

Public Perception towards Mental Health in India

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Report covering more than 3500 respondents across 8 Indian cities highlights importance of focused stigma-reduction programmes in mental health initiatives



'How India Perceives Mental Health,' a report published by The Live Love Laugh Foundation (TLLF) to gauge the public perception of mental health across 8 Indian cities has revealed that 87% of respondents associate mental illness with severe disorders (like schizophrenia and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and their symptoms. Illustrating the poor understanding of the broad spectrum of mental illness, respondents were unlikely to associate mental illness with symptoms of more common mental disorders such as anxiety, when describing people with mental illness.

The survey also revealed high prevalence of stigma with 47% of people using the word "retard" to describe people with mental illness. Further, 60% of respondents believe that people with mental illness "should have their own groups to avoid contaminating healthy people" and 68% believe that they "should not be given any responsibility." 60% believe that mental illness is caused by a "lack of self-discipline and willpower".

The study has revealed three broad segments of people based on their attitudes towards mental illness:

- Segment 1 (27%) - Those who indicate support for people perceived as having mental illness. They would not discriminate against people with mental illness and predominantly believe that anyone can suffer from mental illness. This segment was seen predominantly in cities such as Kanpur, Patna and Delhi;
- Segment 2 (47%) - Those who are judgmental against people perceived as having a mental illness. This segment includes people who are more aware of mental illnesses and associated symptoms, but also display some stigma against people with mental illness. While the individuals in this segment sympathise with people with mental illness, they themselves would like to keep a safe distance. This segment was seen predominantly in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kolkata;
- Segment 3 (26%): This group comprises individuals who display fear towards people perceived as having mental illness. This segment are "frightened of living in the same neighbourhood as and interacting with someone suffering

from mental illness". Bangalore and Pune were seen to have a larger representation from this segment.

The findings illustrate the often ignored, but, critical role of stigma-reduction programmes in addressing mental health.

TLLLF 2018 National Survey Report: 'How India Perceives Mental Health,' is the result of a five-month research project commissioned in July 2017 by TLLLF that covered 3,556 respondents across eight Indian cities.

The report was released by Sanjeeva Kumar, Additional Secretary, Department of Health & Family Welfare, and Deepika Padukone, Founder - TLLLF, Anna Chandy, Chair of TLLLF's Board of Trustees and Dr Shyam Bhat, Trustee - TLLLF.

Speaking at the launch, Deepika Padukone, Founder, TLLLF said, "This research initiative is part of our ongoing efforts to build a better understanding about mental health in our country. Our research shows that only over a quarter of the respondents are willing to be supportive in many aspects, while the remaining are either judgmental or fearful of those affected with mental illness. This is an extremely unfortunate situation for us to be in. It is absolutely critical that we as a society work together towards increasing awareness, reducing stigma and normalizing the need to seek support for mental illness."

Anna Chandy, Chairperson – The Board of Trustees at TLLLF, said: "Traditionally and historically, India is a collectivistic society, now slowly moving towards a more individualistic one. This transition is evident in the data presented in the report. In larger cities, we see a more dramatic shift towards individualism, possibly due to an increase in the amount of access to information and migrant need for survival. However, smaller cities like Kanpur and Patna seem to retain some of their collectivistic roots, and are moving towards an individualistic society at a slower pace."

Noting that mental health had to be looked at holistically, she said, "Focussing both on decreasing stigma and increasing awareness is the key. By inculcating collectivist practices into our more individualistic lifestyles we can shape the conversation to build an inclusive society to a) provide support to people with mental illness; and b) Increase India's awareness about mental health concerns."