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Does Culture Affect Pathways to Mental Health: A Descriptive Survey From Hilly India

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Purpose: Mental disorders have become the major cause of disability as they affects one out of four people worldwide.¹ The lifetime prevalence for developing any kind of mental health problem is 13.7% in India² and the reported point prevalence of mental illness during the year 2015-16 year was 1.64 % in Dehradun district of Uttarakhand.³ Despite this huge burden: there were no outpatient facilities for mental health in public sector before 2012.⁴ Uttarakhand is a hilly state located at the foothills of the Himalayas and is known for its Hindu pilgrimage sites where the common pathways of care are mainly moving from non-psychiatric interventions to a psychiatric hospital.⁵ These pathways are often culturally driven hence an attempt was made to quantitatively study the pathways in seeking mental health care treatment and its cultural barriers.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted by convenience sampling on 300 patients and their family members visiting psychiatry OPD of a tertiary care center, who were surveyed using WHO Pathway Encounter Form and a self-structured Cultural Barriers Assessment Scale (CBAS) which includes barriers related to values, beliefs, and knowledge. Descriptive data was analysed using frequency mean and percentage while One-way ANOVA was applied for inferential statistics.

Results: A pathway diagram was made based upon study findings which revealed that majority (55%) of the participants initiated their treatment from non-psychiatric services, almost 32% of the participants directly sought treatment from psychiatric services in their first contact. Participants faced various cultural barriers in seeking mental health care treatment namely Affective barriers (3.03 ± 0.38), Physical or structural barriers (2.83 ± 0.63), Cognitive barriers (2.77 ± 0.54) and Value oriented barriers ($2.55\pm.56$). The mean score of cultural barriers was statistically significant ($p<0.000$) among those who sought help from native faith healers and type of patient's mental illness($p<0.05$).

Conclusion: This is the first study elucidating the pathways to mental health care treatment in the hilly region of Uttarakhand in India. Findings suggest that pathways to mental health care treatment are often culturally driven and varied from individual to individual. Since, more than half of the patients in the study sought help from non-psychiatric services, it is a priority for the Government of India and the State of Uttarakhand to expand mental health care services at the general medical health facilities across the remote corners. This implies an urgent need in teaching and training

of non-psychiatric care providers who can facilitate early recognition of mental illness and identify cultural barriers in treatment seeking.

Title:

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Keywords:

Cultural Barriers, Mental Illness and Pathways to Mental Health Care

Abstract Summary:

Mental disorders have become the major cause of disability as they affect one out of four people worldwide. The lifetime prevalence for developing any kind of mental health problem is 13.7% in India. Pathways to mental health care treatment are often culturally driven and vary from individual to individual.

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