



Jan - Mar Issue 2024

Focus on a multi-faceted approach to address mental health issues, as well as innovative solutions to help individuals manage and improve their mental well-being.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

-BY PAVITRA V MADHAV

While traveling on public transport once, I was gazing at the mesmerizing scenery of nature. Suddenly I heard echoes of people talking about the difficult times they were facing and how life had been hard on them. The thing that led me to speculate about the conversation was, how easily and ordinarily people used the terms 'depression', 'anxiety', 'OCD' etc. "I was so stressed due to my work, I had anxiety. The moment my boss called for me, I had a panic attack", "I think I have OCD, I feel like cleaning my house when I see it dirty".

Working with students' mental health, I have observed how readily individuals draw the connection between common problems and mental illness. I frequently hear from students who are feeling too much pressure from their families and their studies. As a psychologist, I consider the pressures people encounter, the discouraging ideas they have, and how they get disinterested in pursuing their desired objectives. There is constant contemplation about how experts like us can help everyone experiencing a mental health crisis, not just these students.

We are humans, and daily, we experience certain levels of stress, worry, and apprehension about anything and everything (McLaughlin & Hatzenbuehler, 2009). For the same, we usually fixate on a coping method to overcome that stress. For some it could be talking to their partners, friends, or families, it could be a cup of tea, for some, it could be even sleeping. But what are the measures when it goes beyond a certain level? What to do when it starts hampering our daily functioning? People are usually advised to see a professional during these circumstances.

Everyone has the right to receive government-funded mental health services, according to the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 (Duffy & Kelly, 2019). However, this obligation is radically at odds with reality, particularly in India. There were just 0.3 psychiatrists per lakh individuals in India in 2014; the number of psychologists and psychiatric social workers was considerably lower, though increasing but at a very slow rate (Garg et al., 2019). Given these statistics, it seems a difficult task for us to address the needs of people with varying problems and situations at hand and then adhere them to the long-term traditional treatment plan. With the advancement in technology and industry, it is the need of the hour to investigate innovative solutions to manage mental health issues. An interesting fact that comes up while looking for innovative solutions is that when contemplating new treatment modalities, we should constantly examine how to remove obstacles to mental health and how many individuals will be able to use such therapies after they are authorized.

Technology's ability to provide individualized and easily available solutions has revolutionized mental health care. By removing obstacles associated with stigma and

distance, teletherapy and digital mental health platforms have improved the accessibility and convenience of therapy sessions. Along with the expansion and progress in technology and innovation in every sector and field, efforts are being made to popularize the same in mental health. But what pops up in my mind is "how to make technology sensitize to emotions and feelings, how a code once written can justify individual problems and mental health concerns. Behavioral patterns are analyzed and mental health crises are predicted using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms, thus creating a sensitized tool for mental health.

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Computer simulations can be used to initially screen out various mental health issues and problems that might be difficult or overloading for professionals. Simulations can also help raise awareness about therapy structure, plan, and progress, ultimately aiming to reduce the taboos and stereotypes associated with people going for therapy. This can also induce a positive outlook for therapy rather than people assuming and guessing that it is nothing just talking. Consuming technology for transforming traditional treatment methods like using a VR for guided imagery, guided meditation, and in-vivo exposure therapy, can be a good alternative. This can give a new outlook to our conventional methods for managing mental health issues, also taking the ledge off the professionals. Research has proven these to be more effective when used with long-established treatment plans.

Adding to the innovative solutions, culturally competent interventions and community-based initiatives that tackle issues and promote a more all-encompassing mental health treatment model can be a great advantage in addressing mental health issues. These can include peer support networks, community centers, support groups, etc. To guarantee fair access, affordability, and ethical norms in the implementation of these innovations, authorities, healthcare providers, researchers, and communities must work together to address the challenges and difficulties.

While new accessibility technologies are beneficial to people who require them, they do have the potential to alter the beliefs and mindsets of others who do not. Innovative approaches are changing the face of mental health treatment, providing hope and real advancements in tackling the complexity of mental health problems. It will be possible to create a mental health ecosystem that is more inclusive, accessible, and efficient by embracing these technologies while resolving obstacles.

FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR A HEALTHIER MIND AT GRASSROOT LEVEL

-By Adiba Ansari

Everyone quotes the statement 'Well, Delulu is the Solulu' after they build castles in the air. This saying has become very common among GenZ. Essentially, it means that remaining in delusion is seen as a solution to real problems. Being unaware of one's problems can only be acceptable to some extent, but this GenZ approach to mental health and real-life problems cannot be practiced in real life. The challenges set forth by present times cannot be tackled by the solutions that was proposed during earlier ages. Modern-day problems implore for new and innovative solutions.

The definition of a healthy person for a major populace sums up to the criteria of "physical health" only, in many cultures and regions, the concept of mental health is still alien. It is high time people understand that mental health conditions can impact various aspects of life and can have a detrimental effect on emotional well-being, making it difficult to maintain a healthy balance in life. Mind and body are not separate entities, mental and physical health correspond to each other. As per the data by WHO, World Health Organization approximately 280 million people in the world have depression. An estimated 4% of the global population currently experience an anxiety disorder making it the most common of all mental disorders. All these facts and figures present a very worrying picture of mankind as with more and more people being affected by mental disorders a bleaker future awaits humanity. A healthy population ensures a healthy future for the planet.

The lack of availability of human resources 24/7, the unaffordable and expensive component of therapy still makes up for a huge reason for people not seeking professional help. Going for therapy, even now is considered a luxury and is an option for only a small chunk of the population. Some of the problems presented can be tackled through the interaction between Psychology and AI. The advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), in conjunction with other fields, has led to significant progress and can also be employed in the discipline of psychology to ensure feasible results. Psychologists and their skills are irreplaceable, but thoughtful and strategic implementation of AI is crucial to combat the challenges presented by modern-day issues. AI Chatbot can be used as a solution to the lack of human resource availability.

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People of all ages, races, and cultures can have a confidant with whom they will trust and share their lives and problems. This helps to mitigate the financial problems as AI Chatbot will be free to use and breaks the language barrier.

In urban areas, therapy has become a common term as people are now aware of different mental disorders and have access to professional help. However, in rural areas, the situation remains stagnant. The rural population often considers mental illness as a result of supernatural causes and relies on local spiritual practices to find a cure. It is now imperative to provide education to the rural masses about various mental health disorders and is essential to encourage the rural sector to talk about mental health along with physical health so that they are well-equipped to encounter mental health issues through community centers and establishing weekly or monthly mental health clinics.

India is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The people of India take deep pride in their culture and tradition and hold on to their roots. The raw and traditional Indian culture is evident in Indian rural society. A simple yet effective way to transmit information across rural populations is to develop a model where the importance of mental health is imparted through traditional art forms. By devising this model, we can convey the significance of mental health by employing a conventional form of theatre like Natakas, Natyashastra and regional theatre forms like puppet shows, Tamasha (Maharashtra), Bhavai (Gujarat), Yakshagana (Karnataka), Saang (Rajasthan, UP), Bhand Pather (Kashmir). The theatre has always been a popular leisure time among the people of India and is perfect to dissipate knowledge among people. In this model, we can provide employment to people ensuring livelihood and at the same time creating awareness among people through entertainment and reviving the art and culture of India. This model can also be implemented in an urban setting. By creating lively surroundings through theatre, a stage is given to people to talk and discuss among themselves creating awareness.

The majority of the population faces loneliness due to the monotony of life, but often struggle to express themselves, which can lead to various mental health disorders.

“The Emotions Bench” provides a platform for people to connect, talk, and find solutions to their problems together. “The Emotions Bench” can be an initiative to let people voice out their problems and emotions by setting up benches in public places giving a platform to talk to strangers, providing a sense of privacy and protection, and letting people bond over shared problems faced by people of different walk of life.

The conversation on mental health has now become the need of the hour and it is important to provide a platform where people can freely talk about the challenges faced by them to inspire people to take the correct steps to tackle their problems. There is still a huge gap in finding newer solutions that correspond to the challenges presented by the modern world and we actively depend on budding psychologists to come up with new and innovative solutions.

Transforming Mental Wellness: Innovative Solutions in Recent Times

-By Minal Agrawal

Innovations in Mental Health and other fields

In today's time, we find ourselves at a crossroad where different fields like nature, art, technology and mental health merge and pave a new way for the future generations. (Thompson, 2020; National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). As mental health awareness increases, one must wonder if there is any way to apply the knowledge of various fields for the betterment of mental health. The answer, according to me, is yes. Various groundbreaking approaches in technology like artificial intelligence and virtual reality (O'Dell et al., 2022) can provide solutions for mental health issues which are easily accessible, 24/7 available and scalable and on the other hand, fields like nature and art make solutions more friendly and fun.

Virtual Therapy Apps

Everything nowadays is digitalized, then why not therapy? There are already a few mental health apps like BetterHelp, Headspace, Moodfit etc, and there are a growing number of apps (Mohd et al., 2023) being built for this purpose. This idea didn't cross my mind until I started college. My college provided all the students free access to a virtual therapy app which could be accessed anytime and anywhere. I suffer with anxiety but I have never been to therapy because of the stigma surrounding therapy. For the first time in my life, I felt in control knowing that I could get help if I ever wanted it.

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Such apps can help eliminate the geographical boundaries by helping people connect with professionals no matter where they live. This helps bridge the gap between places where there is a shortage of mental health services. It also helps in ensuring that people get help within the required timeframe. You can't know beforehand when you might get a panic attack, but you can seek help immediately by connecting with someone on your phone when you are having one.

Virtual Reality (VR) Therapy

VR Therapy is an upcoming form of psychotherapy which uses visual aids and artificial environments to treat issues like phobias, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression and many other psychiatric disorders (Maples-Keller et al., 2017). In case of phobias and traumas, the clients are able to face their fears or traumas in a totally secure environment knowing that they are safe. In a survey conducted on US soldiers, 19% of the soldiers said they were willing to try Virtual Reality approaches for mental health help rather than talking to a person (Maples-Keller et al., 2017).

It helps them master relaxation techniques quicker than when traditional methods are used. It can either be used with traditional methods or on its own. There has been ongoing research to develop more well-powered and controlled studies to compare VR based treatments and other approaches to identify the suitable candidates for the therapy (Maples-Keller et al., 2017).

Art Therapy

Art Therapy contains a wide spectrum of art like music, drawing, painting, dancing, theatre etc. that might be used to showcase and express their thoughts and feelings freely (American Psychological Association, 2018). It is not always easy for a lot of people to express themselves using words, such people often find solace in other alternatives which might be related to one or the other art form.

It has been found that art therapy when used simultaneously with other therapies can help provide emotional support to the clients. (Kern-Pitch, 1980, as cited in Tate, 2002). This can be true for a lot of people who find comfort in one or other forms of expressive art.

It has proven to be helpful in mental health issues like anxiety, depression, eating disorder and PTSD (Regev et al., 2018). Tate et al.(2002) also highlighted that most clients would find it easier to draw a picture of a house or a tree, than to share private information with an unknown person.

Pet Therapy

The earliest use of animals can be traced back to farm animals, but within the last few decades a wider range of species have been used for the treatment of psychological issues (Fine et al., 2019). The first time I heard about emotional support pets when I started college, I thought it was a clever scheme by the students to bring their pets with them in the dorms. I was surprised to learn that pets and other trained animals can help deal with issues like depression, emotional instability as well as anxiety (Cherniack et al., 2014).

A variety of animals like dogs, cats, horses and even birds are used in this type of therapy. In a study conducted on elderly, it was found that people who received animal therapy got a lower score on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Cherniack et al., 2014). These animals are trained and certified by professionals in the field to ensure that it adds to the well being of the client and the animal too. This type of therapy is also flexible and customizable according to the needs and preferences of the client. It also provides a non-judgemental therapy setting.

Future Perspective

As we walk down this path of mental health, we should embrace all the other fields that complement it. The collaboration of mental health with strategies like Virtual Care Apps, VR Therapy, Art Therapy and Pet Therapy envisions a solution where the concept of therapy is not looked down upon but embraced as a place where creativity and empathy runs free. By exploring innovative solutions combining various fields and innovations, the future of mental health solutions can be hopeful and inclusive for everyone.

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Dealing with Clients, Queries & Distress: Implementation of Different Ideas in Solving several Mental Health Issues

-By PRATITI BANERJEE

Today, more than ever, mental health issues are at the forefront of our society. As mental health professionals, it is our duty to continuously seek innovative solutions to address these challenges. One of the most promising areas of innovation in mental health is the use of technology. With the use of different digital platforms, it has emerged as an effective tool for managing mental well-being. Different apps offer features such as meditation exercises, mood tracking, and access to licensed therapists. By integrating technology into mental health care, individuals can access support and resources. Professionals now have the opportunity to monitor their patients. For example, there are apps available that can track sleep patterns (Sleep Cycle, Pillow etc.), mood fluctuations (Moodpath, eMoods etc.), and stress levels (Headspace, Pacifica etc.). By analyzing this data, professionals can provide more personalized and effective treatment plans.

Virtual reality (VR) is another exciting development in the field of mental health. It allows to create immersive environments that simulate real-life situations. By gradually exposing patients to their fears in a controlled and safe environment, professionals can help them overcome their anxieties. VR therapy has shown promising results in treating conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and social anxiety disorder.

Artificial intelligence powered chatbots can provide immediate support and guidance to individuals. These are programmed to offer empathetic responses and can help individuals navigate through difficult emotions. It provides valuable resources and coping mechanisms. AI can assist in analyzing patient data, identifying patterns, and predicting outcomes. This can ultimately lead to better diagnosis and treatment plans.

Another innovative solution in mental health care is the integration of mindfulness practices. Mindfulness involves being fully present in the moment and non-judgmentally aware of one's thoughts and feelings. Numerous studies have shown that mindfulness-based interventions can reduce anxiety, depression, and stress. Professionals are now incorporating mindfulness techniques into their therapy sessions to help patients develop self-awareness, manage their emotions, and enhance their overall well-being.

Teletherapy is another area where innovation is making a significant impact. This has proven to be particularly beneficial for individuals who live in remote areas or have difficulty accessing mental health services.

In addition to technology, community support plays a significant role in addressing mental health issues. Peer support groups and community-based initiatives provide individuals with a sense of belonging and understanding.

Furthermore, holistic approaches to mental health care are gaining traction as innovative solutions to address mental health issues. Integrative practices such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness have been shown to have a positive impact on mental well-being by reducing stress and promoting emotional balance. Additionally, alternative therapies such as art therapy, music therapy, and nature-based interventions offer creative and non-traditional methods for individuals to express themselves and find healing.

Another innovative solution to mental health issues involves the integration of mental health care into workplace wellness programs. Many organizations are implementing mental health initiatives to support their employees, providing access to mental health resources, offering mental health days, and creating a supportive work environment.

Moreover, personalized and precision mental health care is emerging as an innovative approach to address individual needs and preferences. By embracing personalized mental health care, we can move towards a more individualized and effective approach to supporting mental well-being.

While considering my personal implications, it is essential to focus on the impact on both the mental health professionals and the clients.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

1. For Mental Health Professionals:

- Increased Skill Development
- Enhanced Empathy and Understanding
- Engaging in the process of Personal Growth

2. For Clients:

- Improved Treatment Outcomes
- Increased Engagement
- Enhanced Coping Skills

In conclusion, innovative solutions to mental health issues are essential in addressing the growing challenges faced by individuals in today's society. By leveraging technology, community support, holistic approaches, workplace wellness programs, personalized care, virtual reality, AI, mindfulness practices, teletherapy and more we can pave the way for a more comprehensive and effective approach to mental health care. It is crucial to continue exploring

and implementing innovative solutions to support individuals in maintaining their mental well being and promoting a society that values and prioritizes mental health for all.

SOS: Strategies for Outreach and Support in Suicide Prevention

-By Faiza Tabassum

Zooming through life at warp speed, we're all caught up in our daily hustle, leaving family chats on the back burner. With our lives on fast-forward, it's like playing detective to spot a loved one dealing with mental health issues.

According to The Economic Times, statistics indicate that one out of every five individuals is grappling with a mental health challenge, affecting nearly 60 to 70 million people in India with both common and severe mental disorders. It is indeed distressing to note that India holds the unfortunate title of being the global leader in suicides, witnessing over 2,60,000 cases annually. According to data from the World Health Organization, the average suicide rate in India stands at 10.9 per 100,000 people. The suicide mortality rate per 100,000 population in 2016 was 16.5, while the global average was 10.5 per 100,000. The most vulnerable are the 15-29-year-olds, the elderly, and persons with special needs. (Suicide - India, 2019)

Technology has played a vital role in spreading awareness about mental health. Especially in India, the much-needed awareness took place amidst Covid 19 when most of the citizens were hit with a wave of depression due to social quarantine. (Rangaswamy et al., 2022)

The change in the mindset and the approach towards mental health shows that technology has a deep effect on people and can change their viewpoint. The world is more globalized than ever, and it is high time we use technology to play against mental illnesses just the way we use it to spread awareness about it. It's time to move a step ahead and create standardized online applications to help the mentally afflicted person in dealing with self-harm or suicidal thoughts. There are several online applications to help a person, but most are unnoticed and unacknowledged.

It's time to use our everyday gadgets (it's time to use our smartphone smartly) to tackle a critical issue in our ever-changing world – mental health. Let's creatively and professionally harness our most-used tools to address and ease the growing challenges related to mental well-being. It will be a great help for the people afflicted by a mental health issue as well as to the loved ones and therapists involved in the case. For example, An app for suicide-sensitive individuals with affirmative pop-ups as well as personalized management. Also if there is an app to evaluate the mood of the inflicted person throughout the month or week, it will be easier for the therapist to evaluate the progress of the person. Let us employ our most utilized tools in a creative and professional endeavor to confront and mitigate the emerging complexities surrounding mental well-being.

As we explore the tricky world of mental health challenges, let's hope this message goes to people who can make things better in this technological era of Mental Health. We've all got a part to play—helping out, spreading the word, and coming up with cool plans. So, here's a shout-out to everyone with the power to make things happen—individuals, groups, and decision-makers. Let's team up to build a world where support and understanding are just a high-five away. Together, we can create a community that cheers on and stands by every person on their mental well-being journey.