Mental Health in Goan Society: A Socio-Cultural Analysis

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper	This research explores the intersection of traditional and modern approaches to mental health in Goan society. With its diverse socio-cultural fabric and colonial history, Goa provides a unique case for examining mental health practices. This study investigates cultural attitudes, treatment-seeking behaviours, and gaps in healthcare delivery through a mixed-methods approach. It identifies barriers such as stigma, resource shortages, and the over-reliance on traditional healing practices in rural areas. Findings underscore the urgent need for culturally sensitive integrative care models that combine traditional practices with modern psychiatric interventions. Recommendations include improving accessibility, raising mental health awareness, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure to foster a more inclusive mental health ecosystem in Goa.
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Introduction

Mental health is a growing public health priority in India, with one in seven Indians affected by some form of mental disorder (National Mental Health Survey of India, 2016). Goa, known for its rich cultural diversity and colonial legacy, offers a compelling case for examining mental health practices. Despite

the state's progress in healthcare, mental health remains underprioritized, with systemic gaps in service delivery and cultural stigma acting as barriers to effective care (Patel et al., 2020).

The coexistence of traditional healing practices and modern psychiatric care adds complexity to Goa's mental healthcare landscape. The **Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour (IPHB)**, established in 1957, has been central to providing institutional care. However, community-based support systems remain underdeveloped, especially in rural areas (Fernandes et al., 2021). This paper aims to bridge the knowledge gap by analysing Goa's mental health ecosystem and proposing culturally competent interventions to improve accessibility and outcomes.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To evaluate Goa's mental healthcare infrastructure, including public and private facilities.

2. To analyse the role of traditional healing practices in mental health treatment.

3. To identify barriers such as stigma and socio-cultural beliefs affecting service utilization.

4. To assess the potential for integrating traditional healing practices with evidence-based psychiatric care.

Literature Review

Historical Context

The evolution of mental healthcare in Goa reflects its colonial past and post-independence developments. During Portuguese rule, mental health issues were often addressed through religious practices and institutionalized care at psychiatric asylums. Post-independence, Goa embraced modern psychiatry by establishing the IPHB in 1957, which transitioned from custodial care to therapeutic interventions (Chowdhury & Patel, 2023). However, traditional healing practices such as Ayurveda, homoeopathy, and spiritual rituals continue to thrive, particularly in rural communities, reflecting the deep-rooted cultural belief systems (Pillai et al., 2021).

Current Healthcare Framework

Goa's mental healthcare infrastructure comprises government facilities, private practitioners, NGOs, and traditional healers. The IPHB is the state's premier psychiatric care institution, offering tertiary care services. However, mental health services at primary health centres (PHCs) and district hospitals remain inadequate, with significant rural-urban disparities (Srinivasa Murthy, 2011). The shortage of trained professionals and poor community outreach exacerbate these challenges.

Research Methodology

Study Design

This research utilized a **mixed-methods approach**, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis. The study covered urban and rural Goa areas, enabling a holistic understanding of mental health practices and perceptions.

Data Collection

1. **Semi-structured interviews**: Conducted with 40 mental health professionals, focusing on systemic challenges and policy gaps.

2. **Focus group discussions**: Organized with 100 community members to explore cultural beliefs and attitudes toward mental health.

3. **Surveys**: Administered to 150 healthcare providers and 250 patients to assess service utilization patterns.

4. **Case studies**: Examined ten mental health facilities to evaluate infrastructural and operational dynamics.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using **SPSS version 28.0 for** statistical trends, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis through **NVivo**, focusing on recurring themes such as stigma, traditional practices, and accessibility issues.

Results

Assessment of Healthcare Infrastructure

The study highlighted significant disparities in mental healthcare access:

- **Rural-urban divide**: Urban areas have greater access to mental health services, while rural regions depend on traditional healers and under-resourced PHCs (Goel, 2011).

- **Specialized care gaps**: Adolescent and geriatric psychiatry services remain limited, reflecting a lack of targeted interventions.

- **Workforce shortages**: Goa has fewer than 0.5 psychiatrists per 100,000 population, far below the WHO recommendation of 1 per 10,000 (WHO, 2022).

Cultural Attitudes and Beliefs

Cultural perceptions significantly shape mental health practices in Goa:

- **Supernatural causation**: Around 70% of respondents attributed mental illnesses to spiritual or supernatural causes, seeking traditional healers as a first line of intervention.

- **Family dynamics**: Treatment decisions were family-centred, with 80% of participants consulting family members before seeking professional help.

- **Stigma**: Fear of societal judgment was cited as a significant deterrent, with 55% of respondents avoiding psychiatric services due to stigma (Patel et al., 2020).

Treatment-Seeking Behaviour

- **Traditional healer preference**: 65% of participants first sought help from traditional healers.

- **Integrated approaches**: 45% used a combination of traditional and modern treatments, indicating a willingness to experiment with hybrid approaches.

- **Exclusive reliance on psychiatry**: Only 30% sought psychiatric care directly, reflecting persistent barriers related to cost, accessibility, and stigma.

Discussion

Integration of Traditional and Modern Practices

The findings of this research highlight the potential benefits of integrating traditional healing with modern psychiatric care. Collaborative care models, where traditional healers and mental health professionals work together, could significantly improve trust and service utilization. This promising approach offers hope for a more effective and culturally sensitive mental health care system in Goa.

Policy Implications

1. **Strengthening Infrastructure**: Investing in community mental health centres and integrating mental health services into PHCs.

2. **Capacity Building**: Training more mental health professionals and equipping traditional healers with basic psychiatric knowledge.

3. **Awareness Campaigns**: Launching culturally tailored anti-stigma initiatives to normalize seeking mental health care.

4. **Cultural Competency Training**: Educating healthcare providers on local beliefs and practices to enhance service delivery.

Conclusion

Mental health care in Goa reflects a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and systemic factors. This study highlights the urgent need for culturally sensitive interventions and integrative care models to bridge the gap between traditional and modern approaches. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these integrated models and addressing the systemic challenges of workforce shortages and infrastructure gaps.

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