



## UNSPOKEN BARRIERS: MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AMONG HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN NEW DELHI

### Mental Health

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### ABSTRACT

Mental health literacy is a key determinant in the early recognition, management and prevention of mental health problems, particularly among healthcare professionals who are at the frontline of patient care. The present study aimed to assess the level of mental health literacy among healthcare workers and examine its association with selected socio-demographic variables. A quantitative, non-experimental research design was adopted and the study was conducted in a selected tertiary care hospital in New Delhi. A total of 200 healthcare professionals were selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire comprising socio-demographic variables and the standardized Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) developed by O'Connor and Casey. The MHLS demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.869$ ). Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that 54.5% of participants had good mental health literacy, while 45.5% had an average level. The mean mental health literacy score was  $106.95 \pm 3.87$ , indicating an overall moderate to good level of literacy among healthcare workers. A statistically significant association was found between mental health literacy and age, marital status, years of service and area of work ( $p < 0.05$ ), whereas no significant association was observed with level of education, type of family and place of origin. The study concludes that while mental health literacy among healthcare professionals is satisfactory, targeted training is needed to enhance early identification and management of mental health conditions.

### KEYWORDS

Mental Health Literacy, Healthcare Workers, Mental Health, Tertiary Care Hospital.

#### INTRODUCTION

Mental health disorders are a major global public health concern, affecting approximately 970 million people worldwide, or 1 in 8 individuals, with anxiety and depression being the most common conditions. In India, nearly 197.3 million people were living with mental disorders in 2017, contributing to 4.7% of total Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) and 14.5% of Years Lived with Disability (YLDs), reflecting a substantial burden on the healthcare system.

Healthcare professionals, who play a crucial role in identifying and managing mental health conditions, are themselves vulnerable to poor mental health and often face challenges in recognizing these disorders. A large meta-analysis involving over 458,000 healthcare workers across 58 countries reported prevalence rates of 28.5% for depression, 28.7% for anxiety, 25.5% for post-traumatic stress disorder and 24.4% for insomnia. Despite their critical role, gaps in knowledge and awareness persist among healthcare workers.

Mental Health Literacy (MHL), defined as the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in their recognition, management, and prevention, is essential for effective healthcare delivery. However, studies indicate that mental health literacy among healthcare professionals is often inadequate. For instance, only 35.6% of primary healthcare workers were able to correctly identify depression and only 13% had formal mental health training. Similarly, among nursing students, 82% were found to have only moderate levels of knowledge regarding mental health literacy.

Insufficient mental health literacy among healthcare professionals can lead to delayed identification, inadequate management and poor patient outcomes. Therefore, improving mental health literacy is essential to enhance early detection, promote appropriate help-seeking and strengthen the overall quality of mental health care services.

#### Need of Study

Mental health disorders are highly prevalent, yet many cases remain unrecognized due to inadequate mental health literacy among healthcare professionals. This can lead to delayed diagnosis and poor patient care. Therefore, this study is needed to assess mental health literacy and identify gaps to improve healthcare outcomes.

#### Scope of the study

This study assesses mental health literacy among healthcare professionals to identify gaps and improve training, early recognition and quality of care.

#### Objectives

1. To assess the level of mental health literacy.
2. To find an association between mental health literacy and socio-demographic variables.

#### Materials and methods

The study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental research design and was conducted in a selected tertiary care hospital in New Delhi. The study population included healthcare professionals, who met the inclusion criteria and were available during the data collection period.

A total of 200 participants were selected using a sample size calculated through Yamane's formula. Simple random sampling was employed to ensure equal representation and minimize selection bias. Participants were included based on their willingness to participate and ability to understand English, while those undergoing treatment for mental illness or having specialization in psychiatry were excluded.

Prior written permission was obtained from the hospital administration and approval was secured from the Institutional Ethics Committee. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

A structured self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The tool consisted of two sections focusing on socio-demographic variables and mental health literacy. Section A included a demographic proforma with seven items such as age, marital status, level of education, years of service, place of origin, type of family and area of work. Section B comprised the standardized Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) developed by O'Connor and Casey (2015), consisting of 35 items assessing recognition of mental disorders, knowledge of risk factors, self-treatment and professional help available.

The MHLS uses a combination of 4-point and 5-point Likert scales. Scores were categorized into low, average, good, and very good levels of mental health literacy. The tool has established validity and

reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.869$ ).

The tool was administered in a standardized manner to ensure uniformity and consistency of responses. The collected data were organized and entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency and percentage were used to describe socio-demographic variables, while mean and standard deviation were used to summarize mental health literacy scores. Appropriate statistical tests were applied to determine associations and significance.

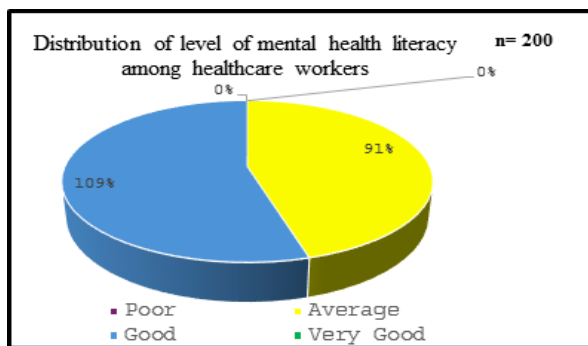
**RESULTS**

**Demographic variables of healthcare workers**

The majority of healthcare workers were in the age group of 18–26 years (47%) and were married (51.5%). Most participants were graduates (49.5%) and belonged to joint families (61%) and rural areas (80.5%). A large proportion had 1–10 years of work experience (61.5%). In terms of area of work, the highest number of participants were working in OPD (36.5%), followed by acute wards and critical care areas.

**Level Of Mental Health Literacy**

**Fig 1: Distribution of level of mental health literacy among health care workers**



The findings show that more than half of the healthcare workers (54.5%) had good mental health literacy, while 45.5% had an average level. None of the participants fell into poor or very good categories. The scores ranged from 66 to 147, with a mean score of 106.95 (SD = 3.87), indicating an overall moderate to good level of mental health literacy among participants.

Association between mental health literacy among health care workers and selected socio demographic variables.

**Table 2: Association between mental health literacy among health care workers and selected socio demographic variables. n=200**

Sr. No.	Demographic Variable	Mental Health Literacy		Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )	p-value
		Average	Good		
1.	<b>Age in years</b>			14.53	<b>0.002</b>
	18- 26 years	55	39		
	27- 35 years	26	47		
	36- 44 years	4	16		
2.	<b>Marital status</b>			9.530	<b>0.002</b>
	Married	36	67		
	Unmarried	55	42		
3.	<b>Years of service</b>			12.08	<b>0.007</b>
	1-10 years	67	56		
	11-20 years	15	41		
	21-30 years	8	10		
4.	<b>Area of work</b>			9.456	<b>0.024</b>
	Critical care area	20	31		
	OPD	26	47		
	Acute Ward	33	23		
	Sub acute ward	12	8		

(df= 3, 1, 3, 3)

There was a statistically significant association between mental health literacy and age ( $\chi^2 = 14.53$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), marital status ( $\chi^2 = 9.530$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), years of service ( $\chi^2 = 12.08$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), and area of work ( $\chi^2 = 9.456$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ).

However, no significant association was found with level of education,

type of family, and place of origin.

**DISCUSSION**

In the present study, age showed a statistically significant association with mental health literacy ( $\chi^2 = 22.80$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that mental health literacy varies across different age groups. These findings are consistent with the meta-analysis conducted by Emma T. Aliasson et al., which also reported a significant relationship between age and mental health literacy. However, a study by Reavley et al. found no overall significant association between age and mental health literacy, although older age was linked with lower scores in specific domains such as PTSD and schizophrenia.

Further, while previous research by Xiao-Yan He et al. demonstrated a significant difference in mental health literacy between urban (13.6%) and rural (8.6%) populations, the present study found no statistically significant association between mental health literacy and place of origin ( $\chi^2 = 1.802$ ,  $p = 0.180$ ).

**Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

The study emphasizes strengthening mental health literacy through structured education and training on identification, risk factors and services. Improving literacy helps healthcare professionals recognize early signs and provide better care. Regular training, standard guidelines, and further interventional studies are recommended to enhance effectiveness.

**CONCLUSION**

The present study concluded that healthcare professionals exhibited a moderate to good level of mental health literacy, with most participants demonstrating good literacy and the remaining showing an average level. A significant association was found between mental health literacy and selected socio-demographic variables such as age, marital status, years of service and area of work. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening mental health literacy among healthcare professionals to enhance early identification, appropriate management and overall quality of mental health care services in clinical settings.

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