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Stigma related mental health knowledge among community health workers - a cross sectional assessment

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Introduction: The accreted social health activists (ASHAs) or the community health workers have been involved in improving maternal and child health over a decade in rural India. There is growing evidences that in mental health resource poor settings, a 'task-shifting' strategy would be advantageous, where the community or the lay health workers (like ASHAs) provides front-line mental health care, instead of mental health professional at a primary care level. However, there is limited data on delivering the mental health services delivered through ASHAs in mental health resource scarce urban slums setting.

Aim: The aim of the present study is to assess the knowledge and attitude towards mental illness among ASHAs serving in government primary health centers in urban Bengaluru, India.

Materials & Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among randomly selected ASHA workers (n=150) in urban Bengaluru in the Karnataka state. Data were collected through mental health knowledge schedule (MAKS), and reported and intended behaviour scale (RIBS), self-administered questionnaire designed assess mental health knowledge and attitude towards mental illness. Data were computed using SPSS. The mean age of the participants was 38.6±5.68 years and educated at least tenth grade (66.1%) or above (20.2%). The mean year experience in the health field as ASHAs was 4.27±2.36 years. The ASHAs had lower score on MAKS.

Results: Our results show relatively lesser knowledge about mental health among ASHAs. Thus, indicating the need to develop training module to train the ASHAs for early identification of mental illness from the community and refer to available mental health service.

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