Unmet needs of public mental health research in India

Sir,

The major trends of public health research in India since 2001 show an increase in the public health research output from India over the past few years.[1] But, the quality of research in public health is not yet satisfactory enough and distributions of research areas are too inconsistent with the disease burden trends. Public mental health is major health system component, which continues to be overlooked. Several policy-making bodies in India have arrived at an estimate of their own, the precise basis of which is not clearly known supporting the need for public mental health research in India. For the matter of estimation, the mental health advisory committee of India estimated the prevalence to be 2% of the total population.[2]

Department of Health Research was established in 2007 by the Ministry of Health in India to respond to national health priorities,[3] and the Public Health Foundation of India was launched by the Prime Minister of India in 2006 to strengthen public health training and research in India.[4] The idea behind their establishment was to coordinate the efforts of different health organizations who contribute towards public health research. Mental health has for decades been low in the priority of health planners at state and central levels and this is well reflected in the quantity and quality of mental health services in India.[5] Looking at very large mental health burden, an acute attention is needed to identify the deficit areas. The trends and gaps in public mental health research in India points towards development of framework that enhances the capacity, infrastructures and resources.

We suggest an idea for developing, conducting research within the context of a rigorous research program, influenced by the requirements. We need to have a national apex center dedicated for public mental health research with the objectives of Influencing the development of policy and practice in mental health, creating research partnerships with service recipients, sharing research findings with the scientific, policy and practice communities, investigating the effects of different methods of inquiry and dissemination on the process of change in public mental health systems ad responding to key issues likely to affect public policy and practice. The Center should strive to create research partnerships with service recipients, to share research results with the scientific, policy and practice communities, and to investigate the effects of different methods of inquiry and dissemination on the process of change in public mental health systems.

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