

ways of facilitating meaningful activities and inviting places as well as developing recovery-oriented services. From another initiative we learned about the value of the ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) method in community development. In some municipalities this is found useful within public health policies and practices and in other local developments. Co-creation and co-production

with citizens are key in these developments. ABCD is participatory and network-oriented, relational and strengths based.

The final part of the day was a workshop where we were invited to practice what we have learned.

## WAPR-Indian Chapter Conference on Promoting Rights and Recovery in Persons with Mental Illness

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The 7th National Conference of World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation-Indian Chapter (WAPR-IC) organized by Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LG-BRIMH) and WAPR-IC was held on 17th and 18th March 2023. Recognizing the pressing need to recognize and promote the rights of persons with mental illness, 'Promoting Rights and Recovery of Persons with Mental Illness' was selected as the theme of the conference. The conference was attended by two hundred and eighty eight delegates who were mostly from India. The scientific sessions were spread over two days with plenary session, six workshops, sixteen symposia, two corporate sessions and a panel discussion. The 7th National Conference of World Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation-Indian Chapter (WAPR-IC) aimed to provide a platform to all stakeholders of mental health to exchange knowledge, expertise and skill.

The theme symposium of the conference laid emphasis on deinstitutionalization and training in Quality Rights to facilitate changes in attitude, practices and services in psychosocial rehabilitation to empower stakeholders to promote rights and recovery. Role of WAPR in promoting the rights of persons with mental disorders and Community Network Approach were also extensively discussed.

The conference also paid tribute to Dr. Sharada Menon, the person instrumental in the founding of WAPR-IC. With a view to introduce and update the delegates on the models of psychosocial rehabilita-

tion for persons with mental illness and in particular homeless persons with mental illness, concurrent symposia were held. Discussions ranged from the tried and tested residential rehabilitation models like Richmond Fellowship Society, the MS Chellamuthu Trust, Medico Pastoral Association and Schizophrenia Research Foundation to the newer and emerging models like the Recovery Oriented Services (ROSeS) Café at NIMHANS Bengaluru that promotes domestic and livelihood skills. The role of work in recovery and rehabilitation of persons with mental illness was recounted historical account of 'Asylums' in India. Keeping in mind the contribution of community in the recovery of persons with mental illness, the conference also organized a symposium on the community based rehabilitation (CBR) which highlighted experiences of CBR in rural setting. While the delegate from Tamil Nadu shared the experience of training community workers, conducting awareness programs and family empowerment, delegates from Jharkhand shared insights into their community led mental health programs using the CHIME framework for facilitating recovery that includes tele psychiatry, home visits, counselling, support group meetings and enhancing social contact.

Family is an important stake holder in the treatment and recovery of persons with mental illness. Keeping this in context, deliberations were on helping families of persons with chronic mental illness. Citing evidence based family interventions, the presenters emphasized the need for designing intervention that

help families to manage crisis, learn effective problem solving and reducing familial distresses. One delegate also shared her research experience that demonstrated enhancement of caregivers' selfcare and reduction of burden through Yoga.

Persons with mental illness who are displaced and homeless owing to their illness are vulnerable to exploitation and neglect. The psychosocial rehabilitation of them involves providing short term and long term residential care as well as efforts at reintegrating them with their family and community at large. This was illustrated in the symposium through experiences shared by presenters from Chittadhama, Shraddha Foundation, Ashadeep Foundation and the Jyotivivas Charitable Society. Most of the homeless persons with mental illness (HPMI) often end up in jail, wander far away from their homes and are often found in poor state of health. The organizations working with HPMI have the unique role in rescue, restitution and reintegration which pose several challenges. Advocating for their rights is one of the major task involved in the recovery and restitution of their rights.

Understanding implication of the laws related to mental illness is vital for providing mental health services. This was highlighted in the deliberation on legal issues and dilemmas in psychosocial rehabilitation. The challenges posed by the Mental Health Care Act, 2017 and the overview of the Persons with Disability Act were discussed extensively in this session. The session highlighted the need to define the role of government for the management and provision of services for those who displaced by mental illness and rejected by their families.

One of the main focus of this conference was to highlight the efforts at psychosocial rehabilitation in Northeast India and to share the experiences of the challenges of the same. Northeast India received special focus since the conference was held in the state of Assam which is situated in the Northeast Region of India (NER). The Northeast Region which comprises of 8 states do face structural, human resource and geopolitical challenges that sometime impair efficient and sufficient delivery of mental health services.

The work carried out by NGOs like ANT and Pari-

vartan Trust in the Northeastern states of Assam and Arunchal Pradesh were extensively discussed. The multi ethnic background of the population of the Northeast states calls for a collective, contextual and community perspective in the delivery of mental health services. The traditional ethnic and religious practices of the myriad of communities in these states need to be taken into cognizance in the planning and execution of psychosocial rehabilitation services. Owing to the proximity to the Golden Triangle, opioid and other substance dependency is high in some of the NER states that calls for a special attention to their recovery and rehabilitation through a non-custodial and collaborative facility. The challenges in providing psychosocial rehabilitation services are many. Limited public conveyance is one of the major barriers in the provision of services as well as in the sustainability of the rehabilitation outcomes. Economic, Structural and Geo-political environment limit the smooth and uninterrupted mental health services in the Northeast Region. The burden of illness is high in the context of these barriers.

Family, that often takes the brunt of the impact of mental illness, shoulders the bulk of the burden of caregiving and ensuring access to services for persons with mental illness. True to the spirit of WAPR, the conference provided the space for caregivers to air their concerns and experiences of providing care to a person with mental illness. A panel discussion was held on the needs and issues of caregivers of persons with mental illness where four caregivers participated. Two among them were also persons on treatment of mental illness themselves. These caregivers represented different socio economic and educational strata. They were strung together by their experience of providing care for a family member with mental illness and the emotional struggle of dealing with uncertainties of the illness. Those with lesser means of income had the additional struggle of making ends meet. Though varying in degrees, their needs for mental health care access specifically during psychiatric emergencies, providing medical care for physical ailments, uncertain future and burden of caregiving were similar. The caregivers found this session to be cathartic and at the same time relieving to know they were not isolated in their experience.

This panel discussion was one of the highlights of the conference.

The conference provided a forum for skill exchange and enhancement through several workshops that ranged from working with children to Rehabilitation Competency Framework. The role of technology-based interventions such as tDCS and neurofeedback that augment rehabilitation and the need to incorporate them in the mental health services was also demonstrated through workshops and presentations.

7th National Conference of WAPR-IC was well received and provided an enriching experience for the experts and the aspirants alike.

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### A Glimpse of the Conference



Theme Symposium (Plenary-1)  
Promoting Rights and Recovery in Mental Health



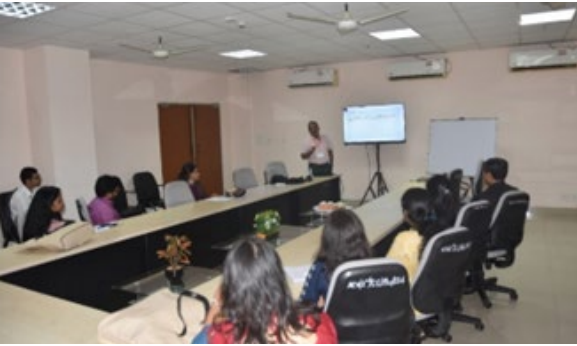
Symposium : Psychosocial Rehabilitation in North East



Plenary-2 Session: In Memoriam of Late Dr. Sharada Menon



Inauguration Function



Workshop On CBT in Psychosis



Symposium: Legal Issues and Dilemmas in Psychosocial Rehabilitation (Vide MHCA, PWD)



Release of the Souvenir



Workshop on CFSR Model



Panel Discussion: Needs and issues of Families of Persons with Mental Illness



Valedictory function



Distinguished audience