



oevaru

mental health conference

15 - 16 october 2023

changing currents ~

~ forming connections



NATIONAL
CENTRE
FOR
MENTAL HEALTH



igmh

Foreword

In the tapestry of human existence, there is an intricate thread woven through every aspect of our lives, one that often remains unseen and overlooked until it unravels—the thread of mental health. Mental health is the invisible thread that weaves through every experience, emotion, and aspiration. It is the foundation upon which our well-being is built, and yet, it is often overlooked and underestimated.

Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness, but it is also the ability to cope with life's challenges and maintain a positive outlook. It is essential to recognise that mental health is an integral part of our lives and should be given the same importance as physical health. Mental Health Care is the cornerstone upon which a functioning, healthy society is built. It serves as the bedrock for our emotional resilience, cognitive capacities, and interpersonal relationships. Just as a strong foundation supports a grand edifice, robust mental health underpins the well-being of individuals, families, and communities alike.

Decentralized accessibility is not merely a convenience but a lifeline for a healthy, productive community. Mental health knows no boundaries; thus, the avenues to seek support should be accessible to all, regardless of geographical location, financial standing, or the nature of their condition. By ensuring easy access to mental health services, we foster a society where individuals can thrive and contribute their unique gifts without the burden of untreated mental health issues.

A preventive approach, beginning at the earliest stages, is key. Just as we prioritize preventive measures for physical health, nurturing mental well-being from an early age can avert crises later in life. The saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” rings particularly true in the context of mental health. School-based programs and primary healthcare systems must be equipped to identify and address mental health concerns. Moreover, assisted referrals to specialist care should be seamlessly integrated, ensuring that those in need receive timely and appropriate support. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and tools to navigate the changing currents in life, we can preemptively address issues before they escalate, reducing the burden of mental health conditions on individuals and society as a whole.

In essence, the importance of mental health transcends individual well-being; it is the cornerstone of a thriving society. It is our collective duty to ensure that no one is left behind, that every voice is heard, and that every person receives the care they deserve. We must commit to providing consistent support, understanding, and evidence-based treatment to those in need. Together, we can weave this essential thread into the fabric of our society, creating a tapestry that is not only beautiful but also resilient and compassionate.

Fazna Ahmed

First Lady of Maldives

Prepared by National Center for Mental Health, IGMH for 'Oevaru Mental Health Conference 2023'.

Male', Maldives

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Welcome to Oevaru 2023 Mental Health Conference

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome all of you to the beautiful island nation of the Maldives and to “Oevaru,” a mental health research conference organized by our National Centre for Mental Health. This pioneering conference on mental health is the first of its kind in the Maldives and we are honored to have esteemed speakers from various parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and India, joining us for this event.

Upon browsing through the range of topics of discussion, I am confident that the selection of speakers, both local and international, has been curated to effectively meet the conference’s objectives. Their collective insights on mental health, research, clinical experience, practice development, and personal experiences, are essential for delivering holistic care to individuals grappling with mental health disorders.

While the conference is scheduled for a two-day duration, from October 15th to 16th 2023, the call for abstract and poster submissions opened back in May 2023. Various preparations related to the conference have been underway even earlier, and I extend my gratitude to all those who have contributed to making this event a resounding success.

I would like to extend a special thank you to the dedicated team at our National Centre for Mental Health. I wish “Oevaru” conference every success and hope that this marks only the beginning of many more such gatherings.

Ibrahim Saleem
Chief Executive Officer
Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital

Welcome from Oevaru 2023 Coordination Committee

I am filled with gratitude and tremendous joy as we welcome you to the inaugural Oevaru, Mental Health Conference. We live in a dynamic and complex world, where mental health issues have steadily increased in the last decade with changes in the currents or “oevaru”.

Traditionally we as seafarers, prepare to set sail only after observing and mapping the “oevaru”. Research and evidence are undeniably the compass, that guides a quality health care system. Hence, as we navigate the changing landscape of mental health in Maldives, it is prudent that we explore, local experiences and learn from global expertise.

This year’s theme Oevaru 2023, changing currents - forming connections, is especially relevant to us as we adapt to change and build connections as individuals, families, and communities and coalesce mental health from a biological, psychological, social, and spiritual lens.

We have been humbled by the overwhelming support and interest in Oevaru with thirty-one submissions, presented as oral or poster presentations, five keynote speakers, five invited speakers, two panel discussions, with a focus on relevant and emergent issues, locally, regionally, and internationally across the oceans.

We hope Oevaru provides a platform that fosters research, collaboration, and overall learning, for those with an interest in mental health, ranging from academics, practitioners, policy makers, carers to those with lived experiences.

We look forward to the continuation of Oevaru as we set forth on this journey of developing research and evidence from our very own shores.

Shanooha Mansoor MBBS, MMed MSc CAMH

Conference Convenor Oevaru 2023

Consultant Psychiatrist and Head of National Center for Mental Health , IGMH

Greetings from Oevaru 2023 Scientific Committee

As the chair of the Scientific Committee for Oevaru 2023, it was a great pleasure to work with the members of the committee to design a programme that is informative and thought-proving that will be delivered over two days. Our scientific programme is rich and varied with keynote speeches, invited talks, panel discussions, oral and poster sessions, and a joint session with the mental health conference Creating Futures 2023, which focuses on common and divergent mental health issues emerging internationally and across island nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. I hope you will come away from the conference with new perspectives on mental health and new knowledge that is guided by scientific research. Above all, I hope you will gain a sense of connection amidst the changing currents across the oceans.

Dr Afiya Ali, PhD, PGDip(Clinical Psychology), Msc Psych, BA Psych,

Chair of Scientific Committee of the Oevaru 2023

Principal Psychologist

Thank you note

Since our inception in 2019, building research capacity has been crucial to our vision of developing into a centre of excellence. However, time and tide changed in the most unexpected way when we all experienced the global pandemic. The current hit us unprepared, and the only thing we could do was to go along with the current or oeveru. This brought to shore a lot of realities, one of which was lack of preparedness, research, and evidence.

A renewed interest in research started amidst the pandemic, but the discussions about a conference surfaced towards the end of 2022, although even then such a possibility seemed far from reality.

Praise be to Allah, today as we host OEVARUs inaugural conference I am grateful for how blessed we have been, as OEVARU would not have been possible without help, support, and trust from numerous well-wishers, to whom I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Fazna Ahmed, who has tirelessly worked towards bringing about awareness and progress in mental health in the Maldives. We are confident that the agenda of mental health, so crucial to our young people and development will continue to be championed by our leaders.

We were pleasantly surprised by the number of people who showed interest in OEVARU and submitted papers, without whom the conference would not have been possible. A heartfelt thank you to all those who have contributed as researchers and participants. In the same breath much appreciation is extended for the wisdom and experience of our esteemed keynote and invited speakers as well as panellists.

OEVARU has been proudly supported by, STO, Villa Hotels and Villa Nautica, DHIRAAGU, WHO, UNICEF, Transparency Maldives, USAID, MTCC, and our creative collaborators, who has made OEVARU come to life, with a generosity that has indeed humbled us.

We could not have done this without the support of our partners, including Ministry of Health, Maldives National University, Villa College, Islamic University of Maldives as well as many other stakeholders in the government, private and non-government sectors who have all further enriched OEVARU.

We would like to extend our gratitude to IGMH management for entrusting us with this and the wider IGMH team for their continuous support.

This note of appreciation would not be complete without a shout out to the National Centre for Mental Health team who has worked tirelessly for the past ten months, through rough seas and even when the shore wasn't visible.

As we set forth on this journey of OEVARU, we hope to continue and strengthen the connections we have made and sail together towards practices that is backed by research and evidence.

Dr. Arif Mohamed MBBS (UNSW), FRANZCP, MPH (OTAGO)
Chair of NCMH Senior Management

Oeveru 2023

Changing Currents: Forming Connections

About Oeveru

Oeveru holds a particular significance in our tradition and history, denoting the changing currents in the ocean. Learning to map the oeveru can be instrumental in shaping one's course as still waters and a smooth surface may hide a strong current underneath; heeding the oeveru on one's journey can ensure a safe welcome back to our shores. Oeveru is used in our everyday language to signify flux. A shift in thinking, a change in behavior, or the formation of a movement have all been described by some within the context of an oeveru.

Oeveru & Mental Health

We chose the name oeveru for our conference, as it symbolizes a movement forward in the landscape of our mental health system. We were struck by how the movement of the oeveru echoes the concept of mental health as a continuum through which people may move along at any given stage. We also identified strongly with the sentiment of the changing currents as a part of nature and neither good nor bad. Oeveru underlines this value of acceptance as an integral part of individual and community mental well-being.

About the conference

Our Oeveru conference is a mental health research conference hosted by National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) of IGMH (Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital), Maldives. This innovative research conference will be the first of its kind in Maldives, welcoming both speakers locally and abroad to connect and contribute to this forum to bring mental health to the forefront of public discourse and dialogue. We also hope that this inaugural conference would inspire fellow practitioners, researchers, and institutions to conduct research in the mental health field.

The theme for this year's Oeveru conference is "Changing Currents: Forming Connections." We identified with this theme, as we believe that this conference provides an excellent opportunity to connect with one another. Forming connections is crucial for well-being in this changing environment at different levels; including biological(brain), individual, spiritual, mental health systems, at both the national and international levels.

Objectives:

- To provide a platform for the presentation of local, national, and global research on mental health, including showcasing innovative approaches and practices in the field.
- To bring together and connect various stakeholders in mental health from different disciplines and sectors.
- To create a forum to present and discuss current challenges and opportunities in mental health, and advocate for evidence-based mental health policymaking and investment.
- To build research culture and capacity in MHPSS service providers and relevant agencies.

Highlights of this conference include:

1. Keynote Speakers; featuring diverse voices in mental health practice
2. Pre-Conference Workshops; connecting and training mental health practitioners
3. Panel Discussions; highlighting current conversations on mental health and finally
4. Oral and poster presentations; covering mental health research, clinical experience, practice development, and lived experiences..

We welcome our fellow mental health practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and service users and carers with lived experience, along with anyone interested in learning more on current research and practice in mental health to take part in the conference.

We view our conference as a meeting point for our fellow mental health practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to come on board and share their learnings, perspective, and recommendations. Just as the oeveru guides one’s journey, we hope that the discourse held during this conference will direct our path towards a more robust, equitable, and accessible mental health system in our nation

Oeveru: Identity design concept

Visual concept: The logo depicts dendritic patterns forming “oeveru” in thaana. Dendritic patterns signify interrelated connections within the inner landscape of self and with one another; It is a connective pattern that is associated with growth or movement.

Design process: The oeveru logo is derived from over 100 hand painted lettering monotypes that yielded the dendritic patterns. Letterforms were selected and digitized based on the aesthetic consistency of the dendritic patterns, boldness and connectivity between the letters.

Typography: lines of shifting text like the currents of the sea



Conference Program

Conference Day 1 15th October 2023

07:30 - 08:15	Travel to Villa Nautica	
08:15 - 08:45	REGISTRATION	
09:00 - 09:45	OPENING CEREMONY / Moderator: Aishath Yooliya Haleem	
09:45 - 10:15	BREAK (Photos and refreshment)	
10:15 - 11:00	Keynote Speech- Prof. Patrick McGorry / Moderator: Dr.Farzana Firdous Changing Currents in Youth Mental Health	
11:00 - 11:45	Keynote Speech- Prof G. Gururaj / Moderator: Athifa Ibrahim Mental Health Services in Maldives: Need for integrated approaches and strategic investments	
11:45 - 12:45	LUNCH BREAK	
12:45 - 13:15	Poster Presentations (outside Dhinasha Hall)	
13:15 - 14:00	Keynote 3- Dr. Shaystah Dean / Moderator: Dr.Aishath Shanoora The centrality of connection in mental health care provision: insights from the emerging field of Islamic psychology	
	Concurrent Sessions- (Venue- Dhinasha Hall)	Concurrent Sessions (Venue- Burunu Hall)
14:05 - 14:20	Implementing WHO's mhGAP-based training in the Maldives and monitoring its outcome - Dr. Abdulla Nazim, Mental Health Awareness Foundation	Strengthening Mental Health Services in Island Communities: The Impact of IBAMA's Multi-Sectoral Approach - Aishath Saaha Sabah, MoGFSS
14:25 - 14:40	Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy for Depression and Anxiety in the Maldives Fathimath Sofiya Rasheed, National Centre for Mental Health	Balancing progress and well-being: Assessing impacts on mental well-being from development initiatives in the Maldives - Dr. Mizna Mohamed, Small Island Geographic Society
14:45 - 15:00	Invited speaker- Are there new advances in psychopharmacology psychiatry and why do we need newer treatments? Dr Amer Siddiqui (Psychiatrist, Malaysia)	Mental health services for children in the Maldives - A child rights perspective Fathimath Nabaha Naseer, Children's Ombudsperson's Office
15:05 -15:20	Invited speaker-Neuropsychiatric manifestations of neurological conditions Dr Ahmed Rasheed (IGMH)	Invited speaker- Regulating mental health care in the Maldives Uz. Aishath Mohamed
15:30 - 16:30	Panel discussion: Are we doing enough to save our young people from drugs? 1. Dr Amer Siddiq Amer Nordin (International expert from Universiti Malaya Community Engagement Centre, Background- addiction psychiatry, public health) 2. Abdulla Faseeh (Deputy Director General, National Drug Agency, Background- psychology) 3. Ali Adyb (Master Trainer at NGO Journey, Background- Drug Demand Reduction Trainer) 4.Aishath Shahula Ahmed (Programme Specialist, Child development - UNICEF Background- psychology) 5. Dr. Arif Mohamed (Consultant Sub Specialist in Psychiatry, NCMH- Background- psychiatry, public health) Moderator- Dr. Abdul Malik	
16:30 -17:00	EVENING TEA	

Conference Day 2 16th October 2023

07:15 - 08:00	Travel to Villa Nautica	
08:00 - 08:20	REFRESHMENTS	
08:20 - 08:30	VOICES ACROSS OCEANS- Overlap Hybrid Session of Oevaru Mental Health conference & Creating Futures Conference- SYSTEMS CHECK Moderators- Prof. Ernest Hunter (Australia) & Dr. Afiya Ali (Maldives)	
08:30 - 08:45	Official opening (Maldives and Pacific) Jimmy Obed (OSMHP) and Aneesa Ahmed (Maldives)	
08:50 - 09:10	Expanding community mental health services in WHO South East Asia Region (WHO Maldives) Dr. Mushfique Mahmud	
09:10 - 09:30	Presentation from WHO Western Pacific Region Tomo Kanda	
09:30 - 09:50	Presentation from Samoa Dr. George Tuitama, Samoa	
09:50 - 10:10	Resonance from the Indian Ocean (Maldives) Dr. Shanooha Mansoor & Dr. Arif Mohamed, Maldives	
10:10 - 10:30	Remodeling mental health care in Fiji (Fiji) - Dr. Balram Pandit, Fiji	
10:30 - 10:50	Discussion & Conclusion Prof. Ernest Hunter/ Dr. Afiya Ali	
10:50 - 11:00	TEA BREAK	
11:00 - 11:45	Keynote Speech- Dr. Seetha Subbiah, Moderator- Dr Afiya Ali Looking forward, Making Decisions for Mental Health	
11:45 - 13:00	LUNCH BREAK	
13:00 - 13:45	Keynote Speech- Ms. Juana Katzer, Moderator- Mariyam Neerish Reflections on Anxiety, Defence and Vicarious Trauma in Mental Health Organizational Structures	
	Concurrent Sessions- STREAM 1 (Venue- Dhinasha Hall) Moderator: Aishath Yooliya Haleem	Concurrent Sessions STREAM 2 (Venue- Burunu Hall) Moderator: Dr. Abdulla Nazim
13:45 - 14:05	Auntie Aisha Answers: A Way Forward For Islamically-Based Comprehensive Life Skills Education - Aisha Hussain Rasheed	Factors contributing to stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders in Maldives - Yuna Siraj, Villa College
14:05 - 14:25	Do we have the right words in Dhivehi language to use when communicating about mental health?- Azeeza Afeef, Maldives National University	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions during Covid-19 in the Maldives - Afaa Mohamed, Maldivian Red Crescent
14:25 - 14:45	The relationship between online psychological support and psychological wellbeing: A random survery in Maldives and New Zealand - Dr. Afiya Ali,NCMH	Bullying in Schools: Anti Bullying Policy and Effective Interventions - Aishath Nasheeda, Villa College
14:45 - 15:05	Invited speaker- Implementing Mental Health Policy in Maldives: Challenges and way forward - Aminath Shahuza, Mental Health Department, MoH	Invited speaker- Challenges faced by people living with mental illness in the Maldives - Aminath Ula Ahmed, MHSG
15:15 - 16:15	Panel discussion- Increasing access to mental health... is it time for a change in currents? Patrick McGorry (International Expert), Prof. G. Gururaj (International Expert), Fathimath Himya (MRC), Saeed Ahmed (Family/Public Representative), Safiyya Mohamed Saeed (Deputy Minister of Health) Moderator- Fathimath Sofiya Rasheed (Senior social worker,NCHM/ IGMH)	
16:15 - 16:30	CLOSING CEREMONY, M/C- Aishath Yooliya Haleem	
16:30 -17:00	EVENING TEA	
17:00 -17:45	Return travel to MALE' (For those not staying for Cultural Dinner)	
18:45 -21:00	Cultural Night (Gala dinner)	

Keynote Speakers



Prof. Patrick McGorry
Professor of Youth Mental Health & Psychiatrist

Pat is a psychiatrist known world-wide for his development and scaling up of early intervention and youth mental health services and for mental health innovation, advocacy and reform. He is a Professor of Youth Mental Health at the University of Melbourne and founding editor of the journal Early Intervention in Psychiatry.

He led the advocacy which resulted in the establishment of the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, by the Australian Government in 2005, which in 2006 became Headspace and he remains a founding board member of that organization. He has played a key advocacy and advisory role to government and health system reform in Australia and in many parts of the world. He chaired the Expert Advisory Committee of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System.

He has published over 1000 publications, with 51,822 citations and a “h” index of 119 (Scopus).



Dr. Shaystah Dean
Clinical Psychologist

Dr Shaystah Dean is a Clinical Psychologist and Research Fellow based in Wellington, New Zealand. She qualified as a clinical psychologist from The University of Canterbury in 2011, and later obtained her PhD from the University of Otago Wellington School of Medicine. She offers consultancy, professional supervision, and clinical services in private practice. With a background in general and adolescent mental health, she has research interests in adolescent mental health, trauma-informed and integrated psychological intervention, and Islamic Psychology. Shaystah is registered with the New Zealand Psychologists Board under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003, and is a member of both the NZ College of Clinical Psychologists and the NZ Psychological Society.



Dr. Seetha Subbiah
Clinical Psychologist

Dr. Seetha is a Senior Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Supervisor to graduate level mental health practitioners, Trainer to para-counsellors and Author, living in Singapore. She received her academic and clinical training in the United States of America: University of California, at Berkeley, Illinois School of Professional Psychology, Chicago Campus, Primary Children’s Medical Centre, Salt Lake City, Utah, University of Illinois Department of Paediatrics, at Chicago, and community mental health facilities and schools in California and Illinois.

Dr. Seetha has had 29 years of involvement in the management and treatment of children, adolescents, and families subjected to severely challenging life experiences, i.e. sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, severe trauma, etc., resulting in longer-term psychological, emotional, and relational conditions. Within this scope of interest, she has led crisis management efforts, developed programs, engaged in child and adult advocacy work, advised lawmakers and trained professional and para-service providers. She has provided services and volunteered in the United States of America, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India, Japan, and Nigeria.

Stemming from her clinical experience, Dr. Seetha authored Did You Hear That? Help for Children Who Hear Voices, a heavily illustrated, reader-friendly treatment guide for mental health service providers. This book, simultaneously, serves as a supportive tool to children who hear voices and see things that others do not see and is used as an informational guide by concerned parents/educators/allied health professionals/law-related professionals. Currently available in English, French and Portuguese and available in 6 additional languages, in the near future.



Ms. Juana Katzer
Social Worker and
Psychotherapist

Juana Katzer is a Papua New Guinean woman of Tolai and Kuot descent. Her ancestors are also German and Chinese. She is a Social Worker and Psychotherapist currently working as a Senior Cultural Consultant/Senior Mental Health Clinician at Evolve Therapeutic Services, Children's Health Queensland, Australia. Juana has focused her career on child protection issues, with a particular interest in child and adolescent mental health, sexual and domestic violence. Juana has provided social work and psychotherapeutic services to individuals, families, and communities in Aboriginal and multicultural communities in Australia and international context. Juana holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Social Work, Graduate Certificates in Grief, Loss and Trauma Counselling and International Development and a Masters of Social Work. Juana is a current Doctor of Social Work candidate and is training to be a Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist.



Prof. G. Gururaj
Senior Professor, Department
of Epidemiology
Centre for Public Health,
WHO Collaborating Centre
for Injury Prevention
and Safety promotion
National Institute of Mental
Health and Neuro Science

Prof. G.Gururaj superannuated as Director of NIMHANS and as Senior Professor in the - Department of Epidemiology, Centre for Public Health, WHO Collaborating Centre for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion in Bangalore, India. He was the Chairman of the Karnataka Health Vision Group, constituted by the Dept. of Health and Medical Education, Government of Karnataka in 2020 - 2022.

His major areas of interest are health system strengthening, mental health, suicide prevention, injury prevention and safety promotion, road safety, noncommunicable diseases and other areas. His major areas of expertise include epidemiological and public health research, developing surveillance and information systems, promoting institutional mechanisms, capacity strengthening and training, advocacy, facilitating legislation, monitoring and evaluation as well as strengthening policies and programmes.

He has completed more than 70 funded and non-funded research projects in different areas and published nearly 150 research articles in international and national journals, and several monographs, manuals, reports, policy briefs and advocacy materials are to his credit. He has presented scientific papers in national / international meetings in diverse areas and has served as a consultant/ adviser / resource person to many national and international organizations like WHO, World Bank, UNICEF, DFID,

Keynote Speeches

Mental Health Services in Maldives: Need for integrated approaches and strategic investments

Abstract

In Maldives, Mental health has been recognised as a priority area for good health of individuals and families, propelled by the Covid-19 pandemic, and on-going policy reforms and programmes by successive governments. Several guiding documents, legislations and guidelines by the Ministry of Health and other agencies have paved the way for systematic strengthening of mental health services. Increasing access, improving service delivery, establishing continuity of care, mental health promotion activities, reducing stigma and increasing public awareness need greater and urgent attention by national policy makers and professionals to meet existing and emerging challenges.

Few surveys and reviews undertaken in Maldives by various organizations have indicated a high burden of mental health problems. It is acknowledged that approximately 15% of the population are in need of mental health care and a robust mental health promotion and prevention programmes is required for the entire population. Despite this recognition and recent policy reforms, the existing urban centric programmes and services, deficiencies in service delivery at primary, secondary and regional levels, vertical programmes, deficient health human resources, specialist oriented curative services, low / minimum emphasis on preventive - promotive – rehabilitative services; logistical issues, transportation challenges, high levels of stigma, coordination issues, and others, pose major challenges. Limited research and absence of good quality data to support evidence based programmes adds to this complex scenario.

To implement strong mental health services, strengthening human resources, overcoming infrastructure deficiencies, improving care and delivery of services, strong advocacy and awareness activities, ensuring supply of drugs, implementing legislations, partnering with different stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations, use of technology (especially tele mental health), mental health information systems and others along with monitoring and evaluation are highly essential. Mental health research and strong national / regional data should be the driving force to augment all these activities and to build mental health programmes that are evidence based, sustainable and cost effective.

The major focus in the coming years should be on increasing access to care, strengthening mental health service delivery, utilization of services by people and reducing stigma towards mental illness to achieve better coverage, completeness and quality of mental health care in

Maldives. Several existing tools and mechanisms need focussed and targeted interventions, effective implementation and integration in programmes. Political commitment, strong leadership, partnerships across agencies, sustainability and cost effective programmes and dedicated funding remain central to facilitate this process. Implementation at regional – atoll-and primary care levels should remain the major focus to achieve desired results. Investments in financial, human and technical resources and innovations in service delivery , considering the geospatial position of the country, are crucial. As mental health is central and critical to everyone, Maldives needs to prioritize mental health as a key driver of people's health and nation's progress .

Prof. G. Gururaj

Former Director and Senior Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health

National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences

Bangalore, India

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Changing Currents in Youth Mental Health

Abstract

Mental ill-health represents the number one threat to the lives and futures of young people globally. This is because mental illnesses are the chronic diseases of the young with no fewer than 75% of mental disorders emerging by the age of 25 years.. Mental ill-health is the leading cause of disability for young people, accounting for 45% of the overall burden of disease in those aged 10-24 years.

Over the past two decades this scenario has deteriorated steadily and dramatically in response to a combination of strong megatrends within modern society. The worsening mental health of young people now represents nothing less than a major public health crisis. We have characterized this crisis as a “shadow pandemic” as it has flown below the radar and outside the mainstream of public and political discourse, despite the alarming trends in worsening morbidity and mortality.

In 2021 the US Surgeon General alerted the US President to this youth mental health crisis, one which began well before the pandemic but has gained momentum in its shadow. Young people themselves are voicing serious concerns about the mental health of their peers and are increasingly pessimistic about their futures, as are their parents. Many countries are experiencing a surge in demand for mental health care by young people that cannot be met by under-resourced services, leading to excessive wait times or exclusion. Traditional services are outmoded, fragmented and lacking in innovation and skilled workforces.

These changing currents mean that we must understand the megatrends in our diverse yet globalized societies that are influencing these harmful currents and devise preventive strategies to turn back the tide. At the same time we must respond to the wave of young people in distress and increasing precarity with a new range of service cultures and with innovation in treatment and care. This is a challenge for all societies and all governments. Each nation has unique local challenges and also strengths upon which it can call.

Patrick McGorry MD PhD

Professor Of Youth Mental Health

University of Melbourne

Executive Director

Orygen: The National Centre of Youth Mental Health, Australia.

What shape will the Maldivian mental health landscape take in the near and distant future?

Synopsis

At the end of decades of growth in the Western mental healthcare landscape, various schools of thoughts and a plethora of traditions and strategies blossomed and continue to blossom. The Maldivian mental healthcare system is at the cusp of a new beginning that can inform, shape, model and mold its near and distant future. Some things we can learn from and take away from understanding the nature of growth in the Western mental healthcare system as you stride confidently toward the future and strive to make important decisions to move your society to the next level.

Dr. Seetha S

BA (Berkeley), MA (Chicago), PsyD (Chicago), MSPS

Licensed Consultant Clinical Psychologist (California, USA)

Centre for WellBeing

Singapore

The centrality of connection in mental health care provision: insights from the growing field of Islamic psychology

With mental health concerns on the rise, professionals in the field have a role to play beyond specialized treatment in the therapy room. Broad concerns such as climate change, technological innovation, and dietary changes call for a broader focus on lifestyle factors and social determinants of health. Integrated and indigenous approaches to mental health offer fostering relationality and collective wellbeing. Drawing on her experience working as a Clinical Psychologist in Aotearoa New Zealand, Dr Dean will reflect on how working in connected ways is necessary to effectively address mental health concerns. Islamic psychology frameworks can be positioned within a global health movement centered on strengthening indigenous paradigms of wellbeing. Common to many of these is harmony with the natural environment, the nurturing of spirituality and a collective consciousness. The emerging field of Islamic Psychology has the potential to address mental health concerns unique to the Maldives, and to enhance access to evidence-based and whole-person mental healthcare.

Dr Shaystah Dean

Clinical Psychologist

PhD, PGDipClinPsyc

PhD - University of Otago, Wellington

PGDipClinPsyc - University of Canterbury

MSc (Distinction), Psychology - University of Otago

BA (Hons), Psychology - The University of Auckland

Invited Speakers

Regulating Mental Health Care in Maldives

There has been an increase in awareness in the importance of mental health care and the acknowledgement of people seeking mental health care within the society. And in recent years Maldives has seen a rise in the number of people who are actively seeking mental health care. Yet, mental health care is unevenly available in limited places within Maldives.

The main concepts of mental health care is no doubt related to fundamental rights of individuals and hence the need to scrutinize the provision of mental health care arises. The clarification needed in defining mental disorders, the freedoms and basic rights of the persons seeking care, the forms of treatments including the criteria and procedure with regards to involuntary treatment, conditions of mental health facilities, monitoring and complaints mechanisms are some of the main areas that is required to be regulated.

At present it is crucial to ensure that mental health care is available equally across Maldives. Much needs to be done to safeguard the person seeking such care and at the same time ensure that mental health care is regulated in accordance with international best principles. Initiatives have been undertaken to regulate the provision of mental health care in Maldives. The government has been working on a draft Mental Health Bill. This presentation will cover the main concepts incorporated in the draft Mental Health Bill and give a brief comparison of international best practice and mental health care legislations of other jurisdictions.

Uza. Aishath Mohamed

Implementing Mental Health Policy in Maldives: Challenges and Way forward

Over the past two decades, mental health has emerged as a significant public health concern, and the covid-19 pandemic, has further exacerbated the situation. Findings from WHO step survey, conducted in Maldives underscore the gravity of the issue, revealing that 1 in 20 individuals have contemplated self-harm and 1 in 5 report experiencing symptoms of depression. The Maldives reported 19 suicides and 42 suicide attempts in 2021, signaling a troubling trend of increased rates as substantiated by Maldives Police reports from 2008 and 2013. While the Maldives has marked a significant milestone with the formulation of National Mental Health Policy in 2015, its effective implementation has been hindered by several challenges within the healthcare sector, notably the lack of comprehensive data highlighting its significance. Amongst the challenges encompass shortage of mental health professionals, inadequate infrastructure and limited funding. Additionally, cultural and social stigmas associated with mental health issues further exacerbate the suffering of the individuals who silently endure these struggles. The shortcomings within the mental health delivery system, including lack of decentralized services and insufficient prevention and early intervention programs, as well as limitations in the integration of mental health within primary healthcare services, creates barriers to timely access, continuity of care, and comprehensive support, perpetuating disparities. Addressing these challenges and inequalities, demands a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international partners. It is also crucial to prioritize strengthening of leadership, governance and enhancing the capacity of the implementing agencies for effective policy implementation. Additionally, close monitoring, coordination, and convergence of activities along with robust supervision and evaluation, are crucial to assess their implementation impact on the population. In conclusion, it is imperative to emphasize the urgency of addressing the escalating mental health crisis in the Maldives through prioritization of leadership and governance in the implementation of the policy, along with capacity building and rigorous monitoring. This approach paves the way for sustainable development in the mental health system in Maldives.

Aminath Shahuza

Public Health Coordinator

National Mental Health Department

Challenges faced by people living with mental illness in the Maldives

The presentation by the Mental Health Support Group (MHSB) offers an overview of the lived experiences of persons with mental illnesses and psychosocial disabilities in the Maldives – with a focus on challenges. The four key areas include: stigma, challenges in the work environment, barriers to accessing mental health services, and the lack of accountability and redress mechanisms. Similar to many parts of the world there exists pervasive stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental illnesses and psychosocial disabilities, creating challenges in all spheres of life from personal and public life to the workplace. Societal, institutional and

internalized stigma in the country has resulted in individuals hiding their mental health issues for fear of discrimination, harassment and retaliation. Human resource policies in Maldivian workplaces have yet to incorporate the needs and rights of persons with mental illnesses and disabilities (including psychosocial). For instance employees are forced to provide “acceptable” reasons when requesting sick leave instead of stating their mental health needs. Mental health service provision in the country remains inadequate and insufficient leading to barriers to access.

Financial barriers, lack of available service providers and geographical disparities are key issues in mental health service provision in the country.

There is low trust in service providers stemming in part from the absence of effective accountability and redress mechanisms. Additionally individuals are hesitant to seek redress due to fear of potential repercussions and negative impacts on their lives. There is a significant need for advocacy, accountability, policy reform and societal changes in order to ensure the rights of persons with mental illnesses and psychosocial disabilities in the Maldives.

Aminath Ula Ahmed

Mental Health Support Group

Are there new advances in psychopharmacology in psychiatry and why do we need newer treatments?

Psychiatry and its treatments have truly transformed with the introduction of Chlorpromazine in 1951 for schizophrenia and Iproniazide in 1958 for major depressive disorders. Since this period, the development and introduction of many other compounds have assisted psychiatrists to better manage patients under their care. The introduction of pharmacological interventions on top of existing psychological interventions have allowed more patients to not only live healthier and normal lives, but for some, even reach their full potential. It has allowed the field of psychopharmacology to develop and better guidelines to be developed for the betterment of patient care. It has also pushed scientists to relook and rethink about psychiatric illnesses as genuine brain illnesses rather than moral defects as has been in the past. More importantly it has allowed patients to live dignified lives. This presentation attempts to introduce colleagues to newer psychopharmacological interventions available in psychiatry and discuss regarding basic issues on accessibility and affordability for our patients. This presentation will conclude with opportunities for research and advocacy.

Dr. Amer Siddiq Amer Nordin, PhD, M. Psych Med, MBChB

Department of Psychological Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malay

Neuropsychiatric manifestation of neurological conditions

Oftentimes patients present with varied neuropsychiatric symptoms , which can have many different underlying causes .

Neurology and mental health services see many patients with neuropsychiatric symptoms. The talk is about such cases and highlights the importance of conducting a proper neurological and psychiatric examination to ensure timely diagnosis and proper management.

Dr. Ahmed Rasheed

Consultant Neurologist

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Abstracts for oral presentations

Parents of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders Living in the Maldives: A Qualitative Approach in Understanding Stress and Challenges in Parenting.

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Purpose: Parenting comes with its own challenges. According to research, parents of children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDDs) experience higher levels of stress than parents of typically developing children. NDDs are a class of conditions that begin during the developmental stage and cause deficiencies leading to functional impairments such as Intellectual Disabilities, Communication Disorders, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Learning Disorder, and Motor Disorders. In the current literature, limited research has explored parenting challenges in raising children with NDD in the context of developing small nations with limited resources such as Maldives. Hence, this study explored the stresses and challenges of parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders living in the Maldives.

Method: A qualitative descriptive design study was carried out with parents of children diagnosed with NDD between the ages of 0 to 17 years, who are registered and receiving therapy at Child Development Centre (CDC), Hulhumale' Hospital. Semi-structured interviews, both face-to-face and online, were conducted for 27 parents via purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and generate common themes. The National Health Research Council (NHRC) approval is still in process for this study.

Result: Four themes are projected to emerge from the data collection: (1) Managing difficult behaviors, (2) availability of resources and services, (3) emotional support systems and (4) financial strain.

Conclusion: This study would help in identifying the major stressors and challenges parents of children with NDDs faced in the Maldives within the greater Male' area and other regional areas. The findings from this study can potentially help in developing parenting intervention programs addressing the challenges faced by parents of children with NDDs to enhance their Quality of Life. The results from this study can also be utilized in developing comprehensive support networks, resource platforms and accessibility to services for both children with NDDs and their parents.

Strengthening Mental Health Services in Island Communities: The Impact of IBAMA's Multi-Sectoral Approach

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This paper investigates the profound influence of the Integrated Multi-Sectoral Support Mechanism for Prevention and Response to Vulnerable Groups (IBAMA) on mental health services within island communities, exemplified through real-life success stories. The significance of mental health as a crucial aspect of overall well-being, particularly for vulnerable individuals, is accentuated in island communities facing limitations in specialized resources. IBAMA, guided by its principles of prevention and response to violence against children and vulnerable groups, embraces a holistic approach in rendering community support. As a community-based initiative, IBAMA plays a pivotal role in safeguarding and enhancing the mental health of vulnerable populations in island communities, ultimately shaping a more promising future for those in need. The objective of this research paper is to comprehensively understand the concept of the (IBAMA), elucidating its specific roles and functions. Additionally, the study endeavors to investigate the potential implications of IBAMA's activities on mental health and overall wellbeing. Moreover, the paper seeks to explore the transformative influence of IBAMA's initiatives on mental health, thus shedding light on its potential contributions to enhancing mental wellbeing. To achieve this objective, the methodology employed in this paper is a qualitative analysis that seeks to explore the positive impact of (IBAMA) on mental health within island communities. The study relies on a combination of real-life experiences, interviews and review of available secondary data to investigate how community social groups influence mental health outcomes.

The paper presents four compelling success stories or case studies that illuminate the transformative power of IBAMA and its positive contributions toward mental health improvement. The case studies serve as compelling evidence of the profound impact of IBAMA's multi-sectoral approach on mental health services within island communities. By empowering vulnerable individuals and families, IBAMA fosters the creation of resilient and supportive environments, thereby engendering significant positive changes in mental well-being. Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize that sustaining and expanding these favorable outcomes necessitates continuous support and active collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The establishment of community support systems is fundamental in engendering a sense of belonging and inclusion for vulnerable individuals, effectively mitigating feelings of isolation and bolstering overall mental well-being. Moreover, IBAMA's multi-sectoral approach optimally integrated mental health support with other essential services, particularly education, culminating in comprehensive care that addresses the mental health needs of students in a highly effective manner. These findings underscore the vital role IBAMA plays in bolstering mental health services, ultimately benefiting island communities and uplifting the mental well-being of their most vulnerable members.

Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy for Depression and Anxiety in the Maldives

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Purpose: The authors aim to pilot the effectiveness of Group Therapy (conducted using Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)) for Depression and Anxiety using the Health Management of Reality Treatment Manual in a clinical setting in Maldives.

Method: This is a clinical intervention pilot done using experimental methods without a control group conducted to evaluate feasibility, prior to performing a full-scale research project. Participants were selected from patients who were receiving treatment for depression and/or anxiety from the National Center for Mental Health (NCMH). Patients were given the options for individual therapy sessions and group therapy. Groups were started with participants who agreed to group therapy which was a total of 34 over a span of one and a half years. This 16-week group treatment comprised four-week modules: thoughts (cognitive restructuring), activities (behavioral activation), people (interpersonal skills training), and health (addresses physical health and depression). The effectiveness of group therapy was measured using the DASS-21 scale and comparing the results in pre and post testing, individual feedback, and observations made by facilitators.

Results: It was noted that most of the patients showed a marked increase in their overall affect. Preliminary analysis of pre- and post-DASS-21 scores shows an overall decrease in anxiety and depression scores. There was an increased awareness and recognition among participants in working towards changing their maladaptive thought patterns and bringing positive changes to their lifestyle evident from their feedback. It was further discovered through the group sessions that many of the patients felt lonely and isolated in their community and found group sessions to be a safe environment to come and socialize, which also became a motivating factor to complete group sessions. The results also describe the overall changes brought in delivering the group, based on patient feedback and facilitator observations, to contextualize the manual to a Maldivian population.

Conclusions: it showed that Group therapy using a CBT model was effective in the Maldivian context. However, further studies with a larger sample is required to generate data that can be generalized for the Maldivian population.

Conflicts of interest: None

Key words: group therapy, CBT, mental disorders, isolation, anxiety, depression

Auntie Aisha Answers: A Way Forward For Islamically-Based, Comprehensive Life Skills Education

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Purpose: This presentation provides the case for, and an illustration of, an innovative, Islamically-based and age-appropriate resource for providing comprehensive life skills education to Muslim tweens and teenagers. Issues vital to such a resource include, among others, philosophical questions such as the meaning and purpose of life, and more practical matters such as physical and mental health and intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. These and many related issues are often considered taboo in culturally conservative communities and are left unaddressed with young people.

Method: In the current context of media-driven influence on Muslim youth and the lack of age-appropriate resources on the subject matter, a multi-disciplinary approach was utilised to make classical Islamic wisdom more approachable for young readers. The author refers to the most authentic primary sources of Islamic ethics and law as well as contemporary life skill education materials, thereby providing factual accuracy, age-appropriate language, and contemporary relevance in the subject matter from an Islamic-values-based approach.

Results: The findings of this research have been compiled into book format under the title, “Auntie Aisha Answers: The Tween Muslim’s Ultimate Guide to Growing Up,” and is currently being prepared for publication. The book utilises tools such as storytelling, thought experiments and thought-provoking exercises to deliver important messages to its readers, and some of these tools will be illustrated in the presentation. It provides practical guidance on what it means to live a God-centric life and how this impacts one’s identity and interpersonal relationships. It combines Islamic rituals with concepts like Islamic mindfulness, and addresses sensitive topics such as bullying, gender roles, reproductive health and sexuality, and death and grieving. Perhaps most importantly, it gives permission to young people to approach knowledgeable and trusted adults with questions on sensitive topics.

Conclusions: Given the need of both caregivers and educators for accurate and age-appropriate tools and resources to address these vital topics with Muslim children, this resource provides a model for the development of further resources across varying mediums.

Keywords: life skills education; pre-adolescence; adolescence; Islamic-values-based; mental resiliency; resource development.

Balancing progress and well-being: Assessing impacts on mental well-being from development initiatives in the Maldives

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Purpose: Theories such as the biophilia theory demonstrate that humans have a high affinity for the natural environment and our psychological responses are positively impacted by nature. Research shows that contact with and viewing nature has psychological benefits such as stress reduction, improving attention and positively impacting emotional well-being. Today, in the Maldives, we see huge changes in our islandscapes with increasing built structures. In addition to declining green spaces, increase in high rise buildings block the view of our blue environments. Large development projects, especially structural developments, in the Maldives must undergo an environmental impact assessment (EIA) process and obtain necessary approvals from the Government. The EIA process includes assessing both environmental and social impacts. The aim of this research is to see how much the EIA considers mental well-being of people affected by development projects.

Method: The research is designed as a qualitative content analysis. Approximately 1000 EIA reports available on the Environmental Protection Agency website for years 2007 to 2022 will be analysed. The first level of analysis is to determine projects which will directly impact the daily lives of people using criteria such as project location and scale and level of impact on people. Next a checklist will be used to see if environmental, social, health and mental well-being impacts are considered in the assessments. If it is considered a low, medium, high scale measure will be used to identify the level of consideration

Results: The analysis is ongoing and preliminary findings show there is some analysis of impacts on physical well-being. However, there is little analysis of impacts on mental well-being from proposed developments.

Conclusions: Based on the findings of this research, more awareness on the need for such assessments can be raised. We recommend sharing the findings with EIA consultants and developing a more comprehensive social impact assessment matrix that includes assessing impacts on mental health. This research can help form practical connections and dialogues between the environmental and health sectors on a very important issue.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions during Covid-19 in the Maldives

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to describe the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) interventions (i.e., service provision, capacity building and social media campaign) carried out by the Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC) to mitigate psychological distress during Covid-19, promote self-help strategies and help seeking behaviors.

Method: Data was collected from desk reviews of key reports including training reports, focus group discussions with volunteers and staff, and anonymous call reports generated on the phone system, brief telephone interviews conducted with callers to the helpline between March 2020 and December 2021.

Results: During this period, about 5500 calls were made to people in isolation and quarantine and 3000 calls were received to the helpline. Majority of people who received psychosocial support were young adults (between ages of 19 - 35 years) and of Maldivian nationality. Concerns reported by callers varied across the response timeline. At the beginning, the most frequently cited concerns were informational needs, concerns about health and safety of loved ones, and concerns around health issues. Following the decrease in Covid-19 cases, the majority of callers reported mental health concerns. The majority of consumers of the service were satisfied with the service and found it to be useful.

As part of capacity building efforts, MRC conducted 57 psychological first aid training sessions and 126 capacity development sessions related to MHPSS among various stakeholders and volunteers. Through a social media campaign across various platforms, MRC was also able to achieve a combined reach of 1,181,330.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that MHPSS during Covid-19 helped to link individuals with basic needs and psychosocial support and promoted recovery and adaptive coping. They also highlight the importance of prioritizing and incorporating MHPSS interventions in relief and recovery efforts following the crisis. Challenges were also noted in implementing the overall project during Covid-19 and lessons learnt and recommendations are provided for the future.

Conflicts of interest: 'Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions during Covid-19 in the Maldives' project was funded by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Maldives. The authors of the paper. The authors of the paper were involved with Maldivian Red Crescent in the following capacity: -

- Afaa Mohamed: Managed the MRC's Call Center under the MHPSS Operations from June 2020 – March 2021 and worked as a consultant during the reporting period of the project.

- Mariyam Ifshan: Managed the training and Capacity Development Programme under the MHPSS Operation from June 2020 – February 2021 and worked as a consultant during the reporting period of the project.

- Fathimath Inasha Abdulla: Was the Programme Coordinator – Health & Inclusion of Maldivian Red Crescent and coordinated overall MHPSS operation from May 2020 – October 2022.

Keywords: Mental health, Psychosocial support, Psychological First Aid, Covid-19

Do we have the right words in Dhivehi language to use when communicating about mental health?

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Purpose: Mental health has been a significant emerging health issue and there is increasing focus on improving mental health, both nationally and internationally. One of the most important aspects of improving mental health is communicating appropriately about mental health. The aim of this research is to analyse if there are appropriate words in Dhivehi vocabulary when communicating about mental health.

Method: This is a qualitative study using principles of corpus linguistics as the method. A list of 60 English words used in communication about mental health in clinical settings was compiled by the researchers. The list was further divided into three categories, general, technical, and more technical. This list of words was analysed using a corpus, which included two 'Radheef' applications as well as articles available on the internet about mental health in Dhivehi language. These Radheef applications were searched to find equivalent Dhivehi. Subsequently, both the English words (written in Dhivehi script) and the equivalent Dhivehi words were used to do a Google search on Dhivehi articles for comparative words. Additionally, local mental health experts and language experts were given the list of English words and were asked to provide a Dhivehi word that would best describe the English word in the list.

Results: The preliminary analysis revealed that there were few Dhivehi words for most of the English words in the compiled list, with usually one Dhivehi word used to define many English words, hence difficult to express the same meaning in Dhivehi. There are fewer technical terms in Dhivehi language to describe mental health related words. It was also found that there were few new Dhivehi words that have been added to Dhivehi language about mental health. However, it was evident that these words were not commonly used in general communication in Dhivehi articles. It was interesting to note that comparatively more Dhivehi words were compiled for the list by the language and mental health experts.

Conclusions: The preliminary findings suggest that there are very few words available in Dhivehi language to use while communicating about mental health in the electronic corpus. However, there were more options available in the lists compiled by the language and mental health experts. It is evident that further research is needed to explore this further.

Key words: Mental health, Mental disorders, Communication, Dhivehi language, Vocabulary

Bullying in Schools: Anti Bullying Policy and Effective Interventions

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Purpose: Bullying is considered as the most common form of violence that takes place within the school context, and one of the leading causes for suicide. Although bullying has been researched for over four decades the issue still remains prevalent and is of a concern to school administration. For any act of violence to be considered as bullying, it should have three characteristics: repetition, intentional and power difference. The Ministry of Education, Maldives officially launched policies for bullying, suicide, and student behaviour regulations. These policies were released to ensure students safety and wellbeing, along with educating appropriate behaviours in a schoolground. The overall aims of these policies and regulation were to facilitate awareness, prevention, and to alleviate symptoms bullying/suicide faced by the students. Additionally, the National Institute of Education released a Health and Physical Education in the National Curriculum key stage 1 (NCHPE), to develop students with 21st century skills, and are healthy both physically, also spiritually and to be responsible towards the progression of the Maldivian society.

The present study evaluated and reviewed anti-bullying policy, suicide prevention guidelines, student behaviour regulations and the NCHPE to better understand the effective prevention methods that are in place for schools to mitigate bullying and ensure students safety.

Method: The study takes on a qualitative research approach to evaluate the existing anti bullying policy, suicide prevention guideline and the NCHPE. The content of the curriculum is evaluated in depth to understand the effective bullying interventions that are embedded in the curriculum and compared with the international standards. Further analysis of existing suicide prevention policy and student behaviour regulation guidelines will also be implemented.

Results: The study analysis is currently ongoing, but inferences can be made. The anti-bullying policy is very comprehensive. The standard intervention stated in the policy in case of a bullying incident, is to provide psychosocial support via school counselor, however, in the absence of a counsellor the class teacher/ leading teacher/ life skills facilitator needs to intervene. Additionally, in analyzing the NCHPE, it was revealed that there is a brief mention of bullying without additional context. The lack of information regarding bullying in the NCHPE calls for a need to re-evaluate the curriculum.

Conclusions: The standard intervention stated in the policy in case of a bullying incident, is to provide psychosocial support via school counselor, however, what is concerning is that many schools are without a counsellor and a trained life skills facilitator. Thus, it is hoped that through this review effective bullying strategies can be developed and implemented in schools to ensure that school is a safer place for students and a trusted place for parents to send their students.

Conflicts of interest: The authors do not have any conflict of interest in conducting this study.

Key words: Anti bullying policy, bullying, Health and PE Curriculum

Emotional distress in covid-19 patients in Maldives

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Purpose: There is a growing international literature on emotional stress and other psychological effects of COVID-19 pandemic, but limited studies are done in the Maldives and none with the patients. Hence this study is important. This study is a cross-sectional study, measuring the prevalence of emotional distress among patients with COVID-19 in the Maldivian population.

Method: This study was conducted in Maldivian nations above 18 of age with COVID-19 who were admitted in isolation facilities. Patients who were on treatment for any other chronic medical conditions, severe and critical COVID-19 disease were excluded. This study was conducted over a period of 2 months by administering a local translated version of DASS21 questionnaire. Stata program was used to analyze the data.

Results: The total of 195 patients were included in this study. The mean age of the patients was 40 (CI at 95% 38–42) years. The respondents were 48.7% men and 51.3% women. Overall, 9% of patients with COVID-19 had depression levels above the cut-off score while 23% of patients had anxiety and 12% of the patients had stress. There was a statistically significant relationship between gender and depression, anxiety and stress ($p < 0.01$). Symptomatic cases had a significantly higher level of stress than asymptomatic patients ($p < 0.05$), but no significant association was observed with symptomatic status and anxiety or depression.

Conclusions: The management of patients with COVID-19 should be multi-disciplinary with special focus on the mental wellbeing of our patients. This study highlights the importance of addressing the mental health needs of patients by developing the standards of care and proper protocols. We should aim to establish proper communication with the patients in order to identify emotional distress and provide appropriate mental health care.

Key words : Depression, anxiety, stress, COVID-19

Implementing WHO's mhGAP-based training in the Maldives and monitoring its outcome

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Background: The WHO's mhGAP Intervention Guide (mhGAP-IG) for mental, neurological and substance use (MNS) disorders in non-specialist health settings is a valuable tool to scale up services for people with MNS conditions and their families in low and middle- income countries (LMICs).

Purpose: mhGAP versions 1.0 and 2.0-based training programmes were conducted in the Maldives including MHAF's first mhGAP training which was held in 2015. Our organization's programme was first designed as an intensive 6-day training. Since 2015, we held trainings till 2019 and another 3 trainings in 2023. Most of these trainings were attended by 29-30 participants from both health professionals and non- health professionals, working in front-line services and coming into contact with mental health patients.

Method: This paper aims to evaluate attitudes and knowledge of both health professional and non-health professionals towards MNS disorders and stigma towards MNS. Throughout these programmes, data was gathered at the beginning and end of the training, and also at the end of each selected module. The data attained from these training programmes were used to monitor the impact of the training in evaluating any changes towards knowledge relevant to the participants, management of MNS disorders and their stigma towards MNS pre and post training and if there has been any impact of this training on the ground towards aiding in scaling up services for people with MNS conditions and their families.

Results: The project findings are being further analyzed. However, from the current tally of accumulated scores, it is evident that the majority of the trainees in the study revealed a statistically significant improvement in knowledge and attitude towards management of MNS disorders and stigma associated from the baseline (pre-training).

Conclusion: Such intensive short term mhGAP training could be instrumental in cultivating knowledge and attitude in countries like Maldives with extensive needs in terms of quality of comprehensive healthcare at primary level. Further studies tailored to local contexts are warranted on the retention of information after training and monitoring the impact of the training on clinical practice.

Mental health services for children in the Maldives – A child rights perspective

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Purpose: The Children's Ombudsperson Office, established under the Child Rights Protection Act (CRPA) (No. 19/2019), monitors the implementation of CRPA and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The paper aims to evaluate the regulation and accessibility to mental health services and provides a contextual understanding of the implementation of child rights perspectives in the delivery of mental health services for children in the Maldives.

Method: Data for this paper was collected from the findings of the child rights audits and investigations conducted between 2020 to 2023. The methodology for the audits and investigations included a comprehensive review of relevant national legislation, international conventions, good practices and standards related to child rights and mental health. Data for the audits and investigations were collected qualitatively through interviews, document reviews and building inspections.

Results: The analysis of the collected data revealed significant gaps and areas of concern. Findings indicated an overall lack of accessibility to mental healthcare services, compounded by the centralization of the services in the Greater Male Area and the lack of systematic referral mechanisms within institutions. It was identified that most island hospitals and health centers did not have adequate staff trained to provide mental health support or provide specialized psychiatric care. Additionally, lack of school counselors poses several issues for children exposed to vulnerable circumstances in islands where alternative mental health services are not available. These factors are further exacerbated due to the lack of regulatory mechanisms within the mental health sector, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of services provided and overall lack of planning to mitigate for the above factors.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, recommendations were made to strengthen child rights protections in mental health services, including enhanced trainings for professionals, establishment of child-friendly environments, increasing the efforts of mental health promotion and prevention and establishing a community system to provide continuous mental health services. The integration of child rights principles into mental health practices is necessary to ensure that children receive the quality of care that support their overall development and well-being.

Factors contributing to stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders in Maldives

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Purpose: Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) refers to a group of lifelong neurodevelopmental disorders affecting communication, social and behavioural development of the diagnosed individuals. Raising a child with ASD involves many demands that go beyond the challenges of raising typically developing children, which places mothers (as primary caregivers) of these children at a greater risk of experiencing increased levels of stress, and thus mental health issues. The purpose of this study was to gauge the different factors contributing to stress among mothers of children with autism in Maldives. Identifying these factors will be helpful in designing interventions to support and coordinate better services for families of children with ASD.

Method: Based on the interpretivist paradigm, this research utilized the qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the topic. Using purposive sampling, eight mothers of children with ASD were selected and interviewed using open-ended, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

Results: Seven main themes emerged as stressors affecting mental health of mothers of children with ASD. These include factors related to the child (severity of autistic symptoms such as atypical behaviours, sensory issues, feeding issues, sleeping issues, speech and communication issues), factors related to the mother (parental resilience, coping strategies, vicarious futurity, parenting self-efficacy, worry and guilt, social well-being and social support), societal factors (social stigma, societal awareness), factors related to schooling and education (teachers' awareness and acceptance, teachers' competence, resource availability, bullying, peer-awareness, access to shadow teachers), financial burden and strain on the family (single-income dependence, expensive services), factors related to health services acquisition and maintenance (health care providers' awareness, empathy, waiting time, service availability, affordability), and familial relationship (strain on relationship between spouse, guilt associated with unequal distribution of time for other children, nature of coparenting relationship and support, parenting style).

Conclusions: Severity of the child's autistic symptoms was found to be the most salient factor contributing to maternal stress. However, it was concluded that mothers' ability and confidence in their competence, the coping strategies used, and the external support received significantly affected how they navigated through this stressful journey. Hence, increasing understanding among health practitioners, educators, policy makers and social workers about the unique stress and strain that raising a child with ASD may cause is critical to developing effective interventions that can be implemented to foster preservation, resilience and well-being of family unit, especially mothers.

Key words: Autism Spectrum Disorders, Mothers, Stress, Maldives, Mental Health

The relationship between online social support and psychological well being: a random survey in Maldives and new Zealand

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Purpose: Previous research has repeatedly established that 'in-person' (offline) social support, both perceived and actual, is associated with psychological wellbeing. However, the growing literature on the relationship between social support acquired from social networking sites (SNSs) and psychological wellbeing is less clear. Some studies have reported a positive association between online perceived social support and psychological wellbeing, but these studies were based predominantly on convenience samples of college students primarily from the United States and Asia. Therefore, the objective of the current study was to examine relationships between online perceived social support and psychological wellbeing and to compare the strength of the statistical association of this relationship to traditional 'in-person' or offline perceived social support.

Results: The multivariable regression analyses show that higher levels of perceived social support from online interaction were not associated with better psychological wellbeing in any of the three sample groups. In contrast to perceived online social support, perceived social support from offline social networks was positively associated with psychological wellbeing in both New Zealand and Maldives random community samples. In the clinical sample, unlike in the general population samples, the results showed only a marginally significant positive association between offline perceived social support and psychological wellbeing.

Conclusions: This study's findings suggest that unlike online social support, traditional offline social support is significantly associated with better psychological wellbeing which aligns with the robust general literature that has shown social support to be a strong predictor of psychological wellbeing. These results confirm the importance of real-life social support derived from offline social networks in psychological wellbeing. The role of social support derived online did not add measurably to psychological wellbeing levels but neither did it detract from that link. These findings are discussed in light of limitations and future research.

Method: A quantitative cross-sectional survey of randomly selected community samples of adults, from New Zealand, (N = 385) and Maldives, (N = 411), using carefully selected best measures available at the time was adopted in this study. The study hypotheses were also tested on a third sample, a small convenience clinical sample from New Zealand, (N = 78) for comparison with the general population groups.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Abstracts for poster presentations

Bullying Prevention for a Happier and Safer Schools: Implementation of the Bullying Prevention Month

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Purpose: Despite the rapid growth in opportunities for socialising, it is also evident that there has been a marked increase in acts of anti-socialising, especially of those such as bullying. Bullying can have a profound impact on the emotional and psychological well being of children. Therefore, the project initiated a bullying prevention month that was conducted by the Ministry of Education together with Advocating the Rights of Children. The aim of this project was to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students through educating them.

Method: The target population included all the students enrolled in all government schools. The bullying prevention month was conducted from 26th February to 23rd March 2023 and activities were included under four main themes: Respect, Responsiveness, Kindness and Tolerance. One of these themes were followed each week. This included a series of activities, where assemblies relating to this were held twice weekly. During these assemblies, emphasis was given to reinforce the values to be promoted among the students. While the assemblies were led by teachers on Sundays to provide information related to bullying, the students led the assemblies on Thursdays showcasing the desired values through skits, plays, pledges, poems or short stories. Furthermore, daily activities on bullying were conducted throughout the week. To increase awareness against bullying, notes for teachers and parents were also distributed weekly. Story telling and case studies were also used simultaneously, as a means for inculcating these values in the students.

Results: The project was successfully completed by the 23rd of March 2023 and it was successfully implemented in all 215 schools with positive feedback. The findings were through anecdotal evidence, student interviews and feedback from the teachers. Efforts to include the values of respect and kindness had helped cultivate stronger bonds of friendship among students. Moreover, special focus on tolerance and responsiveness had enabled students to become responsible and empathetic individuals, equipped to navigate complex social situations and thereby engage in classroom discussion without the fear of being judged

Conclusions: Violence prevention, positive coping skills and resilience building were the areas that were tackled through the bullying prevention month. It is crucial to conduct such awareness through the involvement of all relevant stakeholders to ensure that such anti-social acts are minimised.

Unraveling the Rise of Self-Harming Behaviors Among Teenagers: Exploring the Impact to Mental Health Services and Addressing Challenges.

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Purpose: To effectively address self-harm among teenagers, comprehensive insights into the nature and causes of self-harm among this vulnerable population were essential. The research aimed to shed light on the multifaceted nature of self-harm in this age groups. A significant aspect of the study was to examine why teenagers were reluctant to seek assistance from mental health services, despite their availability. Identifying the barriers and stigmas surrounding mental health was crucial in devising strategies to promote help-seeking behavior among affected adolescents. Finally, the research focused on the age categories of teenagers involved in reported self-harming cases. Understanding the specific age groups most susceptible to self-harm will aid in developing targeted interventions and preventive measures.

Method: This mixed method, quantitative and qualitative research study aimed to investigate the rise of self-harming behaviors among teenagers. The research sought to understand through quantitative analysis the different types, age categories, gender and other demographics of self-harming cases reported during 2019 to 2023 to Child and family protection Services, with an analysis of the recorded data, explored the underlying reasons behind this concerning trend, and identified the barriers preventing affected adolescents from seeking mental health services through analysis of secondary data in the case notes of the self-harming cases. Qualitative interviews from case workers through a set of unstructured questions consisting of 10 questions will be the primary data collected in the study.

Results: The data analysis is anticipated to draw attention on creating comprehensive insights into the nature and causes of self-harm among teenagers, creating an understanding on the nature of self-harming cases and the reasons teenagers were reluctant to seek assistance from mental health services

Conclusions: The findings of this study have significant implications for mental health professionals, policymakers, and educators. Deeper insights into the rise of self-harming behaviors and the challenges in accessing mental health services can pave the way for collaborative efforts to develop more effective and supportive measures to address this pressing public health issue.

Breaking the stigma- Community reintegration of patients suffering psychiatric illnesses- An exploratory study

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Purpose: The main purpose of this study includes understanding the stigma attached with psychiatric illnesses, as there is a tremendous increase in the number of patients suffering psychiatric illness requiring residential care in the Maldives. Similarly identifying the challenges in community reintegration of patients suffering from psychiatric illnesses for community reintegration also becomes important as HPSN being the only residential facility it is very challenging to cater to this demand as successfully reintegrated are few

Method: This research employs an exploratory qualitative research design. The sample of the study includes a diverse sample of 40 participants selected through purposive sampling. Which includes 10 patients suffering from psychiatric illnesses admitted in HPSN, 10 care workers from HPSN, 10 social service workers working with the selected sample of patients and 1parent/ patient from the selected sample of patients.

The data for this study will be collected through semi structured interview method. To understand the challenges in community reintegration the social service workers will only be interviewed with the question set A consisting of 5 semi structured questions and to understand the stigma associated with psychiatric illnesses the care givers, patients and parents participating in the study will be interviewed with the question set A, in which 5 questions targeted separately for each group.

Results and conclusions: The results will provide an understanding of the stigma attached with psychiatric illnesses from diverse perspective. It is also anticipated that the challenges faced in community reintegration will be explored from a diverse perspective too.

Conclusions: It is projected that the results from the semi structured interview will allow to draw conclusion on understanding the stigma attached with psychiatric illnesses, identifying the challenges in community reintegration of patients suffering from psychiatric illnesses for community reintegration.

Identifying Nutrition Therapies Appropriate for the Treatment of Psychological Disorders in the Maldivian Population: A Preliminary Review

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Purpose: In the recent years, interest has been growing with regards to the association of diet and dietary habits with mental health. Priori diets and dietary practices are showing its benefit in the treatment of psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. The purpose of this review is to identify diet therapies or diets which are appropriate to be provided for patients with psychological disorders in the Maldivian population and to identify the gaps in literature to build more research to formulate the nutrition therapy in psychological disorders.

Method: An electronic database search was done using Google scholar using search phrases “diet and mental health, dietary practices and mental health, specific food and mental health, specific nutrients and mental health”. Search criteria was limited to research done on adult and elderly population age 18 years and above and research published after July 2018. The studies were sorted based on diets or dietary habits and dietary education, specific nutrients, specific food groups in relationship to mental health.

Results: A Total of 63 research articles were included for this review, from which, 36 were cross-sectional, 2 were control trials, 5 were cohorts or longitudinal studies, 1 was a case control study, 9 were systematic reviews or meta-analysis, and the rest reviews. From the research done, the majority of the research shows that a priori diets and some of the micronutrients in our food help in both prevention and treatment of psychological disorders. However, these priori diets are a far cry from general diets of Maldivians, and no study had compared general healthy eating with mental health or use of dietary education tool in treating psychological disorders. While, people choose food based on religion and culture, it is important to investigate the association between religious dietary practices and Qur’anic food in relation to mental health. Research done on the benefits of Islamic fasting on mental health was identified, but there was no study focusing on the association of food mentioned in the Qur’an with mental health.

Conclusions: literature shows the benefits of a priori diets on treatment of psychological disorders. But more research needs to be done on the use of dietary education tools or use of Qur’anic foods on treatment of psychological disorders.

Key words: diet therapy, mental health, psychological disorders, priori diets

Mental Health Education in Curricula of The Maldives National University

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Key words: mental health education, course coordinators' perceptions, curriculum mapping, health sciences

Purpose: Mental health education is a priority area in most developing countries and global emphasis is placed on developing qualified professionals to address the growing mental health concerns of countries. While health-based courses are rapidly increasing in the educational landscapes in Maldives, it is significant to examine the inclusion of mental health in health sciences-based courses. Moreover, Maldives faces numerous challenges in times of retention of qualified mental health professionals, difficulties in early interventions and prevention and battling the stigma surrounding mental health. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the inclusion of mental health in existing curriculums of health sciences and nursing courses at The Maldives National University. The study addresses the following research questions: 1. What are the courses that incorporate mental health education? 2. What are the views of course coordinators on incorporating mental health education.

Method: The study will utilize a qualitative research design, where content analysis will be used to identify key themes that are included in the curriculum, and semi-structured interviews will be held with course coordinators to gather their knowledge and perception on the inclusion of mental health in existing curricula. The courses offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences and School of Nursing will be chosen for content analysis. A curriculum mapping of course structures will be conducted to identify the subjects that include mental health components and further subjects will be identified through the interviews with course coordinators. Content analysis will be done to identify whether course subjects provide in-depth knowledge, clinical skills, prevention, awareness, and clinical exposure.

Results: The projected results of this study will be that courses that develop human practitioners working in the health and social sector would incorporate mental health-related modules to adequately prepare them for the workforce.

Conclusions: The findings of the present study will enable educators and curriculum developers

to confer with mental health professionals to incorporate in health-based disciplines but also in areas that have the potential of engaging with service users. Such reviews in education are crucial in preventing issues surrounding mental health, facilitating early interventions, and promoting mental health education and awareness that can buffer the stigma surrounding mental health in the country.

A snapshot of the history of Mental Health in the Maldives

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Purpose: Mental health is a significant emerging health issue and there is little documented about the history of mental health services in the Maldives. It is important to understand the evolution of mental health services to assist in better planning of mental health services and organise prevention efforts for the future. This paper aims to review the development of mental health services in the Maldives, particularly in connection to stigma, the development of clinical mental health services, mental health promotion efforts and systemic work to address mental health at policy level.

Method: The study was undertaken using a qualitative methodological framework with documentary analysis and in-depth interviews of key informants. Document collection involved gathering relevant information from related stakeholders through formal and informal approaches of both digital and physical documents. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 key informants, selected purposively for their knowledge around development of mental health services from various perspectives. The transcribed interviews and documents will be analysed to identify themes as well as specific content relevant to the development of mental health services.

Results: The data collection and analysis has not been completed and the findings are preliminary. The initial findings indicate the significant negative and positive aspects of religion and culture in contributing towards stigma and care for people with mental disorders. The provision of care with the establishment of Home for People with Special Needs in 1976 is a significant milestone. The start of psychiatric outpatient services with the opening of Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in 1995 is also a major development. There have been significant efforts in mental health promotion over the years with focus on life skills training in youth as well as psychosocial support. The release of National Mental Health Policy in 2015 marks an important step in systemic efforts at policy level to address mental health.

Conclusion: The study is expected to provide important information about the development of mental health services in the Maldives which will help shape future planning of mental health services and organised prevention efforts.

Keywords: Mental health, History, Development, Maldives

Impact of stigma on patients with mental illness, registered in National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) of Maldives

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Purpose: Stigma associated with mental illness is a global issue which has a huge impact on the quality of life of individuals who experiences mental illness Though mental health conditions are increasing in Maldives, there is no available research conducted locally to assess the situation in the country. The aim of the study is to examine stigma based on patients' perception of negative feelings which resulted from behaviors of people towards them. Research will focus on finding the answers for the effects of stigma associated with mental illness, their perceived level of internalized stigma and the types of stigma faced by people with mental illness who are registered in NCMH of IGMH.

Method: 210 participants will be selected among the 574 people who had minimal 3 visits at NCMH out patient department in 2020 by selecting every 3rd patient in the registry list. Data collection will be done within one-month period by a structured interview using a research questionnaire. Research tool consists of three sections in which major section is Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Inventory (ISMI). Data will be analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and will be presented in tables using frequency and percentages.

Results: Once data is collected, findings will be shared to provide an insight and equip policy makers and professionals in various areas to be focused in dealing with people who have mental illness in Maldives.

Conclusions: Results of the research will be utilized to develop standard care of practice and to bring necessary amendments to the clinical practice.

A review of critical incidents reported in the National Centre for Mental Health Inpatient Care Unit (NCMH IPCU) of Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH).

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Purpose: High rates of patient and caretaker perpetrated aggressions are a growing concern for nurses working in the NCMH inpatient care unit with negative consequences for the patients, nurses and the organization. The aim of this review is to analyze the critical incidents reported in National Centre for Mental Health Inpatient Care Unit of IGMH to provide a safe environment to both the patient and employees during the course of the treatment process.

Method: An analysis of the incident reports from January 2022 to June 2023 was done using a retrospective study methodology. 50 incidents in total were recorded during the chosen time period for the review. On the basis of the exclusion criteria, 10 of these reports were excluded. 40 reported instances serve as the sample size for this review. The reported incidents from the Centre for Mental Health Inpatient Care Unit were used to collect the data. The information included any safety incidents that involved aggression, violence, or intentional self-harm and were committed either by the patient or the caretaker. Data was analysed with content analysis.

Results: The incidents resulted in negative consequences to patients, staff, institute and patient's caretakers. These reports identified 19 types of critical situations, in which nurses were the main personnel involved. The result also has described 22 interventions been carried out during these incidents and the most commonly used intervention to deescalate the situation is chemical restrain.

Conclusions: The review showed that the staff working in NCMH Inpatient Care Unit encounters critical incidents in everyday practice. Therefore, it is important to conduct staff training sessions to enhance safe practice and to develop a risk assessment and management guideline to manage patient aggression effectively.

Incorporating Mindfulness to Create Trauma-Informed Classrooms

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Purpose: High rates of violence against children in Maldives calls for a need to create Trauma-Informed Classrooms (TIC). TICs are classes taught by teachers who consider students' traumatic experiences, understand trauma reactions and dealing with them. Research indicates reported child abuse cases are on the rise, with 47% of children have been subject to either physical or emotional punishments, and 15% of adolescents have experienced sexual abuse. Mindfulness is a simple yet powerful technique to improve mental health, including reactions to traumatic stress. Research has demonstrated the benefits of mindfulness-based treatments, including improvement of emotional regulation and reduction symptoms of depression and anxiety. Currently, mindfulness techniques are not formally included in mainstream classrooms in Maldives. The purpose of this study is to understand the effectiveness of incorporating mindfulness in the classroom, with a focus on positive impacts on students.

Method: A literature review of incorporating mindfulness in classrooms is conducted using Google Scholar database. For the literature search, 1) keywords search, 2) backwards search and 3) forwards search methods were used. The primary inclusion criteria were if the study included the use of mindfulness techniques in the classroom, and if the effectiveness for using these techniques were assessed. The age group selected was classes for students aged 7 to 18, as this is a vulnerable age group experiencing high rates of abuse. The literature chosen did not pertain to a particular region as this is an emerging area with limited studies; with none in Maldives. The content is analysed to see if mindfulness was effective and if there were any impacts on students.

Results: The analysis is in progress, but early inferences can be made that using mindfulness techniques in the classroom, such as breathing techniques and guided relaxation can have positive outcomes for students in terms of stress reduction and academic performance.

Conclusion: This research could help highlight the importance of using holistic approaches such as mindfulness to mitigate the impacts of trauma. Training teachers to use such techniques in the classroom can be an effective approach to do this, given the limited mental healthcare resources in the country.

Key words: Mindfulness, Trauma Informed Classrooms, Students

The journey of forming and running a Cancer Support Group (CSG) by Cancer Society of Maldives (CSM) in the Maldives; to assess the impacts of CSG on mental wellbeing of patients and caregivers.

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Abstract: This article summarizes the journey taken by Cancer Society of Maldives (CSM) to set up a Cancer Support Group (CSG) and investigates how it has evolved over time.

Introduction and background: The Cancer Society of Maldives (CSM) is a national community based (non-profit/non-governmental) organization formed for the purpose of reducing the incidence and impact of cancer in the Maldives. The Cancer Support Group (CSG) was formed on 4th February 2016. The main aim of the CSG is to create a platform where cancer patients and caregivers could interact with each other and technical experts in the field to exchange their stories and views and seek support and provide support to each other. This is the first time ever that such a support group has been established in Maldives. In review of global literature there are multiple studies citing evidence on cancer support groups having a host of psychological and other benefits for mental wellbeing and improving the quality of life of a cancer patient or care giver.

Aims and Objectives/ research question: This research investigates the process of forming a cancer support group in the Maldives context and investigates the journey and experiences of doing so with the achievements, challenges and lessons learnt by CSM.

Methodology: It is a qualitative study with the main sources of data, being secondary data, kept by CSM on record of CSG meetings. The other source of information is Key Informant interviews of the main drivers of CSG since its inception.

Results: Initial difficulties faced by CSM as it was completely a new concept in Maldives adding to it the stigma around cancer and people's reluctance to come forward with their stories. The support group evolved from 3 to more than 20 people in regular group sessions and presence of 216 members in the Cancer Support Community Viber group. The modification into online during COVID-19 which transitioned into hybrid mode post covid was a success as members taking treatment abroad and living in the islands can join the CSG meetings. Even though the support group was started as fortnightly meetings, presently it is held once a week without fail. The key informants noted that the members have expressed how helpful CSG is for their psychological wellbeing during and after their cancer journey.

Conclusion: CSG is one of the most rewarding and regular service that CSM provides to cancer patients directly. It has been successful and going on for more than 8 years. The records kept by CSM, and the key informant interviews clearly suggests that the members of CSG benefit from attending the meetings to relieve their emotional stress related to dealing with a cancer

diagnosis, going through the treatment process, and living as a cancer survivor post treatment. There is a need for more support groups in the islands as noted by the key informants. A further study on how the support group directly impacts cancer patients and caregivers is warranted to further draw additional conclusions on the broader impact of the support group.

Limitations: Since patients were not directly interviewed for this study the broader impact of the benefits of the support group could not be ascertained (awaiting ethics clearance through NHRC for such a study).

Keywords: Cancer, Cancer Support Group

Pathology of internet gaming among adolescents

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper to shed light into the development of pathology of internet gaming among adolescents. Maldives is undergoing digital transformation with significant advancements in ICT in education, e-commerce and digital marketing. Many Maldivians prefer online markets for daily exchange of goods and services. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are popular platforms for young people to connect with people around the world. With these open and easy channels of interactions on multiple devices such as phones, tablets and computers, playing video games has become a habit. Studies on internet gaming reveals that it has significant changes in the brain similar to substance and gambling addictions.

Method: The paper is a conceptual review on psychopathology of internet gaming. For the concept review articles published in EBSCOhost and Pubmed between 2021 to 2023 on addiction and gaming will be reviewed. Key terms such as gaming, online gaming, addiction, gaming pathology will be used to search for the articles. The paper explores the mechanism of addiction, whether playing video games is a real addiction, signs and symptoms of addiction, consequences of gaming addiction and possible treatments for gaming addicts. The information for this paper is extracted from high quality journal articles.

Results: Internet gaming disorder (IGD) is an addiction in which individuals are preoccupied with playing online games to the extent they are unable to regulate behaviour leading to physical and psychological harm

Conclusions: While gaming addiction is a relatively new concept and more research is being done, creating awareness among the general public should be at its forefront.

Key words: Addiction, digital transformation, gaming

Existential Anxiety amid COVID-19 pandemic in Kashmiri population

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Purpose: Existential anxiety (EA) is concerned with the fact of ultimate concern related to life and death. It becomes salient when there is exposure to stressful experiences where the stress is profound and the resources seem insufficient. Since COVID-19 is such a stressful event which poses a strong threat to human life and existence, the development of EA is very likely to have affected human mind. Therefore this study was conducted with the aim of measuring the EA, the prevalence and magnitude, in Kashmiri population during this pandemic.

Method: This study was conducted by reaching out to people online via various social media platforms. This was a cross-sectional study. The time period for data collection was set to be 4 weeks. Data collection was started on 20th of April 2020. All the participants belonging to Kashmir valley were included. EA questionnaire (EAQ) developed by Weems et al was used for measuring EA among the study participants.

Results: A total of 132 subjects who filled the questionnaire were taken for analysis. The prevalence of EA concerns among the respondents were as death 55.3%, fate 62.1%, emptiness 72.7%, meaninglessness 31.8%, guilt 54.5%, and condemnation 63.6%. The mean Existential anxiety score in our study was 5.0 with a standard deviation of 3.22. EA was higher in those who had ever been diagnosed for mental illness by a psychiatrist than those who had no such issues. EA score was much higher in those who had ever felt a need to visit a psychiatrist than those who never felt such a need. There was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of existential anxiety for those who never felt this need and those who felt this need since the start of COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions: There's high prevalence of EA among the respondents of Kashmir valley. Relative concerns are more prevalent than absolute concerns. EA score was higher among those who had mental health issues compared to others.

Family burden in the patients of alcohol dependence syndrome attending the psychiatry department of Nepal Medical College Teaching Hospital

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Purpose : Substance abuse/dependence causes significant harm to self, family and society as a whole. The costs that families incur in terms of economic hardships, social isolation and psychological strain, are referred to as family burden. The study of family burden in alcohol dependence assumes importance because the profile of the associated factors can both influence the outcome of the problem, and be useful in designing and planning interventions to help the families cope with alcohol dependence.

Method: A descriptive, cross-sectional, hospital based study at NMCTH on 105 respondents (N=105) for 1 year (3rd October 2016-3rd September 2017) was carried at Attarkhel. Sample of all cases of Alcohol dependence syndrome were included in the study and those who refused to give family details, the patient and the patient parties who did not give informed consent, pregnancy, patient and PCT with severe comorbid medical and surgical medical illness were excluded from the study. Proforma, Family burden interview schedule (FBIS, Pai and Kapur 1981), Diagnostic Criteria for Research by the Division of Mental Health of the World Health Organization (WHO, 1992) as per Tenth Revision of International Classification of Diseases were the research tools used in the study.

Result; The subjective burden analysed found that spouse (59%) had more burden than non-spouse among caregivers. The burden was moderate among the female spouse and high among illiterate and unemployed ones.

Conclusion; This study suggests that there is moderate burden among the PCTs of the respondents and mainly spouse are the ones to be affected more. The increasing trend of alcohol consumption among males and females either literate or illiterate, employed or unemployed has a devastating role to the family as well as society. A national policy needs to be formulated aimed to create awareness about moderation of alcohol consumption, associated health consequences, impact on family and friends and work productivity. Alcohol dependence possesses problems not only on the individual users but also on the family and the community. The study will be useful in designing and planning interventions to help the families cope with alcohol dependence.

Analysis of Clinical and Financial Consequences of Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) Unavailability in the Maldives: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Purpose: Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is a highly effective treatment for various mental health disorders. However, ECT service is currently not available in Maldives, resulting in the referral of patients abroad for the service. This study aims to analyze the clinical and financial consequences of ECT unavailability by examining data provided by various stakeholders in Maldives.

Method: This cross-sectional study utilizes data collected from the Aasandha Insurance, National Social Protection Agency, and Indhira Gandhi Memorial Hospital. Specifically, the study focuses on the number of patients sent abroad for ECT and the associated costs incurred from 2018 to 2022. These data will be used to evaluate the clinical and financial implications of ECT unavailability in the Maldives.

Results: By examining the number of patients sent abroad for ECT, the study will underscore the prevalence of this practice and shed light on the treatment delay and therapeutic gap experienced by the local population. Moreover, by assessing the associated costs incurred by sending patients abroad, the study will elucidate the financial toll on the healthcare system.

Conclusions: The study's results will enhance our grasp of the full scope of how ECT unavailability affects the Maldives on patient care and the healthcare economy. By emphasizing its effects on patient well-being and healthcare spending, the study will offer essential knowledge for policymakers and medical experts. The data can guide future resource allocation strategies to start and improve ECT service within the Maldives, ultimately leading to better mental health outcomes for the population.

Data inferences for an 18-month period for children with developmental delay.

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Purpose: This research aims to provide primary data on children with developmental delays attending the Child Development Centre (CDC). The Child Development Centre based in Hulhumalé Hospital is the only child-centered facility which provides multidisciplinary services in the Maldives. The study will help identify variations in the demographic data, clinical diagnosis and services/therapies provided. Inferences were made based on the population of children requesting and receiving therapy in the last 18 months from the Child Development Centre.

Method: A quantitative descriptive study of the children who attended the Child Development Centre, Hulhumalé Hospital for a period of 18 months from January 2022 till June 2023. Existing primary data from the Child Development Centre was utilized in this research.

Results: The results are projected to show elevated demands for certain therapies, such as occupational therapy and behavioral therapy. In addition, demographic differences in children with developmental delays seeking services was also identified. Furthermore, identification of regions with higher demand for services.

Conclusion: The results of this research can facilitate in further research to identify the reasons, for higher demands for certain therapies. Furthermore, identify regions with higher demands for therapies, so strategies or new establishments can be made in nearby areas to allow access to services. Finding the predominant conditions and areas with most demand will aid in streamlining services and identifying areas for developing capacity and resources.

A retrospective descriptive analysis of young people re-admitted with suicidal behavior in the National Centre for Mental Health, Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Maldives

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Introduction; Recent research indicates an increased global incidence of self-harm and suicide among young people and similar trends have been observed in the Maldives. There is also an increased number of re-admissions following index admission of young people with suicidal behavior despite in-patient management. Hence, we propose a retrospective descriptive study to find out the effectiveness of usual care of practice provided by National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) in managing young patients presenting with suicidal behavior.

Method; All cases re-admitted under NCMH with suicidal behavior within a 1-year period among those aged 12-24 years will be identified from the hospital database. AfterwardsAfterward, the treatment records for each case will be retrospectively evaluated to find out the usual care of practice using a questionnaire developed with reference to the practice guideline for the treatment of patients with suicidal behaviors published by the American Psychiatric Association.

Results; Once data has been collected, This study we will present our findings reflecting the usual care of practice provided in NCMH inpatient unit in Maldives for young people presenting with suicidal behavior. The findings will focus on, factors associated with re-admission which may include patient relatedpatient-related factors, care-provider relatedcare-provider-related factors and treatment relatedtreatment-related factors.

Conclusion; Based on the results we will comment discuss on the adequacy of the current usual care of practice, probable reasons for readmission of young people with suicidal behavior , and make recommendations for improving the current standard care of practice and further research.

Developing a culturally and linguistically responsive AAC app with cutting edge technology

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Purpose: Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC), are communication devices, systems, strategies, and tools that replace or support natural speech. These tools support people who have difficulties communicating using speech. Currently, there are various robust AAC systems developed in many languages. However, there is no AAC system designed in Dhivehi for Maldivian culture and for those who understand and use the Dhivehi language. This paper aims to introduce an AAC Application Developed in Dhivehi Language which suits Maldivian culture.

Method: This application would have various features including Graded vocabulary, Symbols, and Images, Picture to voice output and text-to-voice output, Integrated text and keyboard mode, the ability to share messages on social media platforms, and word and sentence prediction using Artificial Intelligence. The application would have three levels grades of vocabulary with core (frequently occurring words) and fringe words. To customize to the users' interests, there would be features where users can add their vocabulary, images, video clips, and voice recordings. This AAC will have over 15000 symbolic pictures color coded with the Modified Fitzgerald key. Artificial intelligence would be used to predict the sentences which would help users to communicate easily. The application is designed to facilitate literacy skills.

Results: This Application would provide an accessible and affordable AAC system for people with communication difficulties, therapists, teachers, parents, and caretakers. The app will be used by children and adults with complex communication needs to express themselves and learn.

Conclusions: With the help of this application, we can make communication possible and easy for everyone at any time and any place with the language they are happy to use. This would help children with communication difficulties survive and thrive at school and in society, and help adults engage in social and vocational activities. Furthermore, this would provide a helpful tool to use in therapy to train and help children and adults develop Speech, Language, and communication skills.

Panel Discussions

Are we doing enough to save our young people from Drugs?

Session Number	Day 1: Session 9
Date	Monday, 15th October 2023
Time	15:30 – 16:30 hrs
Focal staff NCMH	Dr. Arif Mohamed

Synopsis Substance use issues continue to be one of the major public health issues in the country and there are significant challenges to addressing this comprehensively. In terms of estimated prevalence rate, the National Drug Use Survey 2011/2012 estimated the prevalence for Malé and Atolls were 6.64% and 2.02% respectively. It is also concerning the highest proportion of drug users in population were among young people. In Male', the highest proportion of current drug users were between the age group of 15-19 years (48%) followed by 20-24 years (24%) age group, while the majority of the current drug users in the atolls were under the age group of 20-24 years (30%). The survey also showed that mental health problems were common in this population.

Stigma and poor awareness around substance use is a significant issue and this is contributed by various perspectives and understanding of substance as well as the current social consequences resulting from substance use issues.

Prevention of substance use in young people should be the main focus. The use evidence-based prevention programs needs to be strengthened in families, the community and the school system. Identifying at risk children early on with early intervention and support needs to be a priority. Importance of providing support to vulnerable families during early years of life as well as parenting programs are need to be prioritized. Teaching life skills and coping strategies needs to be strengthened in the school system. It is also important to address systemic inequalities while ensuring access to inclusive education, social and financial support for vulnerable populations.

Moderator Dr Abdul Malik

Panelists

- **Abdullah Faseeh (NDA)**
- **Aishath Shahula Ahmed (UNICEF)**
- **Ahmed Adhyb (Journey, NGO)**
- **Dr. Amer Siddiqui (University Malaya, Malaysia)**
- **Dr. Arif Mohamed, Consultant Psychiatrist (NCMH)**

Increasing access to mental health.... Is it time for a change in current?

Session Number	Day 2: Session 9
Date	Monday, 16h October 2023
Time	15:30 – 16:30 hrs
Focal staff NCMH	Dr. Afiya Ali Principal Psychologist at NCMH

Synopsis Mental health or psychological well-being is an integral part of an individual's capacity to lead a fulfilling life. Mental health problems are common and often persistent, with many emerging in early life. For people experiencing mental health problems across a range of social and demographic groups, access to healthcare can be challenging particularly in a small island nation such as Maldives. Promotion, prevention, and early intervention approaches are relevant across the entire spectrum of mental health problems and disorders. Mental health issues in children, for example, can be prevented through school-based programs designed to promote resilience. Integration of mental health care in primary care services is important in ensuring accessible, affordable, and acceptable services to people. To improve access, the following steps need to be taken.

Governance and policy: Government policy, plans, and laws should incorporate prevention, early detection, and primary care for mental health as part of universal health coverage efforts.

Financial and human resources: Government budget and human resource capacity building should be directed to mental health matching the burden of disease that mental health contributes to
Empowering communities: Advocacy work must be carried out to enhance prioritization of mental health, and awareness raising to reduce stigma and discrimination. Empowering and engaging people with mental disorders in key aspects of service planning and decision-making are essential actions for providing mental health in various settings.

Community-oriented care: Shifting care from institutions to primary care settings with improved community-oriented quality services is an important part of integrated services for mental health.

Investing in research and technology: Use of research and technology should be used to improve access and quality of mental health care.

Moderator Fathimath Sofiya Rasheed (Senior social worker)

Panelists

- **Professor G. Gururaj (Consultant in Public Health- Epidemiology, Mental Health, Road Safety)**
- **Professor Patrick McGorry, University of Melbourne**
- **Safiyya Mohamed Saeed, Deputy Minister of Health**
- **Fathimath Himya (Secretary General, Maldives Red Crescent)**
- **Saeed Ahmed (Principal, Family member/Public Representation)**

Voices across oceans



Exploring commonalities and differences in the mental health challenges of island nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans

Objective

The linking of two major Island Nations mental health conferences - Oevaru in the Maldives and Creating Futures in the Pacific - will provide a forum enabling discussion of commonalities (such as climate change, social transformations, globalization, geopolitical pressures..) and differences impacting these disparate populations, and an opportunity to initiate relationships and dialogue into the future.

Background

Creating Futures is a biennial conference series that has operated across Australia and Pacific Island nations for almost two decades, through which a Leadership in Mental Health: Island Nations course (in conjunction with Sangath in Goa) has been implemented (www.creatingfutures.org.au). 2023 is the tenth conference and the second conference run online, after the first online conference in 2021 due to COVID. That meeting included contributions from the Maldives delivered by participants who had previously attended Creating Futures and the Leadership in Mental Health course.

Oevaru is the inaugural Maldives mental health conference and will be run in person in the Maldives (<https://oevaruconference.mv/>). One overlap session will be held through existing relationships between members of the Steering Committees of both of these conferences.

Outcomes

For Creating Futures, CF23 online will maintain the series with expectations of a return to face-to-face meetings in 2025. For Oevaru this conference will initiate an important fixture in the health calendar and stimulate interest and activities in the sector. For participants across both regions the joint meeting will demonstrate the feasibility of engagement across widely separated regions, commonality of challenges and needs and, potentially, an opportunity to consider the possibility of an international mental health grouping extending to small island nations globally.

Information Sessions

Three information sessions about the research skills were held before the conference, particularly aimed at those who would be interested to present their work at Oevaru.

'Mastering Abstract Writing; Unblocking the Power of Concise Communication' led by Dr. Dheeba Moosa from Islamic University of Maldives was designed in a way to equip potential researchers with essential skills and techniques required to craft effective and engaging abstracts. - August 06th at IGMH.

'From Data to Delivery; A workshop on Crafting Compelling Conference Presentations' led by Dr. Shazla Mohamed; a Senior Research Fellow at the Research Development Office of the Maldives National University, was designed to equip potential presenters with the skills and strategies required to craft impactful presentations and build the gap between complex data and clear, memorable delivery. 03rd September at IGMH

'Paper Presentations in Conferences' led by Dr. Fazeela Ibrahim; Deputy Dean at Institute for Research and Innovation at Villa College; was formulated in a way to help the researchers transform their data-driven research into captivating presentations that engage and resonate with the audience. 05th September -IGMH

Pre-conference Workshop

Four pre-conference workshops scheduled, with two taking place simultaneously in the morning and the remaining two happening in the afternoon. These workshops are aimed at professionals whose scope of work is rooted or based around mental health.

The date for these workshops was set for the 14th of October 2023, from morning: 8:30am to 12:30pm, afternoon 1300pm to 1700pm and the venue Meeruma Hall in Male’.

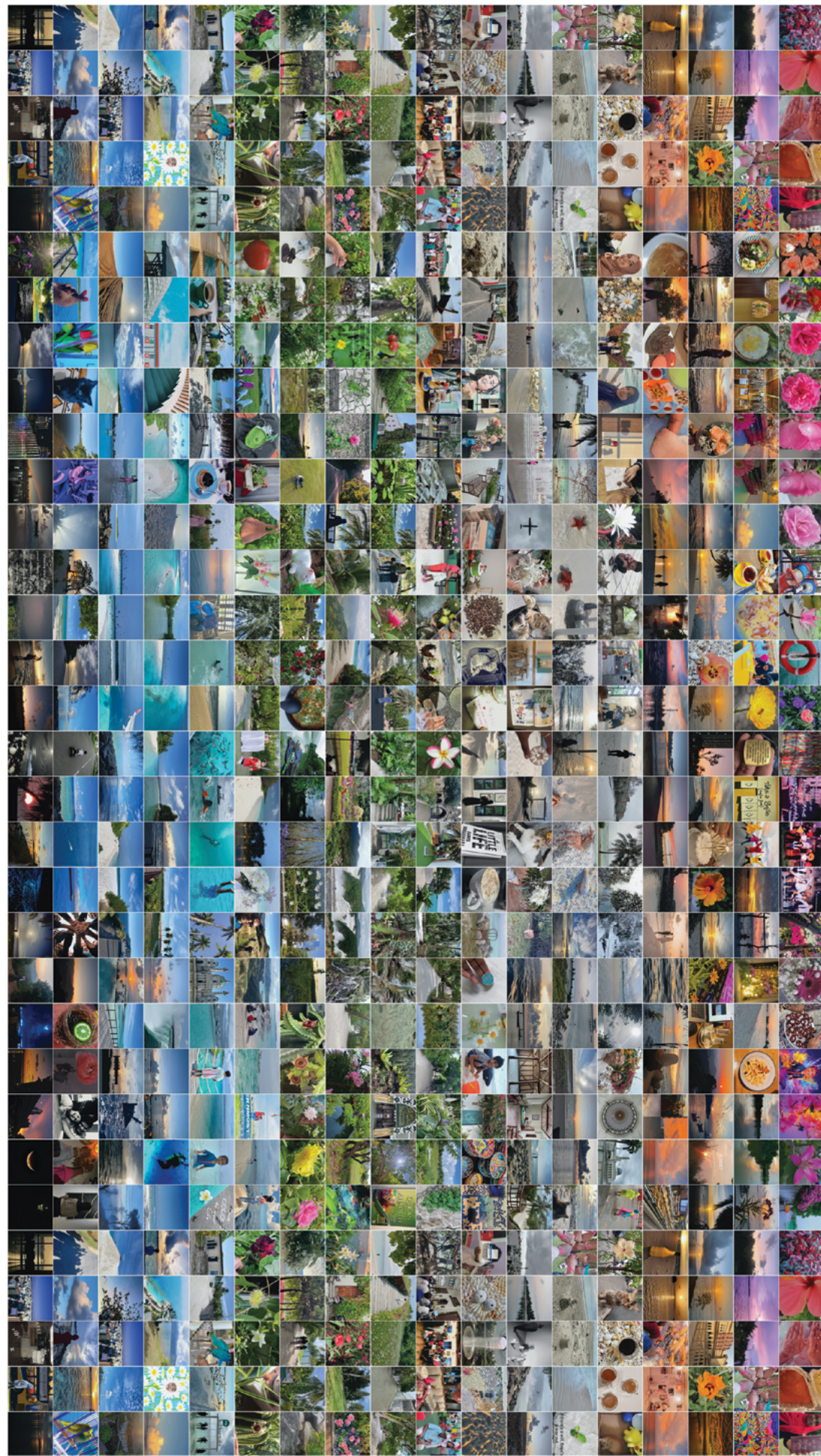
1. **Healing through Connection; a Transdiagnostic and Integrated Approach to Working with Young People**, conducted by Clinical Psychologist - Dr. Shaystah Dean. Objectives of this workshop are to explore the role of a therapist in psychological intervention, and introduce the core theoretical underpinnings of an integrated and transdiagnostic group intervention for adolescents along with being able to identify and engage with tools and processes for an effective delivery of an integrated group approach.
2. **Playing for Health and Wellbeing (Play Therapy)** conducted by Clinical Psychologist - Dr. Seetha Subbiah. This workshop is designed to identify the role of play in childhood and adolescence, and its importance as being a medium for establishing rapport and building trust. Additionally, learning the therapeutic value of play in therapy with children and adolescents, to identify the roles of different types of play in emotional and psychological health and healing in children along with making sense of play in therapy.
3. **Risk is Everyone’s Business; Managing Risk as a stakeholder Team** conducted by Social Worker & Psychotherapist - Juana Katzer. This workshop is formulated to help understand how to work with stakeholders using a systemic lens, and understand how anxiety and vicarious trauma affects stakeholder teams when working together to support children and young people at risk of self-harm, suicide or violence. In addition, how to develop a risk management plan as a stakeholder team when supporting high risk children and young people.
4. **Introduction to Motivational Interviewing for practitioners** conducted by Clinical Psychologist - Dr. Shaystah Dean. Key objectives of this workshop included providing a comprehensive introduction to Motivational Interviewing and learning the latest information and being aware of the fundamental skill set of MI in order to help people engage in behavior change.

Community engagement project

‘In My Mind – an artistic expression of our beautiful minds’, an art exhibition was first hosted by National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) in October 2019, to create a platform for people to begin talking about mental wellbeing and break the stigma surrounding mental illness. This year, we would like to continue the conversation on mental wellbeing through the ‘In My Mind – a photographic expression of our beautiful minds’, as a photographic collage mural at Oevaru 2023.

We invited the public from all over the country to submit photos representative of the theme, “what mental health means to you?”. All the photos submitted will be compiled as a photo collage mural, which would be unveiled at the conference, giving a snapshot of our mental health experience in Maldives, as we navigate the “Oevaru” of change.

The goal of the campaign is to send a message of hope and encourage people to engage in positive ways to support their mental well-being.



Sponsors



Creative Collaborators

- Raivaru and Bandhi: Abdulla Afeef and Azeeza Afeef (Senior Lecturer at Faculty of Art)
- Oevaru identity design: Shahee Ilyas and Ayeshath Fadwa Waheed
- Oevaru theme: Dj Pai-dé

Raivaru:

مَدْرَسَةُ فَرْحَانِ دَسَر

Do not hesitate

[illegible]

خُوسَ سَرُو رُحَرَدَر

To achieve your hopes in
life

(مَدْرَسَةُ بَرَكَاتُ مَدْرَسَةِ سَوَادِ)

کَیْسَیْ سَاخَرُ بَرَّکَتُہٗ

Even if you are drowning
in the waves

(مَعْرُوفٌ سَائِدٌ وَفَرْحَانٌ)

سِرِسُو تَرْمُو سِرِسُو تَرْمُو

To achieve positivity

(اِسْمُو فَرْجِ اَكْبَرُو فَرْجِ)

رَسُوْمُو قُرْاَنُ وَاوَعُوْهُ

With courageous
determination

(تَرْسُورُجْ، بَرَجْ دَر مَوْجْ، و (و))

تَرْسُورُجْ ر مَوَّجْ دُرُجْ دُرُجْ

Voice your thoughts

(رَحْمَتِي رَحْمَةً رَحِيمَةً)

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا

عَرَّضَ رُؤُوسَهُ:

مَرَدُّ بَرَاءَتِي كَسَوْنَا رَقْدَر مَوْتَوَنُو. جِي مَوْتَوَنُو اِسْمُو قَر (مَوْتَوَنُو) اِنْدُون
 رَقْدَر جِي اِنْدُون، قَسَمِي ر مَوْتَوَنُو اِنْدُون.

Even if you are drowning in the waves, do not hesitate to achieve your hopes in life. To attain positivity and achieve your dreams, voice your thoughts, and make yourself be heard.

Feeling you might lose everything

(عُقُوتَر) (عُقُوتَر) (عُقُوتَر)

هو قوت ر قوت

Bandhi:

سُرُجُ سُرُجِ خَرْدَلِ خَرْدَلِ سُرُجِ خَرْدَلِ سُرُجِ خَرْدَلِ

قُرْهَر اَرَايَ عَزَى سَرَقَر
مُ اَرَسَر شَوَا سَرَا

Actively working to ensure mental well-being

Thank you for connecting to the two (parts) together

[illegible]

اسمہ ذی کرم سولہ روزہ بخیر ہو

Oevaru and Creating Futures join this session together

Thank you for this session that sends “voices across oceans”

[illegible]

زُجِرَ مَعَهُ ذُرِّيَّتُهُ

Here's hoping this relationship will be blessed and will continue

Thank you to all participants!



VILLA NAUTICA
PARADISE ISLAND

VILLA RESORTS
MALDIVES

