

Mental Health Awareness: The Role of Media

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Abstract: *Mental Health is a vital concern across the globe and it thrives on physical, social, and economic well-being in continuum. Awareness of it itself play a role in maintaining mental health. Mental health awareness has dual aspect; first, self awareness of mental well-being which helps a person to avoid those social, economic, and cultural environment which results in behavioral adversities to health; especially mental health. The second aspect is more positive in nature and constructs positive perspective among people and develops empathy towards a person suffering from mental illness and thus, prevents their ostracisation. Media's potential is not confined to urban centers and small towns. Rural mass can be informed and made aware which can improve their over all mental health literacy. Mental Health messages through different forms of media can act as tool for understanding psychopathology and for advocating mental health.*

Keywords - Mental Health, Awareness, Media

I. Introduction

Mental Health is a word of discussion now a days. It consist mental stability with the adequate cognitive processes required in daily life functioning. A sense of satisfaction in finding a meaningful life is a key to mental wellbeing. Therefore, the WHO states, “a state of well being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope up with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and can contribute to his or her community.”^[1] The present world has put up lots of social, occupational, and financial adversities leading to distress, further turning to mental illness.^[2] American Psychiatric Association^[3] stated alternating changes in emotion, behavior and thinking are closely connected to the distress caused by problems in social, occupational domain or within the family. Masses are ignorant of the progression of such catastrophe, or they have already become the victim of behavioral disorder.^[4] Studies pointed out the higher prevalence of mental health illiteracy prevalent in the Indian context; a study conducted by Ogorchukwu et al.^[5] in South India on late adolescents' mental health literacy and they found 29.04% knew about the Common Mental Health Disorder (CMD) and 1.31% on psychosis. Another study conducted by Gaiha et al.^[6] with broader age range and inclusion and exclusion criteria in five states presented the comprehension of symptoms of mental illness, and it was a worrying figure of 6%. Therefore, mental health awareness is needed to be raised, which can be achieved substantially by the help of different forms of media.

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II. Media: a tool for understanding Psychopathology

Media can be potentially utilized to comprehend people with psychopathology underlying mental illness. The onset and prognosis of illness and suffering of the individual and their emotions and desire can bring out empathy towards an individual with mental illness. Earlier identification of symptoms understood by mass can help in achieving the target of prevention. Shining examples under this context were Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind* starring Russel Crowe^[7] and James L Brooks directed *As Good It Gets*.^[8] These movies were able to depict the sign and symptoms of mental illness in a social context. Bollywood also learned the extent of the current health issue in the past few years and realized its responsibility in educating populations, and to empathize with the caregivers. Movies like *My Name is Khan*^[9] and *Taare Zameen Par*^[10] brought disorders like Asperger's Syndrome and Dyslexia at the forefront. *Dear Zindagi*^[11] and Rani Mukherjee Starrer *Hichki*^[12] had brought the matter of depression and Tourette Syndrome, which was behind the veil. Indian Television came forward with the series *Aapki Antara* aired on Zee TV^[13], which aware the Indian viewers about the 'Autism' and associated distress of the parents of a child with autism. It has been reported that awareness generation has brought a positive mindset towards the patient with mental illness and his/her family.^[14,15] So, it can be inferred that media can help in removing fog of ignorance on mental health and illnesses.

III. Media: a tool for Mental Health Advocacy

Consistent with the role of watchdog, media, especially print and news channel regularly raised the issue of mental illness, their prevalence, shortage of professional and advocacy for passing new Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. Print media, as per the study, has been reported sincere and civic in reporting psychiatric illness and their symptoms.^[16]

The news channel has also reported and did the panel discussion on the mental illnesses in the past.^[17] This, in turn, helped the issue of mental illness to come from background to foreground. However, there are more issues to be put in front of government pertinent to mental illness, such as voting rights of an individual with mental illness. The media professionals should learn the pathology of mental illness and have to understand that every diagnosis has separate prognosis. Stress, aggression, anxiety and unusual fear also come under the banner of mental illness which gets unnoticed or slips through the eyes of the general population. So, the people diagnosed with episodic and CMD should also get the right of adult suffrage, and media is accountable in raising this issue.^[18] Bringing the episodic and CMD under the purview of health insurance and reminding the companies to fulfil section 21 subsections 2 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 is commendable. However, regular follow-ups on the inclusion of mental illness and voting rights and pushing the agenda of implementation of DMHP in all the districts of India will help in realizing the article 3 and article 21 (3) of the Human rights.

IV. What precisely the media has to do for mental health?

It is quite evident from the studies that there is uneven mental health literacy in rural and urban areas.^[19-21] All India Radio with coverage of approximately 99% in the country will bridge the gap of urban-rural mental health

literacy.^[22] Weekly invitation of a mental health professional on radio talks and as well as on news channel will improve awareness and will minimize ignorance. Interviewers of recovered patients on national news television will give hope to caregivers and will reduce prejudices on mental illness. Indian Psychiatric Society in the past signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Deepika Padukone to spread awareness on depression.^[23] Such celebrity endorsement should be more frequent for a larger impact on the audience. Producers of telefilms, documentaries, web series, and daily soap operas should do comprehensive research on different types of disorder. With minimum dramatization and sensationalism, the filmmakers and soap operas makers can educate and entertain their audience.

V. Conclusion

Mental illness is on the rise and curtailing the taboo around it is the prime responsibility of media. Media has to get rid of previous lampooning done on mental health and has to take as arduous exercise to spread mental health awareness across the country. The movement of mental health awareness will be called successful, when a person with mental illness will stop concealing his/ her identity and illness, will be able to exercise his/ her voting rights and be able to receive acceptance and empathy from the community

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