

EXPLORATION OF TRIBAL YOUTH'S STATUS OF MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AND THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR

¹Jomyir Bagra

PhD research scholar, Department of Psychology, Rajiv Gandhi University,
Arunachal Pradesh, India

²Dr. Kakali Goswami

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Rajiv Gandhi University,
Arunachal Pradesh, India

kakali.goswami@rgu.ac.in

Abstract

In the modern world, issues relating to mental health are spreading rapidly throughout many segments of society. This situation is made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, which draws attention to the neglected area of mental health among all sections of society and government agencies at large. This highlights the significance of mental health literacy among the general population and their help-seeking behaviour, which includes the behaviour of intentionally communicating with people to seek help and also professional psychological services. The present research aims to investigate the status of mental health literacy and attitudes towards help-seeking among tribal youth. Further, the study aims to explore the relationship between mental health literacy and the attitude towards help-seeking behaviour among the tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh. To measure the variable of the study, a quantitatively standardised psychological test named the Mental Health Literacy Scale developed by Matt O'Connor and Leanne Casey is used to assess mental health literacy, and the Mental Help Seeking Attitudes Scale (MHSAS) is used to assess the attitude towards help seeking behaviour of an individual. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was found to be 0.60 between the variables. The results of the study indicated a significant positive relationship between mental health literacy and attitudes towards help-seeking behaviour among the tribal youth. The implication of the findings is in the use of intervention strategies to be carried out at higher educational institutes for enhancing mental health literacy.

Keywords: *Mental health literacy, attitude toward help seeking behaviour, college going youth of Arunachal Pradesh*

INTRODUCTION

Mental health plays important role in the holistic health status of a person. The world is full of stressors which can trigger mental health-related issues in a cross-section of the population. Young adults are more vulnerable to it due to their living conditions. But researchers have indicated a low level of help-seeking behaviour for mental health issues due to a lack of information about mental health symptoms and how to get help. There is indifference and barrier-to-care regarding mental health reflecting lack of information about mental health issues and accessible treatments, as well as a failure of current mental health services to empower young people (Vanheusden, 2008). Mental health problems are so

common in the general community, yet most people do not have adequate information and abilities to aid them (Marcus et.al, 2012). In India, mental health issues are increasing in an exponential manner and it has a significant socio-economic impact.

Treatment disparities in mental health are affected by many factors such as stigma, lack of accessibility, affordability, awareness, sociocultural limits, fear (Muhorakeye & Biracyaza, 2021), especially in the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh. Tribals are the native inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh and are dependent on natural resources for survival as well as having cultural patterns fitting to their physical and social environments. The concept of mental health is somewhat new or vague and the term 'mental' has a negative connotation and misconception within the tribal community. The youth as the major section of the population need to have the knowledge about mental health problems and a number of factors can affect their help-seeking behaviour for mental health problems (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, 2007) also contextual in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Higher educational institutions can provide opportunities for youth to enhance mental health literacy by including awareness programs and interventions for the identification and prevention of mental health problems. In order to design necessary interventions for society there is a need to investigate mental health literacy and youth can help to have better understanding of the situation.

According to the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) from 2015-16, approximately 80% of people with mental health issues were unable to receive treatment for more than a year. This survey also discovered significant treatment gaps in mental healthcare, ranging from 28% to 83% for various mental diseases (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, 2016). "Mental health literacy" was coined to characterise "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid in their recognition, management, and prevention" (Jorm, Korten & Jacomb, 1997). This definition has been expanded to include skills and knowledge that assist people to obtain, comprehend, and utilise mental health information (Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, 2008, p. 8). The ability to recognise specific disorders or different types of psychological distress has been defined as part of mental health literacy. Other characteristics of being mental health literate include - knowledge and beliefs about risk factors and causes; knowledge and beliefs about self-help interventions; knowledge and beliefs about professional help available; attitudes that facilitate recognition and appropriate help-seeking; and knowledge of how to seek mental health information (Kutcher, Wei, Coniglio, 2016).

Being mental health illiterate can suggest that one has little or no evidence-based understanding about mental illness or therapy, but it can also indicate that one's knowledge and views are based on other sources, such as superstitions or tribal culture and personal beliefs (Ganasen et al., 2008) which can be found in the tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh.

The considerable research on health literacy shows that insufficient knowledge on health literacy has negative health consequences and increases disease burden (Schillinger et al., 2002; Schwartzberg et al. 2005; Nutbeam, 2008). Disease prevention, early diagnosis of symptoms, and implementing the necessary measures to reduce mental disorder symptoms are all advantages of having a high Mental Health Literacy (Marcus et al. 2012). The findings suggest that people's usage of psychotherapy can be predicted over time if they have good attitudes toward getting help and perceive the need for treatment significantly and

independently (Bonabi et al., 2016) yet in many nations, the prospect of using professional help-seeking behaviours for mental health problems is not very optimistic (Bifftu et al., 2018).

The help-seeking behaviour was defined as a 'type of adaptive coping that sought assistance from other people in response to a distressing experience or a problem' (Mechanic, 1982). Attitudes toward seeking professional psychological services has many sides, that reflects the perceived recognition of the need for professional psychological assistance; stigma tolerance associated with seeking such services; every individual should be able to see a person's problem openly; people's confidence on in the capability of the psychological professional to seek their help (Fischer & Turner, 1970).

Studies suggest that factors increasing the likelihood of avoidance or delay on treatment before presenting for care includes the lack of knowledge to identify features of mental illnesses, ignorance about how to access treatment, prejudice against people who have mental illness, and expectation of discrimination against people diagnosed with mental illness (Henderson et al., 2013).

There is only a small section of the population who choose to seek help for mental health problems. Studies have suggested that the underutilization of mental health services is due to stigma (Jorm et al., 2007; Gulliver et al., 2010). Other reasons are because of hesitancy in disclosing diagnosis (Hinson & Swanson, 1993) and expense anticipation (Vogel & Wester, 2003) which is equally applicable to an ethnic group of people. Therefore, it is important to understand mental health awareness and stigma among the youth of tribal communities. The present research can fill the gap of knowledge about the relationship between mental health awareness, help-seeking behaviour and overall wellbeing among the tribal youth at higher educational setting. Assessing mental health literacy can also assist in determining which aspects of the youth's mental health knowledge are deficient and give input for the intervention strategies to be implemented. Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyse the relationship between Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Behaviour among the higher educational tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh.

Objectives

1. To assess the level of Mental health literacy among the higher education students of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To assess the attitude toward help seeking behaviour among the higher education students of Arunachal Pradesh.
3. To assess the relationship between Mental health literacy and attitude toward help seeking behaviour among higher education students of Arunachal Pradesh

METHODOLOGY

The current study was carried out among randomly selected tribal college going youth from three colleges of Capital Complex of Arunachal Pradesh of age ranging from 18-25 years. Total of 112 samples were collected from each collage out of which 20 samples were excluded for being incomplete or invalid. Thus, 92 samples were analysed. Inclusion criteria are the youth of all gender, should be native of Arunachal Pradesh, of all socioeconomic status and from both rural and urban areas.

Tools

1. Demographic profile and consent form: Consent form and demographic profile was provided to the participants. Demographic profile included name, age, gender, education qualification and tribe.
2. Mental Health Literacy Scale, 2015: Mental Health Literacy Scale (O'Connor & Casey, 2015) is used to assess the mental health literacy. The items are answered using 4-point and 5-point Likert scale. It includes reverse scored items too. The questionnaire consists of 35 items and six attributes. These attributes include ability to recognize disorders, knowledge of risk factors and causes, knowledge of self-treatment, knowledge of professional help available, knowledge of where to seek information, attitudes that promote recognition or appropriate help-seeking behaviour.
3. Mental Help Seeking Attitudes Scale (MHSAS): The MHSAS (Hammer et al., 2018) contains nine items which produce a single mean score. The MHSAS uses a seven-point semantic differential scale. To counteract possible response sets, the valence of the item anchors was counterbalanced across the nine items. Here the higher mean score indicates more favourable attitudes. It includes reverse scored items too.

Procedure

The present study was designed as a correlational study which explored the relationship between mental health literacy and attitude toward help-seeking behaviour among the college-going youths of Arunachal Pradesh. The data for the study was collected by survey method by using a self-report psychological questionnaire. The raw data were analysed by using descriptive statistics and further treated with the person product moment correlation method.

RESULTS

The obtained raw data were treated with descriptive statistics and coefficient of correlation was calculated. The obtained results were reported in the following tables.

Table 1 Showing Mean and Standard Deviation values of Mental Health literacy

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Highest score obtained	Lowest score obtained
Mental Health literacy	103.9	13.68	135	65

From table 1, we can interpret that the level of Mental Health Literacy (MHL) of the collage going youth falls under the average range. It means that there is an average level of mental health literacy among the tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh.

Table 2 Showing Mean and Standard Deviation values of Attitude toward help seeking behaviour

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Highest score	Lowest score
Attitude toward help seeking behaviour	5.42	1.18	7	2.6

The results in table 2 showed that the attitude toward help-seeking behaviour is under the neutral range. While nearly 50% of the respondent had a favourable attitude toward the mental health help-seeking behaviour, the rest had either neutral or unfavourable attitude.

Table 3 Showing coefficient of correlation between Mental Health Literacy and Attitude Toward help seeking behaviour

Variables	Mental health literacy
Attitude toward help seeking behaviour	0.60**

***significant at both .05 and .01 level.*

The results in table 3, we can infer that there is a high positive significant relationship between mental health literacy and attitude toward mental health help-seeking behaviour.

Table 4 showing the attitude of people towards professional help seeking in percent

Characteristics	Sample's poll
Useful	83%
Useless	17%
Important	79%
Unimportant	21%
Healthy	70%
Unhealthy	30%
Effective	65%
Ineffective	45%
Good	84%
Bad	16%
Healing	67%
Hurting	37%
Empowering	80%
Disempowering	20%
Satisfying	67%
Unsatisfying	33%
Desirable	55%
Undesirable	45%

The results in table 4 reported that 83% of the participants considers their attitude towards taking professional help for mental health issues useful. Similarly seeking professional help was considered important by 79%, healthy by 70%, effective by 65%, good by 84%, healing by 67%, empowering by 80%, satisfying by 67 % and desirable by 55% of the participants.

DISCUSSION

The study aims to explore mental health literacy and help seeking behaviour and their relationship among higher education students. The study considers three objectives based on the conceptual framework to explore by using survey method for a correlational research design. The study found average level of mental health literacy among the tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh. The findings in table 2 indicated that tribal youth has less exposure to the

knowledge of professional help regarding mental health. This asked for urgent intervention in terms of awareness program among the youth in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The findings from mental health literacy scale showed only 29% of the participants confidently choose the correct response for the Item 1 to Item 8 that consisted of questions that assess one's ability to correctly identify the presence of a disorder such as depression, anxiety, phobia etc. Similarly, only 48% of those polled indicated a willingness to establish friendship with someone who has a mental health condition, while the remainder were either indifferent or hesitant. The study found that 82% of the respondent were indifferent or reluctant to vote for a politician if they had a history of mental illness. The study also found that 80% of the respondent were either neutral towards hiring someone who had a history of mental illness or refused to do so. More than half of the youth participants believed that mental illness was not real, that people can easily snap out of it if they wanted to and that it was an indication of a weakness in themselves. The obtained findings fulfilled the first objective.

The study findings from table 3 indicate that if an individual has high mental health literacy then there will be an increase in help-seeking behaviour. Recent studies also support the poor mental health literacy in India such as Venkataraman et.al (2019) in their research study (Venkataraman et al., 2019). This study argued that poor mental health literacy remains an urgent public health concern because it is known to influence the public's decision-making in relation to their mental health, particularly their low rates of help-seeking for psychiatric symptoms (Venkataraman et al., 2019). Negative or unfavourable attitudes toward mental health professionals can make it difficult to recognize mental health disorders and seek appropriate care for those who are in need.

The findings of the study from table 4 showed that majority of students believed that seeking professional help is good, important, and healthy whereas only small percentage of people considered that professional help is ineffective, hurting, and undesirable. This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of mental health literacy in a sample of Arunachal undergraduates students and showed some areas of deficiency for mental health. This study results support intervention in educational setting by creating educational program focused on mental health awareness improving factors. Implementation of awareness program can enhance overall mental health scenario of the state.

CONCLUSION

The present study can help in determining which aspects of the youth's mental health knowledge are deficient. The stigma toward mental health illness can play a big role in low levels of mental health literacy. Due to the unfavourable attitude towards people suffering from mental health issues labelled mentally ill person is perceived with more negative attitudes and rejection regardless of his/her behaviour. There is a dire need for mental health literacy intervention targeted at higher education students which can lead to a decrease stigma, enhance help-seeking efficacy and improve help-seeking behaviour from professional source.

Acknowledgements

This work is based on independent research work of the authors

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

Author's contributions

Both the authors contributed equally to the theoretical development, analysis, interpretation and writing of the manuscript. The first author contributed in conceptual framework development and data collection. The second author contributed in data analysis, interpretation and writing of the manuscript.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Bifftu, B. B., Takele, W. W., Guracho, Y. D., & Yehualashet, F. A. (2018). Depression and its help seeking behaviors: a systematic review and meta-analysis of community survey in Ethiopia. *Depression research and treatment*, 2018,1-1. doi: [10.1155/2018/1592596](https://doi.org/10.1155/2018/1592596)
- Bonabi, H., Müller, M., Ajdacic-Gross, V., Eisele, J., Rodgers, S., Seifritz, E., Rössler, W. & Rüsch, N. (2016). Mental health literacy, attitudes to help seeking, and perceived need as predictors of mental health service use: a longitudinal study. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 204(4), 321-324. Doi: 10.1097/NMD.0000000000000488
- Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. (2008). *National integrated framework for enhancing mental health literacy in Canada*. Ottawa: Ontario
- Fischer, E. H., & Turner, J. I. (1970). Orientations to seeking professional help: development and research utility of an attitude scale. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 35(1p1), 79-90. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0029636>
- Ganasen, K. A., Parker, S., Hugo, C. J., Stein, D. J., Emsley, R. A., & Seedat, S. (2008). Mental health literacy: focus on developing countries. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 11(1), 23-28. Doi: [10.4314/ajpsy.v11i1.30251](https://doi.org/10.4314/ajpsy.v11i1.30251)
- Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., and Christensen, H. (2010). Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people: a systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 10(1), 1-9. doi: 10.1186/1471-244X-10-113 (Accessed 04/5/2022 6:45pm)
- Hammer, J. H., Parent, M. C., & Spiker, D. A. (2018). Mental Help Seeking Attitudes Scale (MHSAS): Development, reliability, validity, and comparison with the ATSPPH-SF and IASMHS-PO. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 65(1), 74. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000248>
- Henderson, C., Evans-Lacko, S., & Thornicroft, G. (2013). Mental illness stigma, help seeking, and public health programs. *American journal of public health*, 103(5), 777-780. doi: [10.2105/AJPH.2012.301056](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.301056)
- Hinson, J. A., and Swanson, J. L. (1993). Willingness to seek help as a function of self-disclosure and problem severity. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 71(4), 465–470. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.1993.tb02666.x
- Jorm, A. F., Korten, A. E., Jacomb, P. A., Christensen, H., Rodgers, B., & Pollitt, P. (1997). “Mental health literacy”: a survey of the public's ability to recognise mental disorders

- and their beliefs about the effectiveness of treatment. *Medical journal of Australia*, 166(4), 182-186. doi: [10.5694/j.1326-5377.1997.tb140071.x](https://doi.org/10.5694/j.1326-5377.1997.tb140071.x)
- Jorm, A. F., Wright, A., & Morgan, A. J. (2007). Where to seek help for a mental disorder? National survey of the beliefs of Australian youth and their parents. *The Medical journal of Australia*, 187(10), 556–560. Doi: [10.5694/j.1326-5377.2007.tb01415.x](https://doi.org/10.5694/j.1326-5377.2007.tb01415.x) (Accessed 6/05/2022 3.00pm)
- Kutcher, S., Wei, Y., & Coniglio, C. (2016). Mental health literacy: Past, present, and future. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 61(3), 154-158. Doi: [10.1177/0706743715616609](https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743715616609)
- Marcus, M., Westra, H., & Mobilizing Minds Research Group. (2012). Mental health literacy in Canadian young adults: results of a national survey. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 31(1), 1-15. doi: [10.7870/cjcmh-2012-0002](https://doi.org/10.7870/cjcmh-2012-0002)
- Mechanic D. (1982) The epidemiology of illness behavior and its relationship to physical and psychological distress. In Mechanic D (Ed.), *Symptoms, Illness Behavior, and Help-Seeking*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Muhorakeye, O., & Biracyaza, E. (2021). Exploring barriers to mental health services utilization at Kabutare district hospital of Rwanda: Perspectives from patients. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 638377. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.638377>
- National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences. (2016). National mental health survey of India, 2015-16: Summary. *Bengaluru: National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences*, 1-48.
- Nutbeam, D. (2008). The evolving concept of health literacy. *Social science & medicine*, 67(12), 2072-2078. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.09.050>
- O'Connor, M., & Casey, L. (2015). The Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS): A new scale-based measure of mental health literacy. *Psychiatry research*, 229(1-2), 511-516. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2015.05.064>
- Rickwood, D. J., Deane, F. P., & Wilson, C. J. (2007). When and how do young people seek professional help for mental health problems?. *Medical journal of Australia*, 187(S7), S35-S39, Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5694/j.1326-5377.2007.tb01334.x>
- Schillinger, D., Grumbach, K., Piette, J., Wang, F., Osmond, D., Daher, C., Palacios, J., Sullivan, G. D. & Bindman, A. B. (2002). Association of health literacy with diabetes outcomes. *Jama*, 288(4), 475-482. Doi: [10.1001/jama.288.4.475](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.288.4.475)
- Schwartzberg, J. G., VanGeest, J. B., & Wang, C. C. (2005). Understanding health literacy. *Chicago (IL): American Medical Association*, 2005, 1-84.
- Vanheusden, K., Mulder, C. L., Van der Ende, J., Van Lenthe, F. J., Mackenbach, J. P., & Verhulst, F. C. (2008). Young adults face major barriers to seeking help from mental health services. *Patient education and counseling*, 73(1), 97-104. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2008.05.006>
- Venkataraman, S., Patil, R., & Balasundaram, S. (2019). Why mental health literacy still matters: a review. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 6(6), 2723-2729. Doi: [10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20192350](https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20192350) (Accessed 08/8/2022 3:30pm)

Vogel, D. L., and Wester, S. R. (2003). To seek help or not to seek help: the risks of self-disclosure. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 50(3), 351–361. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.50.3.351 (Accessed 3:00 pm, 7/05/2022)