

What are the levels of awareness and attitudes of Indians towards mental health and how can they seek professional help?

Mental Health. Why are mental health disorders overlooked? Why is it not given the importance that it needs? Are Indians afraid to talk about it? Is it because of the taboo? Or are they simply unaware? “Indians are hesitant to seek professional help or even talk about mental health issues because this topic is extraordinarily stigmatised and immediately associated with being emotionally weak and having no willpower.”, psychologist, Dr. Evelyn Raghel Thomas explains.

A recent article published on World Economic Forum talked about Mental health majorly focusing on why Indians are finding it harder to be happy that mainly talks about stereotypes of it being looked down upon. People think if you go to a mental health professional you are considered “crazy” and this subject is evidently still a taboo in India. According to WHO, almost 50% of Indians are supremely judgmental of people suffering through mental illnesses. The mental health professional, Dr. Evelyn states that these societal stereotypes are developed because of the conservative Indian culture where every individual is expected to suppress these emotions and handle all of it on their own because THIS IS LIFE. Drashti Thakkar, 22, who suffered through chronic anxiety and depression for 8 years says, “It’s high time that India changes these narrow-minded shallow views on mental health issues. I have suffered through anxiety and depression for a long time now and found the courage to seek professional help just 2 months ago.” When asked why she didn’t report this to a professional earlier, she said, “I was always told by my own family that this is what life is, everyone has their struggles, just get over it.” However, she is overjoyed that she made an effort to see a therapist regardless of what the Indian society thinks. “At the end of the day, it’s my life, I make my decisions for a better change and youth is in power.”

Almost 54 million Indians suffer from depression, and 38 million suffer from anxiety disorder according to WHO. According to Sindhvani, one in six people are struggling from some form of mental health issue in India, and still fail to understand the importance of seeking professional help. India faces extreme repercussions like witnessing 28% of suicides due to the ignorant

behaviour and taboo around this topic because of the societal pressure. Having a mental disorder is perceived with a sense of judgement because of the stigma which needs to change. Aaryan Dubey, 29, entrepreneur, explains that it's becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the importance of Mental Health issues in India, because there are serious repercussions that come along with this obliviousness and incognizance. He explains, "Awareness is of utmost importance; India needs to change or at least try to change to accept and normalise how western countries handle therapy." India has been labelled as 'most depressing country' by WHO – India is in urgent need of help and under a mental health epidemic. Mental health conversations are non-existent in India, people have traditionally been and are still in denial with the fact that mental health is as important as physical health and are real issues that majority of Indians are facing.

There is a various factor that play a vital role in feeling encouraged to seek professional help. Firstly, being fully aware and informed about this topic. Most Indians feel like it's a part of life that everyone has to overcome at some point. Secondly, generational gap is a real problem. Younger Indians are more open to mental health conversations and therapy whereas, older public fails to understand this because of their traditional preconceived notions. "Now, India is more open to mental health issues compared to last decade, however, acceptance is definitely among the younger generation – older people above the age 50 are ready to digest the fact that this is a real problem.", says mental health expert, psychologist, Founder of Way to hope, Dr. Harshant Upadhyaya. Another factor that has an effect is education. A person who is educated is more likely to understand this as they are immediately aware of this compared to someone who is not educated. Additionally, location plays a vital role as well, for example, someone from a modern and civilised city like Mumbai is more likely to comprehend this better/seek help compared to someone from a small town in Bihar. Moreover, stable income and socio-economic background is of absolute significance as a financially stable individual is more capable of seeking help than someone from the lower strata. Nonetheless, Dr. Harshant Upadhyaya says that are a few exceptions, "A security guard wanted to treat his son even though he was among the low-income population. A maid wanted to treat her sister suffering from severe OCD regardless of her financial stability." The doctor mentions that we as a country need to normalise mental issues

like medical problems like dengue/malaria. Infact, Physical health issues can cause depression which not be overlooked.

Vinee Moradiya, 35, Fashion designer, explains how people can feel more encouraged to seek help without feeling ashamed or 'weak', "the best way is through awareness campaigns, to take active steps towards emotional-generational crisis. Choosing mental health as an optional subject at school to inform yourself." Psychologist, Dr. Evelyn says that helpline services could be of wonderful use in rural areas, using local medium like posters and regional newspapers is powerful. Rohan Gorawal, 20, student, explains, "Just like doing yoga/exercises for physical health, we need to start taking care of our mental health/emotional wellness and be broad minded to accept change." Twisha Shah, 56, engineer was against therapy; always thought of mental issues as obstacles that everyone faces until she found out that she was suffering through major childhood trauma turned post-traumatic stress disorder. She says, "I didn't know what I was suffering from until diagnosed with severe PTSD, I was misinformed or simply unaware; India needs therapy."

Awareness is the key. A strong person can be depressed too. We need to take this more seriously, demolish the taboo which results in low self-esteem and confidence. Having a mental disorder doesn't define you. Dr. Harshant says, "The best encouragement to seek professional help is the belief that it can be cured."

Word Count: 1030 words

Research Log

This feature article is best suited for Guardian Society because The Guardian has a huge target audience where this information can be provided so people are more informed about the topic. This is majorly focused on India and Indians but it is also about personal preference. If a non-Indian were interested to know about this – they would invest their time – because this is a very interesting, concerning and huge topic that needs more coverage. The two mental health professionals/experts are psychologists/therapists based in India hence I set up a telephonic interview with them for 20 minutes each wherein I covered all my questions, got their views and

opinions and consent to use them in this assessment. All the direct quotes in this feature article are from random strangers who are the ordinary folks/general public from various age groups and professions. I only interviewed Indians or British Indian in Central London at the peak hour on the busiest day just before Christmas because this article is focused on India and Indians hence getting an opinion on non-Indians would not contribute to this piece of writing. All the interviews in Central London were face to face with necessary covid-19 precautions. Each interview lasted almost 8 minutes which gave me in-depth information along with qualitative and quantitative data. The contact details of all the interviewees and mental health professionals is down below.

Contact details:

Dr Evelyn Raghel Thomas - Mental Health Expert/professional, Therapist, Psychologist - Truworth Wellness - +91 9928328141 - evelyn.thomas@truworthwellness.com - interviewed over a phone call on 12th January 2022 at 1:23 p.m.

Dr. Harshant Upadhyaya - Mental Health Expert/professional, Therapist, Psychologist - Founder of Way to hope, Mumbai - +919820419034 - harshantshah@gmail.com - interviewed over a phone call on 12th January 2022 at 2:06 p.m.

Aaryan Dubey - aryandubey949@gmail.com - interviewed face to face in central London on 24th December 2022

Drashti Thakkar - drashtiht02@gmail.com - interviewed face to face in central London on 24th December 2022

Vinee Moradiya – vineemoradiya@gmail.com - interviewed face to face in central London on 24th December 2022

Twisha Shah – twishadshah08@gmail.com - interviewed face to face in central London on 24th December 2022

Rohan Gorawal – rohangorawal638@gmail.com - interviewed face to face in central London on 24th December 2022

Reference list – Harvard Style

Bhatia, A., (2020), 'World Mental Health Day 2020: In Numbers, The Burden Of Mental Disorders In India', *NDTV*, [online], Available at: <https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/world-mental-health-day-2020-in-numbers-the-burden-of-mental-disorders-in-india-51627/> [Accessed on 19 Dec 2021].

Birla, N., (2019), 'Mental health in India: 7.5% of country affected; less than 4,000 experts available', *The Economic Times*, [online], Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/mental-health-in-india-7-5-of-country-affected-less-than-4000-experts-available/articleshow/71500130.cms> [Accessed on 10 Dec 2021].

Deb, R., (2020), 'Why are we still so hesitant about seeking therapy?', *Times of India*, [online], Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/health-fitness/de-stress/why-are-we-still-so-hesitant-about-seeking-therapy/articleshow/76510282.cms> [Accessed on 10 Jan 2022].

Llamba, R., (2020), 'What India must do to solve its mental health crisis?', *The Economic Times*, [online], Available at: <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/what-india-must-do-to-solve-its-mental-health-crisis/74314862> [Accessed on 24 Dec 2021].

Rathore, H., (2020), 'How Committed Is India to Mental Health?', *The Diplomat*, [online], Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/how-committed-is-india-to-mental-health/> [Accessed on 27 Dec 2021].

Sindwani, P., (2019), 'One in six Indians suffer from mental health issues, and are unaware of it', *Business Insider India*, [online], Available at:

<https://www.businessinsider.in/science/health/news/one-in-six-indians-suffer-from-mental-health-issues-and-are-unaware-of-it/articleshow/71513775.cms> [Accessed on 29 Dec 2021].

The Live Love Laugh Foundation (2018), '[How India perceives mental health](#)', National Survey Report.

https://dwdja6ta65an1.cloudfront.net/the_live_love_laugh/uploads/media/source/hlUDEb-TLLLF_2018_Report_How_India_Perceives_Mental_Health.pdf [Accessed on 16 Dec 2021].

Thomas, M., (2018), 'Charted: India's shocking attitudes towards mental illness', *QUARTZ INDIA*, [online], Available at: <https://qz.com/india/1237314/fear-and-apathy-how-indians-look-at-those-suffering-mental-illnesses/> [Accessed on 18 Dec 2021].