

Report on Roundtable Meeting on Status of Mental Health in West Bengal



Date:December 27th 2017

Venue:Netaji Subhash Open University Auditorium

Organized by:Paripurnata Halfway Home & the Center for Counselling Services and Studies in Self-Development

Session 1: Welcome and introduction

Paripurnata Halfway Home, a Psychosocial Rehabilitation Centre for Women and the Center for Counselling Services & Studies in Self Development, Jadavpur University, had jointly organised a roundtable meeting for the presentation of the research findings of Mr. Mahendrasingh M. Sengar, the Status of Mental Health in West Bengal and a Proposed Plan of Action, on 27 December, 2017 between 11 am and 1 pm at the Netaji Subhash Open University Auditorium, Near City Center, Salt Lake, Kolkata -700064.

The meeting was chaired by eminent artist and Rajyasabha Member Shri. Jogen Chowdhary and by the Honourable Minister of State, Law & Judicial and Health Smt. Chandrima Bhattacharya. Representatives of prominent NGO's working in the field of Mental Health attended the meeting.

Paripurnata's secretary, Shri. Prabir Basu welcomed Smt. Chandrima Bhattacharya and Shri. Jogen Chowdhary and all other participants and shared a background as well as the purpose of the roundtable meeting which was to highlight the status of Mental Health in West Bengal as well as to propose a plan of action and bring together all government and non-government stakeholders for the implementation of the same.

Session 2: Experience sharing

Representatives from Anjali, a Mental Health Rights Organization, Monika Majumdar and Keka, shared their experiences while working in the Rajarhat Community and explained in detail how over the years they have seen mental health issues increasing among women and adolescent population. They stressed on providing counselling and other necessary support to them and gave examples of its effectiveness.

Representatives from the Missionaries of Charity, Brother Rathaël, explained how his organization is trying to help mentally ill patients in their outdoor and indoor facilities. He also explained as to how difficult it is for the families to treat mentally ill patients and

highlighted the requirement of more support to the families and also better facilities related to medical, rehabilitation etc. From the Government as well as the NGO sector.

Samikshani's Secretary, Miss Bulbul Bakshi, spoke about the importance of preventing work in the field of Mental Health. She shared Samikshani's experiences and informed everyone how patients are rushing to them after diagnosis of mental illness, rather than addressing it before. She emphasized that the State needs to address mental health issues through the preventative lens rather than the lens of identifying patients and providing treatment. The approach to addressing mental health issues needs to be preventive in nature.

Dr. Subranshu and Ms. Rashmi Chattopadhyay from the Centre for Counselling Services, Jadavpur University, shared findings of a research related to various Mental Health issues among the student communities. They also gave examples of researches conducted by them and shared a few findings related to how social media is contributing in increasing various disorders, such as Depression, among students, and how teachers are facing problems to deal with them.

[Session 3: Mental Health in Perspective](#)

Shri Jogen Chowdhary started the session by giving a perspective on Mental Health. He compared the situation from before 20 years to the present. He acknowledged some improvement in the situation, however, stressed that much more effort was required to address the issue holistically. His specific suggestions to the government and others were as follows.

- Create/established specialised mental health facilities with appropriate human resource at every district hospital.
- Establish better rehabilitation facilities considering the needs of the patients and family members (He gave a few examples from NIMHANS and other institutions from Bangalore city). Recreational facilities for patients (involving cultural activities, art, music etc) are essential in the rehabilitation facilities.
- Awareness program to reduce stigma at various levels, starting from Schools.
- Formation of Doctors Forum for Voluntary Work - He stressed that the voluntary forum of doctors can contribute constructively.

- Mental Health Forum of NGO's and other stakeholders to help government in implementation and also and suggest various measures.
- Prevention of Mental Health Issues - He suggested to publish a booklet/handbook with basic information about various mental disorders and the required steps to address the same. He suggested distributing the same at the community and school level to make people understand the various symptoms and help the mental health patients at an early stage with the required treatment. He further stated that the delays in treatment can affect a mental health patient's life adversely.

Session 4: Status of Mental Health in West Bengal

Mr.Mahendrasingh M. Sengar, voluntary researcher and coordinator of the Mental Health Cell, Paripurnata, made a presentation on the subject of the Status of Mental Health in West Bengal and also suggested a plan of action based on the findings of his research (Presentation of the meeting is attached with press note).His presentation was focused on the Mental Health status of West Bengal and how the prevalence of mental health issues has increased to alarming levels. He shared that at present 13% population of the state is suffering from various mental disorders. He also shared how the changing life style is causing an increase in mental disorders. He also updated everyone about the current services provided by the State Government and how they can be improved. He presented the following plan of action for the state of West Bengal on mental health to the Hon. Chandrima Bhattacharya, MOS, State.

- To provide legal, social and economical protection - Legislation for declaring mentally ill patients as 'First Citizens' of West Bengal
- Special and Enhanced Assistance to Family Members to provide care and treatment for mentally ill patients.
- Extending District Mental Health Program to all districts
- Integration of mental health into child health, adolescent health, elderly health and other disease control programs
- Community Based Mass Screening Programmes
- Establishing Educational Institutions/Courses on Mental Health for Creating more Human Resource (Govt/Private)
- Preparation of Plan of Action for Capacity Building of all stakeholders
- Development of Special Program (Dr.Narayanan, Ishwar Sankalp), Missionaries of Charity Model, Anjali, Paripurnata etc.)

- Establishing Research and Data Collection Institute on Mental Health
- Upgradation of Existing Facilities and Networking
- Rehabilitation Centric Approach
- Mass Awareness Program on Respecting the Mental Health Patients
- Creation of a Special Cell to Provide Assistance to Concerned Departments, NGOs in Implementation and for Coordination Purpose

Session 5: Concluding Session

At the concluding session **Smt. Chandirna Bhattacharya, Honourable Minister of State, Law & Judicial and Health** lauded the efforts of Hon. Jogen Chowdhary and others from the NGO sectors for convening such an important meeting and stated that state will take cognizance of the suggestions. She requested Mr.Mahendrasingh M.Sengar to submit his presentation along with the report of the roundtable meeting. She assured everyone that after consulting the senior officials in the Department, she will personally take up the suggestions and the findings to the Hon. Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee. She also shared and gave examples of various efforts done by the State Government to improve the overall mental health scenario. She shared that the District Mental Health Plan has been extended from 8 districts to 11 districts and how the number of doctors' seats have been increased by the State Government in the medical colleges to address the issue of human resource. She stated that the State Government is serious and open to all suggestions to improve the situation. Some participants asked her about the rules of the Mental Health Care Act 2017. Ratnaboli Ray from Anjali cleared the air by stating that the rules are already prepared by the Central Government and soon it will be published. The Honourable Minister has stated that in case if any further steps are required to be taken by the State Government in this regard then the State Government will not shy away and will take the appropriate measures/decisions.

The way ahead

This session was shared by Mr Mahendrasingh M. Sengar (coordinator, Mental Health Cell, Paripurnata) and Prof. Sadhan Chakraborti (Coordinator, Center for Counselling Services, Jadavpur University). Mr Mahendrasingh M. Sengar proposed all participants to form the Mental Health Forum to work in a focused manner. The group has decided to continue the

efforts and bring as many valuable stakeholders to work jointly on the issue of Mental Health. The modalities of the forum will be decided at the next meeting. The brief report of the roundtable meeting along with the presentation will be submitted to the State Government for appropriate action.

Following are the members present for the Roundtable conference:

1. Shri.Jogen Chowdhary, Rajya Sabha Member
2. Aweek Majumdar – Chairman, Expert Committee (School education) Government of West Bengal
3. Prof.Subha Sankar Sarkar – Vice Chancellor – Netaji Subhash Open University
4. Ratnaboli Ray – Founder of ‘Anjali’
5. Bulbul Bakshi – Secretary, Samikshani
6. Prof.Joydeb Majumdar – President – Jay Prakash Institute of Social Change
7. Sarla Kapoor – Secretary, Indian Psychoanalytical Society
8. Prabir Basu- Secretary. Paripurnata
9. Brother Rathaël- Missionaries of Charity
10. Subholena Chakrabarty – Iswar Sankalp
11. Shampa Sengupta - Director – Sruti Disability Rights Center
12. Prof. Jayanti Basu- Calcutta University
13. K. Viswanath - Mukti
14. Sadhan Chakrobarty – Coordinator- Center for Counselling Services & Studies in Self Development, Jadavpur University
15. Rama Manna – Indian Institute of Psychometry
16. Sandra Menes – International Justice Mission
17. Soma Roy Karmakar – Rahi
18. Biswajit Ray- Antardarshan
19. Dr. Japasish Chakrabarty – Baul Mon
20. Dr. Prathama Guha – Institute of Psychiatry
21. Thomas P.A.- Missionaries of Charity
22. Priyal Kothari- Inswar Sankalp
23. Rashi Chattopadhyay – Jadavpur University
24. Samar Kr. Mondol – Jadavpur University
25. Subhranshu Aditya – Jadavpur University
26. Sahana Nag- Jadavpur University

- 27.Sunirmal G. - Jadavpur University
- 28.Tapan Mondol – Antarik
- 29.Srija Chakrabarti – Anjali
30. Debyani Sen – Anjali
- 31.Paltu Jena – JPISC
- 32.Moumita Mondol –JPISC
- 33.Aarif Bina Gazi – G.S.S.
- 34.Dr.Sarmista Dasgupta – Baul Mon
35. Mr.Mahendrasingh M.Sengar –Researcher on Mental Health