various jewelry — that represented her emotions and caught the attention of people who were going through the same thing. Jen used her creative skills to show her struggles and made a lot of money with Ban. The goal wasn't to make money, it was to make people more aware of her struggles. She was only seen by her family and friends, but after her divorce from Andrew, people started to recognize her struggles. This not only made her popular on Instagram and other social media, but also brought her a lot of attention.

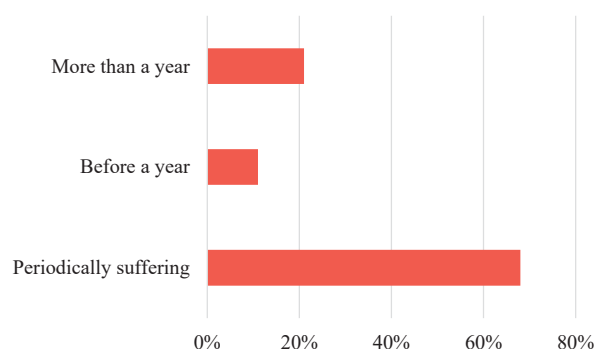
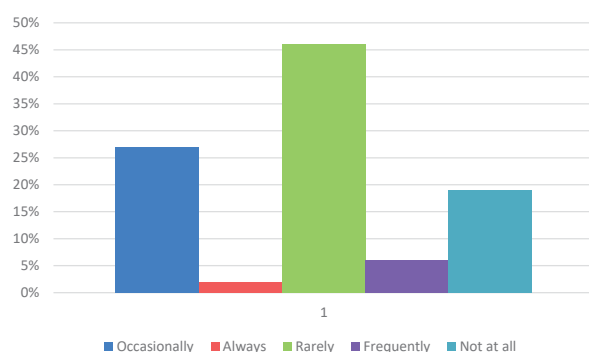
As a part of the study, a survey was conducted among 105 bipolar patients. Through the survey, it was found

Table 1 Frequency analysis

Analysis questions	Parameters	Count	Percentage, %
Have you been suffering from anxiety, bipolar disability or mental disorder?	Periodically suffering	71	68
	Before a year	12	11
	More than a year	22	21
The sense of being lost, feeling unwanted, insecurity and helplessness create a void and numbness inside our mind.	Occasionally	29	27
	Always	2	2
	Rarely	48	46
	Frequently	7	6
	Not at all	20	19

that the bipolar patients considered for study had been suffering periodically which means they are the patients belonging to Bipolar Disorder Type 1 and some suffered before a year and few of them experienced this disorder more than a year. Bipolar Disorder Type I patients undergo periodical stress episodes which might easily cause mood swings, that is, an affected person might feel extreme happiness and sadness simultaneously. In the poll, most of the people responded that they are feeling the sense of being lost, feeling unwanted, insecure, and helpless in rare cases. The outcome implies that the optimistic character is not in-born whereas it should be achieved through continuous practices. Moreover, self-awareness and acceptance of flaws will raise optimism and bring success.

From the analysis table, it is found that among 105 respondents, 68% of the bipolar patients are

**Fig. 1** Graphical representation of duration suffered**Fig. 2** Graphical representation showing the frequency of the symptoms of bipolar patients

suffering periodically, 11% are being suffered before a year and 21% have been suffering for more than a year.

The sense of being lost, unstable and helpless inside the mind is experienced occasionally by 29% among 105 defendants and most of the patients (46%) are affected only in rare situations. This analysis is made to identify the symptoms of bipolar patients and to examine their types based on their responses.

CONCLUSION

From the qualitative and quantitative study done, it is clear that understanding and controlling seasonal triggers is crucial for people with bipolar disorder. In the realm of bipolar disorder, the intricate interplay between seasonal triggers, anxiety and mood disorders reveals relevant challenges and opportunities for both patients and health professionals. Mood disorders, especially bipolarity in particular can be seriously influenced by the changing seasons. Studies show that there exists a potential connection between the seasonal variations and the onset of mood episodes in bipolar disorder and it is difficult to understand this interplay and effectively manage and treat this. Seasonal triggers exert a noticeable influence on the emotional health of individuals with bipolar disorder. This can act as a catalyst for mood episodes, disrupts sleep patterns and disturbs the psycho-social functioning of an individual. By introducing personalized treatment plans, incorporating therapeutic approaches like medication management, light therapy, psycho-education, lifestyle changes, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) social support and regular monitoring of mood and early intervention can help the disordered to overcome the challenges posed by seasonal variations. By seeking professional guidance and developing coping strategies like practicing relaxation techniques and engaging in mindfulness practices empower individuals to navigate seasonal challenges thereby promoting emotional health.

It is not unerring to say that mental health is more important than physical health or vice versa. Both are interconnected and are indispensable components of overall well-being. Striking a balance and prioritizing both physical and mental health is crucial for maintaining a healthy and fulfilling life. The optimal approach is to view mental and physical health as complementary, with both playing essential roles in one's overall health and quality of life.

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