



## Knowledge, Perception and Attitude towards mental health:

### Scenario in the Indian NCR

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mental health is a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health literacy, the understanding and viewpoints about mental health conditions which help in their identification, is low in developing countries. A great social disapproval of mental health disorders exists in India even though a large population suffers from them. A cross sectional survey was conducted to assess the knowledge, perception and attitude of general population residing in NCR region of INDIA. A total of 505 people participated in the study. The respondents were administered a prevalidated, self-administered questionnaire in an online mode using Google forms, which contained 14 questions related to knowledge, 7 questions pertaining to perception and 6 questions under attitude section. In the knowledge section, correct options achieve +1 mark. Total marks obtainable were 14. Perception and attitude questions were answered using 5-Point Likert scale. Data was analyzed using tables and charts. The results of the study showed that 332 (65.7%) people had good knowledge (8-11 marks) while 173 (34.3%) had little or no

knowledge regarding mental illness. The average score was 8.43/14. The results of the survey indicated a generally favorable result of the level of awareness among the public regarding mental health disorders, but it was observed that certain stigmas and stereotypes still exist in the general people towards mentally ill patients. Campaigns regarding mental health awareness should be organized to increase the mental health literacy of the general public.

Key words: Mental health, knowledge, social stigma, general population

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is an odd paradox that a society, which can now speak openly about topics that were once unspeakable, still remains largely silent when it comes to mental illness.” (Glenn Close)

Mental health is a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects our ability to think, act, handle stress and work productively. Mental health is a major concern worldwide as well as in India.<sup>[1]</sup>

If the advancements are assessed in the field of mental health, the speed seems to be slow. Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1954 had said “without mental health there can be no true physical health.”<sup>[1]</sup>

A mental disorder is any illness with psychological or behavioral signs associated with either a disturbing or distressing symptom or a declension in one or more essential areas of functioning.<sup>[2]</sup> It commonly includes depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and other psychoses, dementia, and developmental disorders including autism.<sup>[3]</sup> There is no universally acceptable definition of mental disorder.<sup>[2]</sup> This is partially because mental states or behaviors that are considered unusual in one culture may be regarded as normal or acceptable in another, and regardless it is difficult to clearly differentiate healthy from abnormal mental functioning.<sup>[2]</sup> Propitiously, most of these illnesses can be well treated.<sup>[3]</sup>

Mental disorders account for major causes of non-fatal disease burden in India.<sup>[4]</sup> In 2017, 197.3 million people had mental disorders in India, including 45.7 million with depressive disorders and 44.9 million with anxiety disorders.<sup>[4]</sup> The sex ratio was calculated 738 for mental illness in 2011.<sup>[5]</sup> The prevalence of mental disorders with onset in childhood and adolescence decreased in India from 1990 to 2017 but increased during adulthood.<sup>[4]</sup> One in seven Indians had mental disorders of varying severity in 2017.<sup>[4]</sup> The proportional input of mental disorders to the total disease burden in India has nearly doubled since 1990.<sup>[4]</sup>

A great social disapproval of mental health disorders exists in India even though a large population suffers from them.<sup>[6]</sup> In a study, Thara et al., (2003) found that the stigma of being separated or divorced is usually felt lesser by patients than that of having a mental disorder.<sup>[5]</sup> People with mental health problems can face bias in all aspects of their lives.<sup>[6]</sup> In India, stereotypes and lack of awareness are major factors for underreported mental disorders, with only 7.3% of young people reporting a mental disorder and even fewer reaching for treatment.<sup>[7]</sup> Stigmatization and ignorance towards mental disorders often lead to untreated problems and may enhance the problem further.<sup>[5]</sup>

Mental health literacy, the understanding and viewpoints about mental health conditions which help in their identification, care and prevention, is low worldwide, but specifically low in developing countries.<sup>[8]</sup> Mental health conditions are widely recognized in the world but the literacy about them has been neglected in both developed and developing countries.<sup>[8]</sup> Thus, this study was conducted to assess the knowledge, attitude, and perceptions regarding mental health disorders especially anxiety and depression amongst the general population of India.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A cross sectional study was conducted to assess the knowledge, perception and attitude of the Indian population in the National capital region regarding mental health disorders, especially anxiety and depression.

### **Respondents**

A total of 505 people participated in the study which included people from different spheres like students, government and private employees, self-employed individuals as well as homemakers or unemployed people.

#### Materials

Google forms were used to create an online quiz-cum-survey form, which had 8 questions related to demographic characteristics, 14 closed ended questions pertaining to basic knowledge about mental health, 7 questions regarding perception and 6 questions under the attitude section. In the questions under knowledge section, one mark each was given for correct answer and 0 for incorrect and don't know option. Thus, the total marks obtainable were 14. Each item under perception could be answered using a 5 point Likert scale, where 1 is strongly disagree, 2 is disagree, 3 is neutral, 4 is agree and 5 is strongly agree. Similarly, items under the attitude section could be answered according to how accurately the given options resembled the respondent's feelings, the answers could range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

It also assessed their feelings towards mental health patients, and how they would respond if faced with certain situations where a certain amount of mental health awareness was necessary.

#### Procedure

The respondents were sent the link of the Google form through various social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Instagram. The consent to contribute in the study was duly obtained through Google forms itself. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary, the nature and purpose of the survey was documented in the Google form. The participants were ensured about the confidentiality of the survey. The respondents could evaluate their answers and score (Maximum marks 14.0) only after submitting the form. The scores were graded as 0-3 as poor, 4-7 as fair, 8-11 as good and 12-14 as excellent. Data was analysed and presented in tabulated form.

### **RESULTS**

The present study was conducted to assess the knowledge, attitude and perception of general population towards mental health disorders. A total of 505 individuals participated in the study. Most of the respondents belonged to the age group of 16-25 years (57.4%) and majority of them were females (59.8%). Most of the individuals had never been diagnosed with mental disorder (95.4%) nor they had ever visited a psychiatrist (88.5%).

#### Table 1

#### Knowledge assessment of people towards mental health disorders:

The results of the study showed the average score to be 8.43/14 with the median being 9 points. Only 61 people had excellent score

#### Figure 1

Most of the respondents 332 (65.7%) had good knowledge while 173 (34.3%) had little or no knowledge about mental health disorders. Out of the 14 questions asked most of the participants answered the following questions correctly: 1) The difference between sadness and depression (81.8%). 2) The need for psychological therapy apart from therapeutic drugs (85.7%). 3) Whether stress aggravates depression and anxiety or not (88.3%). The questions which were generally either left unanswered or were answered incorrectly by majority of respondents were: 1) Whether the individuals with a family history of anxiety & depression are at a higher risk of developing anxiety & depression (60.2% of the participants answered incorrectly). 2) If the treatment of these disorders can be continued life long without any serious side

effects (73.1% had negative views). 3) The symptoms of anxiety were incorrectly answered by most of the respondents (91.09%)

Table 2

Perception of people towards mental health disorders:

About 56.8 % of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that stigma & discrimination towards mental health has changed in the past years. They strongly disagreed & disagreed (64.4%) that mental health patients pose a threat to society. The individuals responded positively (95%) over the benefits of advertisements for mental health awareness. However, they had mixed reviews on whether a person suffering from mental health disorders can be identified through their physical appearance.

Figure 2

Attitude of people towards mental health disorders:

Majority of respondents had a positive attitude towards people suffering from mental health disorders. They strongly agreed (60.6%) over being comfortable about sharing their mental health issues with friends & family. Participants strongly disagreed and disagreed (76.1%) over being shameful on having a mental illness. However, individuals had mixed views on whether the patients suffering from mental illness can be productive at work place, school etc.

Figure 3

## **DISCUSSION**

WHO defines mental health as a positive sense of well-being and not merely the absence of an illness.<sup>[9]</sup> Mental health disorders account for approximately 7.3% of disease burden worldwide. The misconceptions and stigma attached with mental health disorders are widespread. Our study delineated the knowledge, attitude and perception of the community regarding mental health and its disorders. The results of the present study revealed that though a considerable proportion of the community 65.7% had good knowledge regarding mental illness a significant percentage 34.3% of the population are lacking in knowledge about it. Moreover, the awareness of the participants (only 8.9% were aware) with respect to signs and symptoms of mental illnesses is limited to manifestations that occur in severe mental illness. The main reason for this could be either limited knowledge of participants about milder and common symptoms associated with mental conditions like joint pains, lethargy and hypervigilance or that these symptoms are too general to be recognized as features of mental illness.<sup>[9]</sup> This finding corroborates with findings of the study of Salve et al.<sup>[9]</sup> There was a significant lack of knowledge about the treatment of mental illness. This fact was supported by the observation that only 26.9% of the respondents were aware that the treatment of mental health disorders can be continued lifelong without any significant adverse effects. This can be attributed to the fact that visits to a psychiatrist are limited and adequate treatment of mental conditions is still not taken into consideration. This finding was similar to previous study.<sup>[10]</sup> It was also observed that family history of mental illness correlated with perception of psychological health amongst the respondents. This maybe due to the fact that those having a lineage of mental illness may share experiences and hence develop good perception. This finding is in accordance with the study of Benti et al.<sup>[11]</sup> Significantly, about 73.3% respondents identified physical exercises like yoga to be beneficial in cases of mental illness as physical exercises are increasingly being recommended to improve and maintain the overall health including mental health.<sup>[12]</sup> Our findings were in accordance with studies by Singh et al.<sup>[13]</sup> Stressful life incidents like any traumatic experience have a considerable effect on various mental illness, including depression and anxiety<sup>[14]</sup>. Interestingly majority of the participants (88.3%) agreed that stress aggravates anxiety and depression. Perception and attitude greatly affect an

individual's everyday life. <sup>[15]</sup> Perception involves an individual's process of facing a situation and then analyzing it into something meaningful based on past experiences. <sup>[16]</sup> Meanwhile, attitude refers to an individual's tendency to behave in a particular way depending upon their experiences. <sup>[16]</sup> The results of this study showed that people have a positive perception regarding mental health patients. About 45% of the participants were of the view that people suffering from any mental health disorder do not pose any threat to the society and should not be blamed for their problems. Moreover, participants showed positive attitudes towards mentally challenged patients and were in support of psychological counselling (54.7%). About 64.4% people were of the opinion that patients with mental illness deserve love and affection from society but a large proportion (35.6 %) of the community still discriminates the mentally ill patients. This suggests that the stigma attached with mental illness is still deep rooted and tends to isolate them from the society. It highlights the fact that there is a dire need to address the stigma of mental illness amongst the society through awareness raising campaigns. <sup>[17]</sup> This is quite consistent with the findings from previous studies <sup>[8,9]</sup>. Many respondents agreed that people suffering from mental illness should not be confined at homes and can perform properly at work place and school. <sup>[9]</sup> The present study also revealed that though many people had positive attitude towards mentally ill patients, a notable proportion of the general Indian population (37.2%) were in doubt about their attitude towards people diagnosed with mental disorder. This finding can be compared with the study done by Dawood E et al. <sup>[18]</sup> It reflects that socially desirable responses may affect the true stigmatizing attitude of the community. <sup>[19]</sup> 15.8% of the people were not comfortable discussing their mental health problems. This signifies that people with mental health conditions are concerned about being treated differently and fear discrimination in the society. However, about 39.4% participants believed that the stigma and discrimination towards mentally sick patients have changed in the past years. Furthermore, media plays a crucial role in everyone's life and is a convenient and rapid source of information. <sup>[20]</sup> The results highlighted the significant role of social media (74.3%) and internet (56.2%) in informing and spreading mental health literacy amongst the community. Hence social media should be largely involved in increasing public awareness and curbing negative attitude of the people towards mental health disorders. The difference between the number of respondents who answered no when asked if they had ever been diagnosed with a mental disorder, and those who thought they suffered from one, was large enough to indicate that more people need to be made aware of the necessity of seeking psychological help, and that mental health counselling should be made more accessible to the general populace.

## **CONCLUSION**

The participants generally had a sound knowledge and positive attitudes toward mental disorders but we are still far behind from achieving complete mental health literacy. This strongly emphasizes the need for more public awareness programs at the school and community levels. Campaigns regarding mental health awareness should be organized to increase the mental health literacy of the general public. The stigma associated with visiting a psychiatrist should be dealt with and the need of proper treatment should be explained to the patients and their families so that we can achieve a mentally healthy society.

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