



Loving Hearts, Beautiful Minds

Media Release

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IMH develops one of the first validated Positive Mental Health instrument in Asia

1. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) has developed and validated an instrument to measure the positive mental health of Singapore residents.
2. The Positive Mental Health (PMH) instrument is one of the first validated scale developed in Asia that is culturally and locally relevant to our population.
3. Traditionally, instruments to measure mental health and well-being are largely developed and often used within Western populations; this compromises their validity in other cultures.
4. The multi-dimensional instrument, which can be self-administered, covers all key and culturally appropriate domains of mental health, and can be applied to compare levels of mental health across different age, gender and ethnic groups.
5. The PMH instrument was developed by IMH's Research Division in partnership with the Ministry of Health (MOH), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National University of Singapore (NUS) and RAND Health, a research division within RAND Corporation, an American non-profit research organisation. The PMH instrument was developed as part of the Singapore Mental Health Study, a research project conducted by IMH over three years from Apr 2008 to Mar 2011 with funding from the Singapore Millennium Foundation and the Ministry of Health.

6. “Health is more than merely the absence of illness. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined mental health as a state of well-being. The implications of having a culturally appropriate instrument to measure positive mental health are widespread and are essential in Singapore and ultimately will contribute to improved health outcomes in the population. ” said A/Prof Chong Siow Ann, the principal investigator of the Singapore Mental Health Study, and Vice-Chairman, Medical Board (Research), IMH.

7. The two researchers who led the study that developed and validated this instrument which took more than 2 years are Dr Mythily Subramaniam, Deputy Director of Research at IMH, and Ms Janhavi Vaingankar, a health service researcher also from the IMH.

8. “The PMH instrument can be used to collect data on individuals and various subgroups in the population which would be crucial when reviewing existing mental health policy and services. Such information may also contribute to adequate mental health training, education and public awareness, and it would also help to identify aspects of the Singapore society that can be built upon to enhance well-being,” said Dr Subramaniam.

9. Ms Vaingankar added: “An additional implication of using this instrument in a research setting will be to measure and observe changes to positive mental health among the Singapore population, over time.”

Key Aspects of the Positive Mental Health Instrument

10. The PMH instrument includes six dimensions (47 items or statements) and encompasses the notion that mental health can be achieved by the balance, influence and strengths of multiple domains.

11. The six dimensions identified for positive mental health are:

- General coping

This refers to one’s reaction and coping strategies during stressful situations, the ability to think positively and engage in choice activities.

- Emotional support

This refers to the emotional support from family and friends. Emotional support is important to help one cope with difficult life situations and gives one the assurance of feeling loved and wanted. It provides compassionate, realistic counseling and care, hence it is essential to be able to share burdens and fears with others.

- Spirituality

This domain covers both spiritual and religious practices and beliefs that influence one's faith and behaviour in life. It contributes to positive mental health as a coping mechanism and a means to building strong social support and networks.

- Interpersonal skills

This dimension strongly contributes to all other aspects of mental health. Interpersonal skills are crucial in helping one develop and maintain good relationships, which in turn will provide the support and network needed during times of distress.

- Personal growth & autonomy

Knowing one's goals in life and ways to achieve them is a sign of good mental health. It reflects on one's level of confidence, freedom, sense of purpose, and the ability to self-evaluate and take control of situations.

- Global affect

The experience of positive mood is a sign of mental health. Being calm, happy and enthusiastic are indicative of emotional stability and vitality. This is a more transient dimension, yet the most predictive of one's recent experiences.

12. Although the key domains of positive mental health are similar to the other reports from Western countries, the study highlighted that spirituality was deemed important in the context of Singapore.

13. "Having religious or spiritual beliefs was perceived to lead to better mental health. Furthermore, the presence of a superior or higher being in imparting well-being is also strongly rooted in all the religious communities. Spirituality was also associated with ways of relating to others and coping in life and with being more creative, patient, hopeful and satisfied," said Ms Vaingankar.

14. Dr Subramaniam added: “At present very few complete instruments are available for assessing all domains of mental health and they are largely developed in Western populations.”

15. “Although they address the role of ‘hope’ they do not contain other aspects of spirituality in their measurement of mental health. Our qualitative and quantitative studies showed that spiritual or religious beliefs and practices contribute strongly to mental health in the Singapore adult population and should be included in such an instrument,” she said.

16. During the development of the instrument, the team of researchers conducted extensive literature review for identifying the multifarious constructs of positive mental health and its cultural correlates.

17. Some 2,500 individuals across Singapore also participated in the development and validation of the PMH instrument. Focus groups and surveys were conducted among adult residents, aged 21 to 65 years old, belonging to Chinese, Malay and Indian ethnicities. The study was conducted from April 2008 till February 2011.

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Note: The Positive Mental Health Instrument is a tool used to study the mental health of the community. It is a research tool and at this point, it is not meant for individuals to assess their own mental health.

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About the Institute of Mental Health

The Institute of Mental Health is the only tertiary mental health centre in Singapore. It offers a multi-faceted and comprehensive range of psychiatric, rehabilitative and counseling services to meet the needs of three groups of patients – children and adolescents, adults and the elderly. IMH also runs mental health education programmes for the general public. These programmes aim to promote mental wellness and raise awareness of the importance and benefits of prevention, early detection and treatment of mental disorders.