



# UW GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

## Mobile Mental Health in Community-Based Organizations: A Stepped Care Approach to Women's Mental Health

Untreated depression is a significant cause of morbidity and mortality among women in low and middle- income countries (LMIC). Dr. Amritha Bhat (UW GMH faculty) and Dr. Krishnamachari Srinivasan were recently awarded an R21 from NIMH for their pilot project on mobile mental health in community-based organizations. This project will test the feasibility of an interactive voice-response, mobile health application (MITHRA) for screening, tracking symptom severity and supporting stepped treatment of depression among women in rural India. The study will lead to the development of a scalable mobile application and build research capacity at the India site.

The idea for this project has been incubating since the time Amritha trained and worked in India a decade ago, and witnessed the stigma surrounding mental health and the low rates of access to mental health care especially for women. A few years ago, [qualitative work she did with women with depression in rural India](#) that led her to develop the idea of a multi user app to detect and treat depression. They received funding from NIH Global Brains for this project in June 2021.

They began work on the project last month with some stops and starts already due to the COVID 19 pandemic. They are developing discussion guides for their upcoming focus groups with administrators and participants in the community based organizations where the intervention will be tested. Information from these focus groups will help them develop the first prototype of the app.

If effective, the app can address mental health workforce shortages by providing first line treatment for mild depression. Although they are testing the app in women's community based organizations (CBOs), similar approaches can be used in other CBOs. For example, in the US, CBOs such as Women's Infant and Children and peer support groups for parents might be appropriate platforms for app based screening and stepped care treatment.

## **Responding to the devastation in Haiti**

This past weekend, Dr. Julio Frenk sent a letter from the University of Miami providing opportunities to support their efforts in the Haitian relief effort. His letter mentions the work of Dr. Guerda Nicolas, a psychologist and professor at University of Miami. Dr. Nicolas was (and still is) in Haiti at the time of the earthquake. Many may be familiar with her work with the Haitian community in Miami and with the Haitian mental health community in her country of origin. [If you would like to learn more about current psychosocial relief efforts, please visit her organization's site.](#)

## **News from NIMH**

### *Request for Information (RFI): Climate Change and Health*

This [Request for Information \(RFI\)](#) invites feedback on the approaches the National Institutes of Health (NIH) can take to enhance research on the health implications of climate change in the United States and globally. Climate change poses substantial threats to human health through communicable and non-communicable diseases, injuries, hazardous exposures, mental health, and death. Please respond by August 30, 2021

### *NIH seeks Public Comment on Women's Health Research*

This request for public comments that is open to the public until September 15. This is an opportunity to provide clear feedback on the need for funding on women's health research. [Please use this link to contribute ideas or thoughts.](#)

### *Advancing Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Access to Mental Health Services for LGBTQ+ Youth*

Date/Time: Tue, September 21, 2021 , 2:00–3:30 PM ET

Significant mental health disparities exist for sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth as a result of frequent discrimination and a lack of support from family members and society. To improve mental health outcomes, it is important to understand how LGBTQ+ youth of color and their families negotiate intersecting identities, manage stigma and discrimination, and develop or utilize social support systems. [This webinar](#) will provide an overview of a NIMH-sponsored study that adapts an evidence-based mental health intervention for LGBTQ+ youth of color and their families. It will also showcase potential mechanisms that can be used to adapt the intervention to address mental health disparities faced by SGM youth of color.

### *Reciprocal learning*

Increasingly, we see an emphasis on how to learn from and apply lessons from global mental health activities in the US and vice versa. This example of NIMH funding highlights that effort. NIMH staff will host a panel discussion around reciprocal innovation experiences during the upcoming 2021 American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (October 2021). An example of reciprocal innovation: NIMH recently awarded Dr. Brandon Kohrt (GWU) an R01 grant to improve the mental health of minority and other vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by COVID-19 through community-based psychological services in New York City; and, an

administrative supplement to develop a competency assessment tool for remote delivery of psychological interventions applicable for non-specialists and specialist providers to improve mental health care in populations affected by COVID-19 in New York City and Nepal. A NIMH R01 award implemented in Nepal laid the foundation for this important work. Dr. Kohrt is also co-author of a recent paper published in *Lancet Psychiatry* titled, COVID-19 mental health impact and responses in low-income and middle-income countries: reimagining global mental health, that examines shifting the balance of power from high-income countries to LMICs and from narrow biomedical approaches to community-oriented psychosocial perspectives. DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00025-0. PMID: 33639109

### **Highlights from the [United for Global Mental Health newsletter](#)**

#### *Ethiopian government launches new mental health plan*

In early July the Ethiopian government launched its [National Mental Health Strategic Plan](#), which sets out a roadmap for the next 5 years (2020-2025). [Mental Health Service Users Association Ethiopia](#) contributed to this plan.

#### *Pakistan launches a new MHPSS initiative*

In July, the federal government of Pakistan has launched a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) initiative by the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives and funded by UNICEF, as part of its emergency response to COVID-19. The aim of this initiative is to develop an evidence-driven MHPSS model which is right-based, scalable and sustainable.

#### *The 4S anathema on mental health*

Mental World has [published a new article on stigma around mental health](#). It explores definitions of stigma, the history of public attitudes to mental illness, and the different types of stigmatization.

#### *Maternal mental health technical consultation*

From 7th-9th September, USAID's MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership will be hosting a [Maternal Mental Health Technical Consultation](#) in collaboration with World Health Organization and United Nations Population Fund, and facilitated by global and country level maternal mental health (MMH) experts.

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