

# IMH Research NEWS

A publication brought to you by the Research Division, Institute of Mental Health | April - June 2016

## WELCOME NOTE

Our vision for mental health research is to do research that will change the way we think about mental health and change the way we treat people with mental health issues. Doing good and useful research is but part of this; good effective communication of these findings is just as important. There is of course the usual communication with the scientific and clinical communities through publications in the academic journals and presentations in scientific conferences but these are usually limited to a rather select audience. We see the equal importance to connect with a wider audience including the public especially when the research affects issues of widespread concern.

Most of the research we do are also supported by our patients and the public either through their direct participation or through public funding hence ensuring the public understanding of our research is one way of being accountable while maintaining their trust and support. The importance of effective communication with a general audience is not limited to pressing issues like ageing and dementia, it is also critical for socially charged issues such as positive mental health and the biological basis for a particular behavior or illness – both of which are covered in this inaugural issue of this newsletter.

In subsequent issues, we hope to be able to continue to share our diverse research findings to all, and to tell in an accurate and engaging way the relevance of these research and the importance of mental health to our life - for there is no health without mental health.



**Prof Chong Siow Ann**  
Vice-Chairman,  
Medical Board (Research)

## POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY: RELATIONSHIPS WITH LIFE SATISFACTION AND FUNCTIONING

- Do you find it easy to form positive relationships with people around you?
- Do you see difficult situations you face as challenges or obstacles to life?
- Do you feel that you are in control of your own life and know how to achieve your goals?
- Would one be able to achieve the above if he had depression or anxiety?



Many people tend to think that individuals with mental illnesses do not possess good mental health and it still remains a matter of debate. Positive mental health (PMH) is not just about the absence of mental illness but also about a sense of well-being, feeling supported and having goals in life. It enables us to fully enjoy and appreciate other people, day-to-day life and our environment.

A study by the Research Division of Institute of Mental Health found that patients with depression and anxiety disorder can also have high level of PMH. The study, which was published in the January 2016 issue of the Journal of Affective Disorders, describes findings from 218 outpatients with the above diagnoses who were administered the locally developed PMH instrument, along with other health-related questionnaires.

While the researchers found that patients who develop a mental illness earlier in life and those with more severe depressive symptoms tend to have lower PMH, the study also revealed that those who possessed high PMH were experiencing better life outcomes such as life satisfaction and general functioning.

Mental illness and mental health are thus not mutually exclusive. Developing good mental health through enhancing individuals' empowerment and participation, or reducing risk factors associated with poor mental health may help to improve one's quality of life and reduce avoidable costs associated with healthcare services utilisation. While it may not be easy to promote positive mental health at the community or system level, healthcare providers should consider implementing mental health promotion strategies among people with mental illnesses.

For more information on the study, you may refer to:  
[http://www.jad-journal.com/article/S0165-0327\(15\)30805-3/pdf](http://www.jad-journal.com/article/S0165-0327(15)30805-3/pdf)

Contributed by:  
**Esmond Seow, Lead author, J Affect Disord. 2016; 190:499-507**

## VALIDATION AND PROSPECTIVE INVESTIGATION

A common assumption about mental illness is that it comes on in an instant, like turning on a light switch. In reality, mental health deterioration occurs over months - even years - before a person is unable to effectively function and his/ her behaviour is no longer socially acceptable.

Research in early 2000s identified three major symptom domains - Positive, Cognitive and Negative - in schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. Broadly, negative symptoms can be grouped into 2 sub-domains: Social Amotivation and Diminished Expression (which in DSM-V are referred to as Avolition and Expressive Deficits)

Social Amotivation is about how one interacts with the outside world and Diminished Expression is the observed manifestation of negative symptoms in schizophrenia individuals e.g. blunted affect, poverty of speech, etc.

The study found that:

- The two sub-domains exist in both schizophrenia and in the group at risk of developing psychosis.
- Negative symptoms predate psychosis in Ultra High Risk (UHR) individuals
- Negative symptoms predate the onset of psychotic symptoms and have a significant role in the individual's functioning impairment
- Social amotivation is associated with impaired functioning in both schizophrenia and those at risk of developing psychosis.

Effectively, identifying negative symptoms (especially Social Amotivation), can predict the functioning of the individual assessed and the potential to transition to psychosis. For clinicians, this provides added impetus to identify and perhaps treat the individual to prevent further impairment.

For more information on the study, please contact Max Lam at:  
[max\\_zhan\\_yang\\_lam@imh.com.sg](mailto:max_zhan_yang_lam@imh.com.sg)

Contributed by:  
**Max Lam, Lead author**

Study reference:  
**Lam M, Abdul Rasheed NA, Fervaha G, Foussias G, Ruhrman S, Remington G, Lee J. Baseline social amotivation predicts 1-year functioning in UHR subjects: A validation and prospective investigation. Eur Neuropsychopharmacol 2015**



Contact us at email: [IMHRESEARCH@imh.com.sg](mailto:IMHRESEARCH@imh.com.sg)