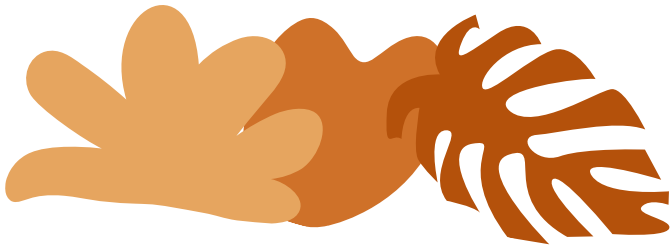# SELAH - PAUSE AND REFLECT

Mental health in India - The Current State

Mental health is our social, emotional, and psychological well-being. It is not only the absence of mental illness. According to a Lancet survey, 14.3% (I.e. 197.3 million!) of the Indian population suffers from a mental health disorder, excluding the various lifestyle disorders, as of 2017. This number is expected to have increased multiple folds with the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, socio-political scenario, and the general uncertainty. India currently accounts for 36.6% of suicides occurring globally. These are bone-chilling statistics, and remind us as to why World Mental Health Awareness Day and Suicide Prevention Awareness are more than necessary in our country.

India currently only has 0.3 Psychiatrists per 1 Lakh people, and 0.07 psychologists. The desirable numbers, according to WHO, are 3 Psychiatrists and Psychologists per 1 Lakh people. In a country that lacks accessible and affordable mental health care - the therapists and mental health care workers are now burned out and overburdened, due to a considerable inflow of new clients, owing to the uncertain times we are living in. We also see that with the current mental health programs, many budding therapists are not getting the level of training and supervision that is required to adequately equip them with the varying concerns.

SELF-CARE TIP:

Gratitude Journaling – *Journaling is known to increase positivity, mood, life satisfaction, resilience, patience, and it also helps in reducing burnout and fatigue. Starting up a new practice can be difficult to be consistent with, but lean into it and see what it holds for you on the other side. some prompts to get you started on your journaling journey.*

- *5 things I'm grateful for*
- *How am I working towards my goals*
- *People in my life I'm grateful for*
- *The best part of my day*

However, the bigger concern and why we need mental health awareness is because of how it is perceived by others. In India, a majority of the population still believes that those suffering from mental health disorders should not be given any responsibilities. Myths and stereotypes regarding mental illness (for e.g- those suffering from mental health issues talk to themselves, they are crazy, etc.) are still very prominent, even in educated individuals. Terminologies such as 'crazy', 'delusional', OCD', 'depression' are thrown around casually in conversations, which desensitize us to the suffering others are experiencing.

It's not all bad news though. With increased awareness, we have seen steps being taken on a systemic level. The mental healthcare act of 2017 decriminalized attempted suicide, there are various District Mental Health Program (DMHP), which aim at providing mental healthcare services at the primary care level. We know that there is still a long way to go, but with more and more people taking charge of their mental health, the goal seems a little bit closer.
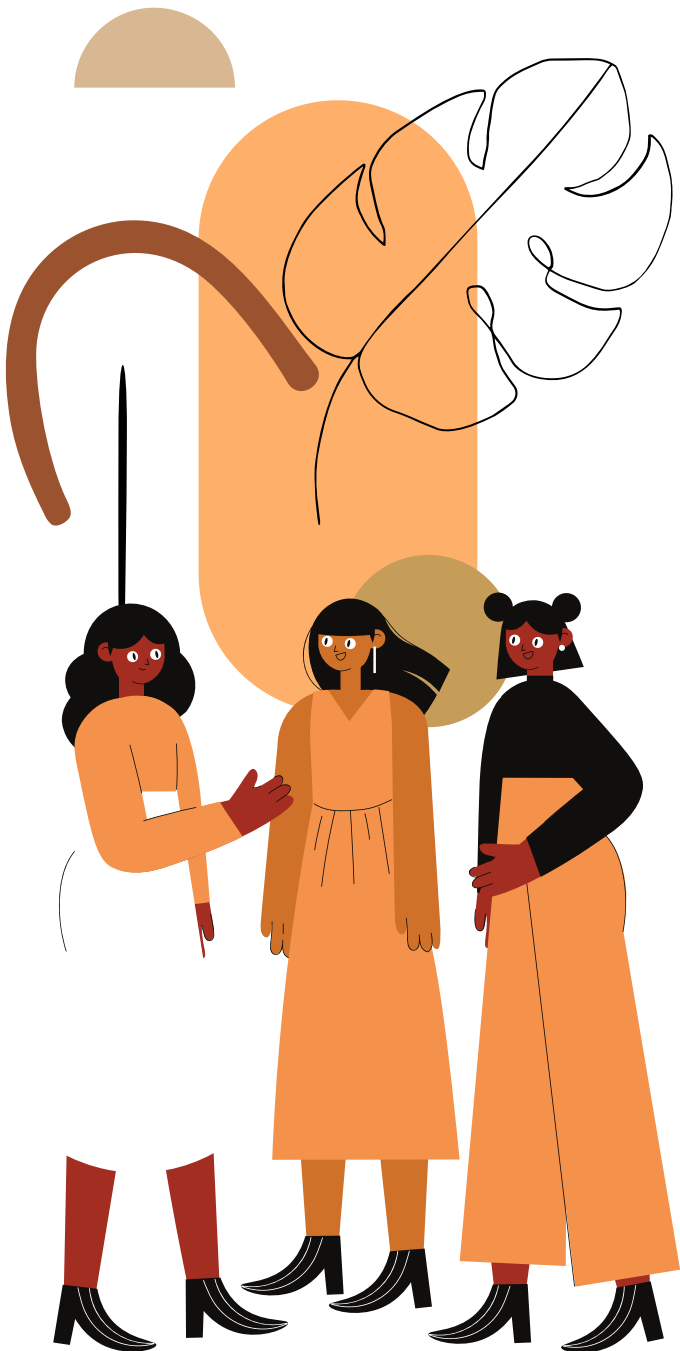
Celebrating Acceptance

The Soul has Bandaged moments.
When too appalled to stir
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her
Salute her, with long fingers
Caress her freezing hair
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover, hovered o'er
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme so fair
The soul has moments of escape
When bursting all the doors
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings opon the Hours,
As do the Bee, delirious borne
Long Dungeoned from his Rose
Touch Liberty then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise
The Soul's retaken moments
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the song,
The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue.

"The Soul Has Bandaged Moments" by Emily Dickinson
This 19th-century poem provides an inside look at Dickinson's struggle with her depression. The poem helps us understand the internal battle many of us must fight on a daily basis.

Questions Your Mental Health Blogger Will Not Answer

Q. Why do I feel bad/worse after therapy sometimes?

A. It can truly be a frustrating feeling because therapy was "supposed" to make you feel better, but now here you are after your session feeling horrible. It can be a sign of progress. As counterintuitive as it may sound, feeling bad during therapy can be good.
It is actually normal to occasionally feel bad or worse after therapy, especially during the beginning of your work with a therapist. When you start, you will eventually share intense negative emotion or tap into a hurtful memory. This will be overwhelming for the first time. With this reference, you will figure out new issues and work on them with your therapist. This means staying with these emotions a little longer than expected. The best part about this however, is that these feelings you dislike, will not last forever. You are moving towards feeling better.

Q. Is my therapist always "analysing me"? / Does my therapist have it all together?

A. It is not as simple to explain, but mostly this statement is untrue. Your therapist is also human and they see the world just like you do. A therapist does look like they have it all together, no bad days or stress to hold them down, and never truly sad. Yes, their training provides them valuable knowledge about human behaviour and psychology, but they are human too! They use their knowledge to be objective and supportive, not look at you as a puzzle to solve. Therapist's goal is to help you achieve a better version of you, and not fix you. Pure analysis is not really instrumental to your growth.
They too have to remind their loved ones that they are not their therapist, rather they too are emotional and biased in their relationship. We all experience loss, heartbreaks, insecurities and rejections, and are trying to get through the human experience in the best way possible. We all like to be viewed in all our humanity too.

Q. How to understand that therapy is working out for you?

A. Here are a few tips to assess your progress in therapy:

- your symptoms seem better managed or are decreasing - you're able to control your reaction to different triggers and regulate your behaviour; it doesn't impact your daily functioning as it used to previously
- you feel like you're accomplishing your current goal(s) - not just therapeutic goals, but the ones you had made for yourself without any immediate assistance; and feel like what you wanted to work in therapy has been accomplished to a certain degree.
- raising your self-awareness outside of therapy - with more insight and knowledge you have found a deeper insight about yourself, your life and actions; you are able to see your vulnerabilities and work with them rather than avoiding or hiding them.

Nonetheless, be aware that not all progress is going to be tangible or obvious. Some progress happens in small bouts without you even realizing. Sometimes, it might be progress you weren't actively looking for. Trust your collaborative effort with your therapist and reach out when you want to assess how you have been doing so far.

Mental Health in Reel Life v/s Real Life

Art imitates life.. or was it life imitates art? Art ranges from movies and TV shows to paintings to literature. So to not make this newsletter into a thesis, we will stick to movies (our favorite kind of art to consume, let's be honest). The influence our lived experiences have on the art we create and consume, also influences the way we view and understand our lived experiences. Mental health in Indian media has gone through a lot of changes in the past decade and a half, and it is no surprise that a majority of our understanding of what mental illness is, is what is portrayed on our screens.

If we believe that cinema provides a glimpse into our society, we understand the story of why those suffering from mental illnesses are depicted as being dangerous, violent, someone who cannot hold any responsibilities and should be isolated from society. This also reaffirms the belief that mental illness occurs because of evil or something supernatural.

But why is the portrayal of mental health so much more important to get right, in comparison to how court proceedings go or how hospitals actually function? Research by Stuart (2006) shows that movies and media model a dramatic reaction of fear, rejection, and ridicule. This leads to various negative consequences such as decreased help-seeking behavior, lowered self-esteem, adherence to medication, and overall recovery. But what exactly are they getting wrong? Various articles and literature postulate that how mental illnesses and suicide is glorified and romanticized in pop culture, and how health-care services are almost never talked about when dealing with mental health issues are some of the cause.

Haider (2018) in 'How cinema stigmatizes mental illness' gives a detailed description of this. She points out how the mainstream perceptions of mental health are remembered and understood through movie scenes. She also talks about how mental health facilities are still remembered the way they were depicted in One that flew over cuckoo's nest, how the whole genre of slasher horror movies depict a specific type of 'crazy', and how 'madness' is associated with horror.

In the past few years, movies like Dear Zindagi, and Chhichhore have opened discourse on mental health in our country. Gone are the days where movies had dialogues like 'mental hai kya?'. The direction in which Bollywood is going with its portrayal of mental illness is definitely encouraged.

Candid Corner

Room celebrated it's 2 year anniversary this July, 2021. It's been an interesting journey and we asked all the sweet souls who have been a part of our little family to share their thoughts and experiences during their time with Room, The Mindcare Space.

Rajul Jagdish

For the longest time, I've believed that the purpose of my life was to make a difference in someone else's life. Come to think of it, Room has made much more difference in mine than it has managed to make in others. Room began with a vision to make mental health accessible and affordable. And we're all tirelessly working towards it.

Throughout the journey, I've been blessed to be working with talented and extremely kind individuals. While therapy in itself is a lonely journey for both the client and the therapist, my peers make sure we aren't.

When asked the question, what do you bring to Room, I am left with a thought of what Room brings to me - satisfaction and hope. With all the personal hardships I've had in the past year, I do know it is Room that has kept me going. It is all the people I work with and for who have kept me going. Thank you for contributing to my life.

Risha Bhattacharya

I've been with Room for more than a year now and the experience has been pretty dynamic and very educational! With the pandemic sinking into our knowledge and eventually daily lives, we, like all the other mental health professionals, struggled with the new setups and trying to form a human connection over unstable networks and 3:4 dull screens. It was a struggle but we were able to persevere through, learn from each other and do better with each passing day. Throughout this process, Room has given me the opportunity to connect with amazing individuals, which include not only my colleagues but also my clients. I have learned so much in the process of working with them and it makes me elated to see them put their foot down, and choose to heal. Healing is and will always be a difficult journey and everyone has their own unique way of working through it. My peers and clients might not even realize how much they have done for me while they were trying their best. Therapy is hard work and we all have been there for each other in such trying times. I only have extensive gratitude for all.

Additionally, I was able to express myself creatively with all the responsibilities and spaces created by Room to allow open dialogue and trust in the community. Hopefully, that continues to thrive and we can welcome more people in our community and allyship to mental health and mental health awareness.

I am looking forward to much more therapeutic spaces, healthy conversations, and open hearts.

Monthly Takeaway
"Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like armour, and it can never be used to hurt you" - Tyrion Lanister (Game of Thrones)
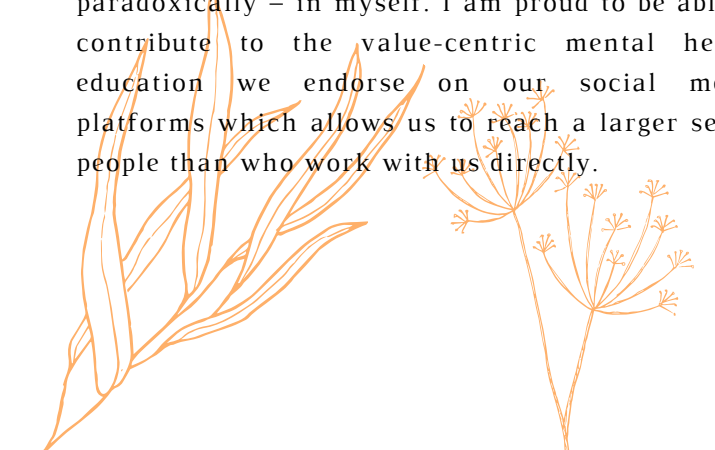
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Mansi Aggarwal

I joined the team at Room, The Mindcare Space at the time where we were at the peak of the global COVID – 19 pandemic and experiencing a tremendous amount of personal and collective distress, grief, and exhaustion. While a little has changed since then, it has been a pleasure and an honor to be able to sit with my peers and clients through a truly difficult time. I think together we have been able to build a warm, compassionate, and supportive space for everyone who has been associated with the organization in any capacity and I am very proud of that.

According to me, psychotherapy is as complex an endeavor for the therapist themselves as it is for a client who is taking it. This has multiplied profusely due to the times we are living in. While dealing with uncertainty, grief, trauma, hopelessness, and purposelessness is central to the psychotherapeutic work, its impact has amplified because in a lot of ways we are sharing similar lived realities as our clients at the same time. Apart from the mechanics of a good psychotherapeutic framework, what I am genuinely proud of is the fact that I have been able to introduce ease, rest, patience, and persistence in the psychological landscapes of my clients – and paradoxically – in myself. I am proud to be able to contribute to the value-centric mental health education we endorse on our social media platforms which allows us to reach a larger set of people than who work with us directly.

Himani Sapehia

My journey with Room might have been short, but in this short span of time, I got to learn and experience what I always wanted to experience. I joined Room in January 2020, and from there on my journey of learning, I learned how to take cases, talking to clients, and many forms of psychotherapy which I had only studied. I could then apply them to my clients. My favorite part used to be our peer review sessions where along with cases, we discuss everything that is upcoming in the field. I cherish those knowledge-filled conversations.

It never felt like you were working somewhere, it always felt that you are learning and growing. I wish more mental health professionals get to experience this, that your work is where you learn and grow, not where you feel stuck and stressed. And thank you Room, for giving me this opportunity. I'm forever grateful for it.

Prapti Parikh

I've had incredible experiences and learned so much in the short time I've been a part of the Room's team. Joining the team during a moment of global uncertainty and a widespread sense of helplessness provided me with a sense of purpose and renewed my confidence that humans are capable of powering through the most difficult of crises. The opportunity to engage on a therapeutic journey with my clients has been a gratifying experience.

With Room, I have a platform and an opportunity to share my thoughts on various topics related to mental health while also expanding our reach to people who are a part of our online community. I can only hope for more learning, assistance, and healing.