



EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING ON “MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING” AMONG SELF-HELP GROUP WOMEN IN THIRUKAZHUKUNDRAM BLOCK, CHENGALPATTU DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

According to the Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016, mental illness or mental disorder is considered a disability impairing reality acceptance or routine life. Due to the serious concern of mental health in the Thirukazhukundram block, STEPS organization took efforts to create mental disability awareness among the self-help group (SHG) women leaders, the major players in family and society who became the mental health ambassadors in the community to identify mentally ill persons for further support. During October 2022, a basic training on “Mental health and well-being” was aimed to increase awareness on mental disability among SHG leaders. 207 SHG leaders were trained from 10 Panchayats of Thirukazhukundram block. Based on the training, an impact assessment was made among the randomly selected 50 SHG leaders to understand their knowledge on mental health and their approach towards mental illness. The training was found to be very helpful not only in identifying the mental health issues of others but their personal knowledge on the rights of mental health persons increased among SHG women leaders who have started helping people with stress. Hence, the assessment shows that similar training should be given to other SHG leaders in the block for further reach due to its meaningful impact.

Key words: Mental Health, Mental Disability, Self-Help Group, Training and Knowledge



INTRODUCTION

According to the Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016, “Mental illness or mental disorder is considered a disability which completely impairs behaviour, judgment, capacity to recognize one’s ability and capabilities to fulfill the daily demands and requirements of life. The primary aim of enacting the Act was to safeguard the interests of people suffering from disabilities, uphold dignity of disabled people and prevent discrimination against them calling for an inclusive society. Disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept and expands the list of disabilities from seven to 21, thus covering the mental disability”.

Math SB, et.al (2019) observes that the word “mental disability” is employed when a psychiatric illness meaningfully impairs the performance of major life activities such as self-care, working, communication, understanding, participation and interpersonal activities. Further, attitudinal and environmental blockades hinder active and full participation of the persons with mental illness in the society making them stigmatized and discriminated”.

There is a serious concern of mental health in the Thirukazhukundram block of Chengalpattu district in Tamil Nadu state. According to the 2011 census, “The taluk of Thirukazhukundram consisting of 95 villages had a population of 196,807 and with 97,426 females and with 99,381 males. There were 1000 men for every 980 women. With agriculture as the primary occupation, the levels of education are low and most belong to the lower socio-economic class. The available health facilities are one Community Health Centre (CHC), three Primary Health Centers (PHC), and 34 sub-centres with nurses. The closest psychiatric facility is a state-run hospital which is 14 kms away. There are no government and private psychiatric care centres in the block”.

About STEPS

STEPS (Service Towards Empowerment of People and Society) is a non- government and non-profit organization committed to quality and comprehensive Physical, Mental, Social, Economical, Cultural, Environmental, Agricultural (Organic), Legal, Folk arts and Moral Development of all people without bias and distinction of creed, caste, colour or community and gender.



The STEPS organization has been working for community mental health service since March 2021 at Thirukazhukundram block of Chengalpattu District. It has been directly working with eighty-five (85) families of mentally ill persons in thirty-five (35) villages in the block and help them get psychiatric treatment by attending the outpatient department at the government general hospital at Chengalpattu and Banayan at Kovalam. The community health workers regularly follow up with the client by visiting the home and make sure that the client take medicine without fail and get social care support services. The health worker also provides individual and family counselling for those struggling with mental health issues and persons who have suicidal thoughts. It creates awareness of mental health for MGNREGA workers, school and college students and conducts training on “Mental Health and well-being” for self-help Group (SHG) leaders.

Self Help Groups (SHGs) are known as informal groups of persons involving people of similar socio-economic backgrounds who find ways to improve their living conditions. Self Help Group is normally containing 10-20 women from marginalized and under privileged section of society who save a little amount of money from their livelihood and earnings for a common fund (www.studyiq.com).

Rais Ahmad (207) observed that, in SHGs common fund is generated by every individual member if the group from their small earnings and savings on the basis of regularity. By being a member of this group, every woman is capable of saving and getting access to the economy and chances of playing economical role both in the family and in the community. This role is very significant for better socio-economic status and life promotion.

These SHG women are empowered by various training programs and income-generation assistance by NGOs as well as the government. The SHG leaders have also proved their achievements through their entrepreneurial activities and their improved standard of living. But their awareness on mental disability is still a gap, as there are no programmes from government to sensitize them on mental health. Hence, this study attempted to provide training on mental health as the SHG women leaders are the major players not only in a family but also in a society taking up the responsibility of improving the economic conditions. Thus, they are given yet another role as mental health ambassadors to identify mentally ill persons in the community for further support.



VARIOUS METHODS USED

STEPS as a part of promoting mental health in the community is keen on creating awareness of mental health and well-being through a structured training model for various stakeholders in the community like officials of the local government organizations, teachers, students, Panchayat functionaries, SHG members, youth groups, etc. During October 2022, a basic training on “Mental health and well-being” was aimed to increase awareness on mental health disability among SHG leaders. 207 SHG leaders were trained from 10 Panchayats of Thirukazhukundram block.

The contents of the training programme include:

- a) Introduction to concepts of mental health and well-being
- b) A brief introduction to mental health disability
- c) How to manage stress and cope with the same?
- d) How to promote mental health in oneself?
- e) How to become a STEPS mental health ambassador?

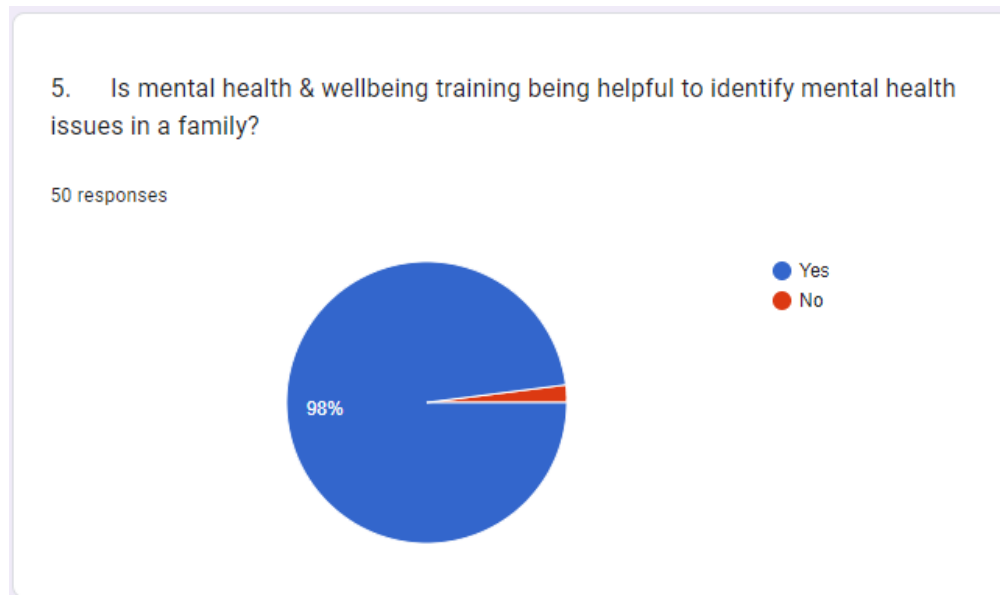
Based on the training, an impact assessment was made among the randomly selected 50 SHG leaders to understand their knowledge on mental health and their approach towards mental illness.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Most of the respondents were educated from middle school to higher secondary and very few have completed under graduation. Most of the respondents were MGNREGA workers. The SHG leaders became key people after attending the training and helping to identify the new mentally ill clients in the community. More than ten mentally ill people were identified by the SHG leaders and referred for support.



Figure 01: Help identify mental disability



It was found that a vast majority (98%) of the respondents reported that the mental health and well-being training helped them to identify their family member's mental health issues.

Figure 02: Better acceptance of mental disability



The assessment indicated that all of them (100%) who participated in the training reported that the mental health and well-being training was helping them to accept their



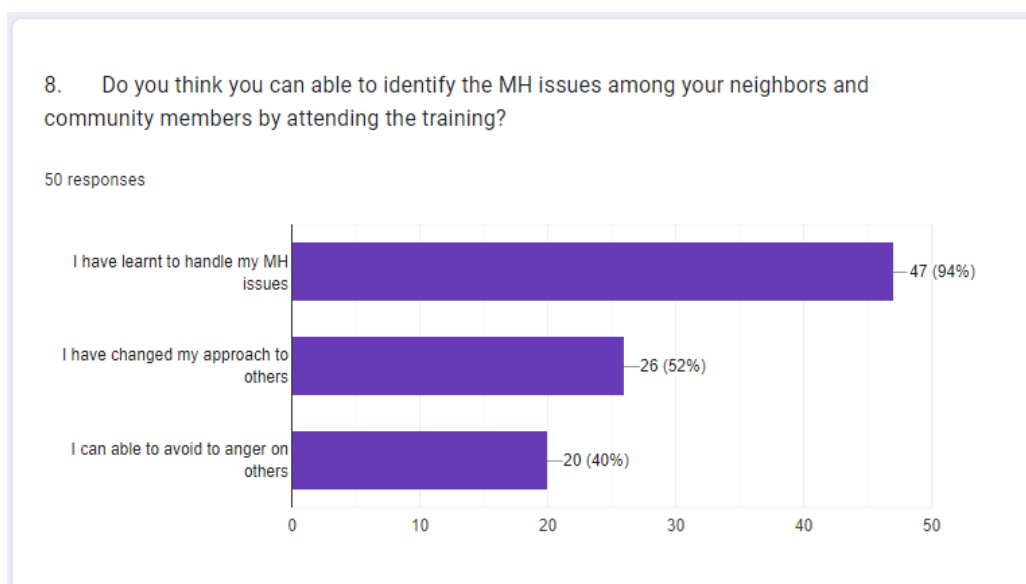
family member's mental health issues and disabilities. Therefore, there was better acceptance of mental disability.

Figure 03: Ability to manage family's mental disability



According to the impact assessment, all the respondents (100%) mentioned that attending the training helped them to manage their family's mental health issues due to the awareness and knowledge gained during the training. Therefore, the respondents were able to handle better the mental disabilities in family.

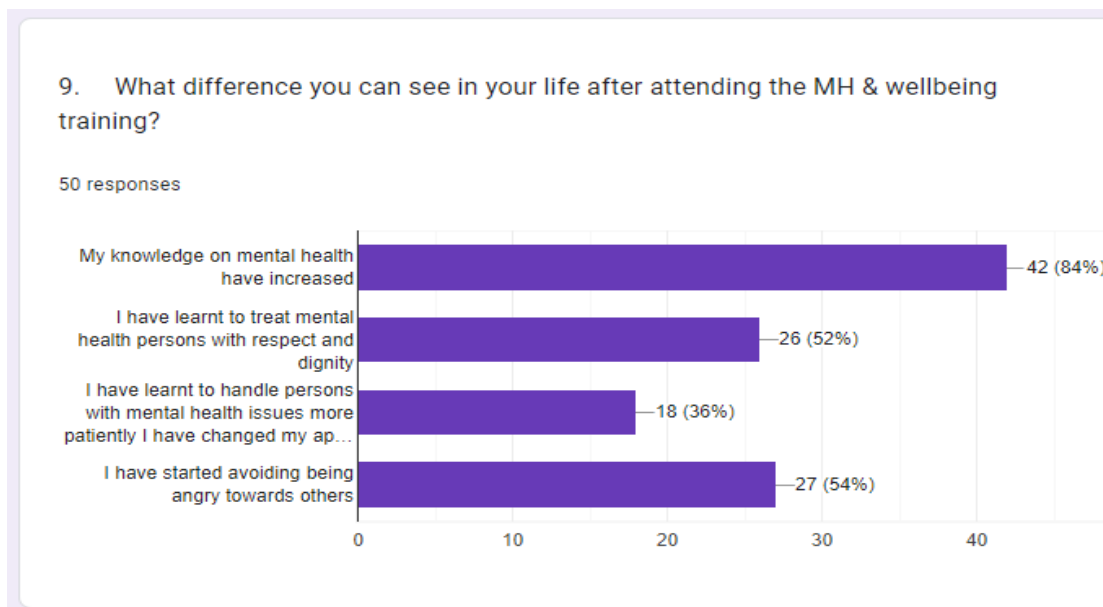
Figure 04: Benefits of the training





The benefits of attending the training program were shared by the respondents. A vast majority (94%) of the respondents reported that they have learnt to handle their personal mental health issues. More than half (52%) of the respondents reported that their approach to others have changed and close to two-fifths (40%) of the respondents reported that they can avoid anger towards others after attending the training.

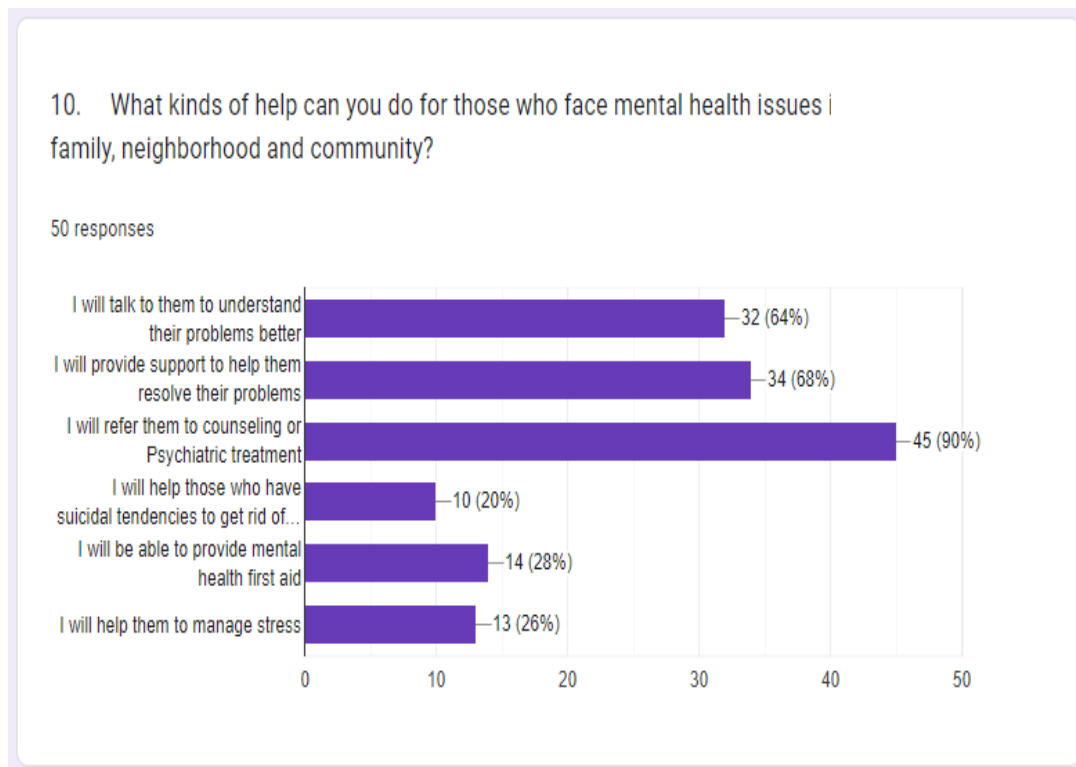
Figure 05: Attitudinal change



The respondents also shared the differences they had seen after attending the training. A majority (84%) of the respondents reported that their knowledge of mental health has increased after attending the training. While 54% of the respondents have started avoiding anger towards others, 52% of respondents reported that they have to learn to treat the person with mental disability with respect and dignity. More than one-third (36%) of the respondents reported that they have learnt to handle mentally ill persons more patiently. Thus, they could see some kind of attitudinal change.



Figure 06: Support to family and community



The assessment was also made to understand the kind of support the respondents can provide to the family/neighbourhood/community after attending the training. A vast majority (90%) of the respondents reported that in case they find anyone with mental disability in their family/neighbourhood/community, they will refer them for mental health counselling and psychiatric treatment. 68% of the respondents mentioned that they provide support to the person to solve their mental health-related issues themselves and 64% respondents reported that they will talk to them to understand their issues better.

CONCLUSION

The assessment was conducted in the Thirkazhukundram block of Chengalpattu district in October 2022 to measure the impact of mental health and well-being training among the SHG leaders. Based on the data collected from the respondents, the training was found to be very helpful in identifying the mental health issues of their family members as well as the community members. The training also has helped the SHG leaders to accept, manage and handle their mental health issues and their family members. They also changed



their approach towards others and learnt to avoid anger towards others after attending the training.

More importantly, they could able to see that their personal knowledge on the rights of mental health persons increased after the training. The ways of treating the person with mental illness have also changed and have started respecting them with dignity. The SHG women leaders now encourage others to talk openly about their mental health issues, help overcome the stress of others and refer the needed family members and community people for psychiatric support. Thus, the above assessment shows that the training has made a remarkable impact on the SHG leaders. Hence, the assessment shows that similar training should be given to other SHG leaders in the block for further reach due to its meaningful impact.

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