

MEDIA RELEASE

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IMH Embarks on a Two-Year Population-based Study on Local Mental Health Literacy

1. The Research Unit of the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) is embarking on a population based study “Mind Matters: A Study of Mental Health Literacy” to better understand the mental health literacy of the Singapore population.
2. This study will generate critical knowledge that will identify and help prioritise mental illnesses to be targeted for mental health promotion; identify existing gaps in mental health literacy as well as ascertain subgroups in the population that are particularly lacking in mental health literacy. This information can then be used to better inform future policies and interventions, specifically targeting these subgroups, to improve mental health literacy in Singapore. Population-based studies such as this help to address knowledge gaps in understanding the impact of mental illness in the population.
3. This two-year S\$1.0 million study is funded by the Ministry of Health (MOH) Health Services Research Competitive Research Grant (HSR CRG).
4. Led by A/Prof Chong Siow Ann, Vice Chairman Medical Board (Research), IMH, the research team also comprises Assistant Professor Mythily Subramaniam, Director of Research, IMH and local research investigator Associate Professor Kwok Kian Woon from the Sociology Division of the Nanyang Technological University.

5. 'Mental health literacy' has been described as the "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which can help in their recognition, management or prevention". Research in many countries has shown that improving community mental health literacy is important in increasing appropriate help-seeking behaviour and improving the high level of unmet needs in the treatment of mental disorders.
6. The aims of the Mind Matters study are to:
 - a) Conduct a national survey to assess recognition of mental illnesses, beliefs pertaining to causes and treatment options, and outcomes for common mental conditions in Singapore.
 - b) Examine mental health literacy and its socio-demographic correlates in the adult resident population in Singapore.
 - c) Examine and compare people's perception and degree of acceptance towards those with a mental illness.
7. "Based on the findings of the 2010 Singapore Mental Health Study, we found that mental illness is quite common among the Singapore population. However, there is a gap as the current state of 'lay' knowledge relating to mental illness is unknown in Singapore since there isn't a national study on the mental health literacy here. Critical information such as gender, education, religion, ethnicity, personal experience of mental illness, etc and how they would impact and shape mental health knowledge and attitudes are also unknown. As such, this new study can shed light on the mental health literacy of the Singapore population so we can address public's mental health knowledge where it is lacking," said A/Prof Chong Siow Ann, Vice Chairman, Medical Board (Research), IMH and Principal Investigator for the Mind Matters study.
8. Overseas studies have found that improving mental health literacy will help:
 - a) To increase and improve appropriate and timely help-seeking behaviour among the general population
 - b) In the early recognition of mental illnesses and treatment, thus improving long-term outcomes for those with mental disorders
 - c) To reduce the high level of unmet needs in the treatment of mental illnesses
 - d) Initiate more targeted and focused programmes to address mental health literacy in Singapore

9. "In general, people have a poor understanding of mental illness. They may not be able to correctly identify mental disorders, do not understand causative factors, and have poor knowledge and misconceptions about the effectiveness of treatment. They are fearful of those perceived as mentally ill and are apprehensive about helping them. As a result, they may be reluctant to seek professional help for mental disorders. With better mental health literacy, we can help improve the recognition of common mental illnesses, strive for early diagnosis and encourage help seeking behavior," said Dr Mythily Subramaniam, Director (Research), IMH and Co-Principal Investigator of the Mind Matters study.

10. Associate Professor Kwok Kian Woon, Nanyang Technological University said, "One of the focus of NTU's research is the study of healthcare from different perspectives. As a sociologist, my collaboration with the IMH co-investigators will help me to better understand what Singapore residents with different backgrounds know about mental health – especially in recognising the different signs of mental disorders and also where to seek professional help. This national survey will also identify specific areas that would require more efforts in the promotion of mental health."

11. Mind Matters will help to identify and prioritise specific mental disorders to be targeted for mental health promotion. With the results of this study, local public education campaigns can then be better designed and tailored to address certain gaps as identified in the survey.

12. The survey will involve some 3000 Singapore residents, aged from 18 to 65 years. Trained interviewers will conduct face-to-face interviews at the respondent's home (or another preferred location). Each interview is expected to last approximately an hour. All trained interviewers will carry identification paper and a letter of authorisation from IMH's Research Unit.

13. A pilot survey was carried out from 4 to 26 February 2014 to test the survey processes and methodology. This two year study is target to end in May 2015.

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Mental Matters: A Study of Mental Health Literacy

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