Shanti Parent Circle

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Problem

Mental health is heavily stigmatized in India and this leads to widespread neglect towards mental wellness.

What evidence do you have that this is a problem?

To collect evidence that our problem statement was valid, we sent out an online survey that was targeted towards college students at the BMS College of Engineering and Jain University. Within this survey, the majority of individuals believed that children did not have proper access to mental health resources at school (75% of respondents felt students didn't have proper access, 16.7% were unsure, and only 8.3% felt students did have proper access).[7]

We also conducted street interviews around Bangalore to ask different people, from autorickshaw drivers to stock traders, how they felt about the subject of mental health in India. The majority agreed that there was a stigma surrounding this topic in the community and many individuals were uncomfortable speaking about mental health freely. Some interviewees even mentioned how they had never even had the time to think about mental health since the subject is simply not brought up that often in India.

Who faces this problem?

To some degree, all demographics in India face this problem. Mental health is relevant to all individuals and anyone can experience a mental health problem such as depression. However, the age group that seems to be most susceptible to mental health problems would be older teens and young adults. When taking a look at individuals in India between the ages of 15 and 24, one in seven experience depression.[4]

Why does this problem exist?

This problem exists in India due to a variety of factors including, but not limited to: a fear of being seen as crazy or weak, a lack of understanding of what the term mental health actually means, and a lack of resources to turn to when faced with a mental health problem. Throughout the course of this GCIL project, we conducted over 20 street interviews with different individuals across Bangalore. From these interviews, we learned that many individuals felt like there was often no point in trying to reach out because they often did not have an appropriate person or resource to turn to.

Who is your customer/beneficiary?

The customer of our project is the Indian parent. Parents represent a backbone of Indian society and are highly influential on their kids' development. In many ways, helping destigmatize the topic of mental health for parents would help the topic be destigmatized for the entire community. To this extent, the beneficiary would be the entire Indian community, since parents will be able to influence their children, their spouses, their extended family, and their peers.

Why do they face the problem?

Indian parents face this problem primarily due to a fear of being criticized or being seen as having something wrong with them. This leads to people feeling hesitant to talk about mental health publicly. People associate mental health with being crazy, and there is the notion that "something is wrong with you" if an individual brings up a mental health problem. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness of the topic, with many people not actually having much knowledge on the subject.

What evidence do you have that they consider this to be a problem?

The evidence we have that parents consider this to be a problem is when we did street interviews with parents from various backgrounds in Bangalore. Many parents openly told us that mental health was not a subject they discussed often, especially not openly. Some parents told us they were uncomfortable talking about mental health with strangers and they would prefer to keep it within their family, while others felt that they would actually prefer talking to strangers rather than close connections. One aspect that most parents seemed to agree upon though was that there is definitely a stigma surrounding the topic of mental health in India and that it is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Why haven't they solved this problem themselves?

The problem of stigma and mental health has not been solved for a variety of reasons. For one, many parents that are aware of the stigma of mental health are often unsure of a way to address the problem. Some individuals may even believe that there isn't a good way to address it and that it's just another part of life and Indian culture. Additionally, many other parents often feel like they don't have the time to address the issues surrounding mental health because they are already so busy with their everyday lives. To an extent, based on responses we got from street interviews and our own personal observations, it is likely that individuals also would not want to put themselves in the spotlight when it comes to mental health and be the first one to take a step. Since there is a stigma surrounding mental health, people do not want to have that stigma directed towards them by being vocal about the concerns they have.

Solution

Shanti Family Circle is a mental wellness club that helps promote and facilitate open conversations between parents surrounding the topic of mental health. Moderators host club meetings for groups of parents and provide them with guiding questions to help facilitate an open discussion surrounding the topic of mental health.

Theory of Change

Parents, especially in Indian culture, are heavily involved in every aspect of their children's lives, and this does not change when it comes to the mental well-being of the children. By empowering parents to get educated on the topic of mental health, they may be able to provide their children a more comfortable space at home to talk freely about their problems. If parents are more educated and comfortable talking about mental health openly, this will in turn empower children to talk openly about mental health as well. As the children and parents get influenced, so will other members of society. Piece by piece, the entire community at large will get more and more comfortable discussing the topic of mental health.

Solution Evidence

We conducted multiple street interviews to help gather public opinion on our solution idea. During these street interviews, we pitched our idea to the individuals and asked for their opinions on whether the idea would work and what they liked & disliked about it. We ended up conducting interviews with over 20 different individuals on the streets of Bangalore, of which the majority believed our idea had potential and could help break down the stigma surrounding mental health. Multiple parents even expressed interest in being a part of the program at some point in the future. Some parents expressed certain concerns as well, with time being the most critical factor. Not all parents were certain if they could find the time for such a program.

How do you sustain yourself financially?

When it comes to costs, there are 3 primary expenses that will have to be accounted for: income for the administrative team, income for the moderators, and income for the mental health professionals. The Administrative team will consist of 2 to 5 full-time employees that will each earn approximately ₹20,000 per month. The moderators will earn ₹500 an hour and spend roughly 3 hours per week per circle. If there are hypothetically 40 parent circles running per week (this would be further down the line, can be seen as Phase 2 of our project), this would calculate to roughly ₹2,880,000 per week as moderator-related expenses. Finally, the mental health professionals would be paid ₹40,000 a month to be available as a resource through our
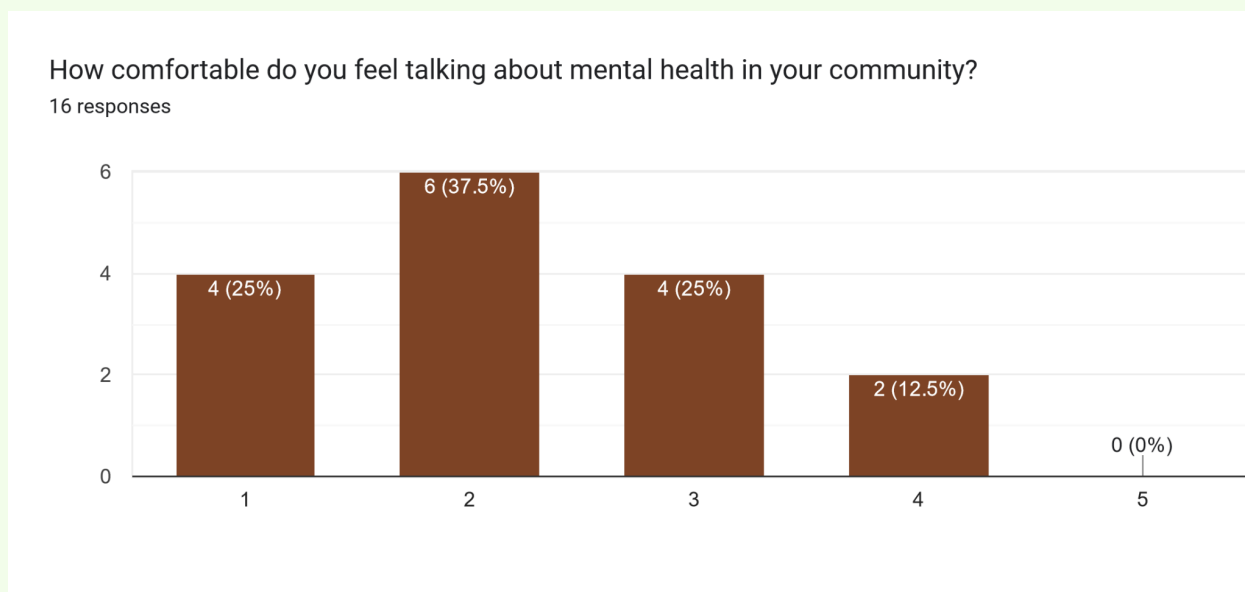
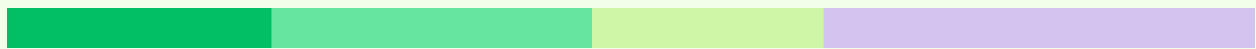website to help assist parents (this would also come at a later stage, possibly Phase 3 of our project).

To generate revenue and address such expenses, we have 3 main sources of income: donations, "Events for Hire", and CSR funds. When it comes to donations, we will not force anybody to donate to our organization, though it will be highly encouraged. Requests for donations will be marketed as a need for us to continue to be able to make the program free for parents to attend. However, fees will not be forced because parents should still have the opportunity to attend these meetings for free (especially low-income parents).

The "Events for Hire" program involves going to corporations and conducting mental wellness sessions to corporate staff. This will be a specialized program catered to the specific corporation and its employees' needs and as such, we will charge around ₹2,000 per hour to conduct these sessions. If in an ideal Phase 2 scenario we conducted 1 session such as this per day, that would result in roughly ₹60,000 in revenue per month. And similar to these corporate sessions, we intend to run a similar program with schools and their teachers as well.

Primary Data

We have a few different sources of primary data on our idea. We sent out a survey to BMS and Jain University students on the status of mental health as a topic in india and received feedback from 16 different individuals.[7] One of the questions that we asked on this survey was how comfortable people felt talking about mental health in their community on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very uncomfortable and 5 being very comfortable. Their responses can be seen below in the following chart:

How comfortable do you feel talking about mental health in your community?
16 responses

As can be seen from the chart, the majority of individuals surveyed from BMS and Jain University felt uncomfortable talking about mental health in their communities. This evidence backs our hypothesis that there is a stigma surrounding mental health in India and people are not comfortable talking about the subject openly.

We also directly interviewed over 20 different people on the streets of Bangalore; the majority of these people were parents, though we also managed to get some school kids and adults of different professions into the mix for variety. As mentioned earlier on, the majority of the individuals we interviewed expressed interest in our project idea and thought that it could work, though there were concerns with time availability for parents. We also prototyped our idea and received direct feedback on how the program was run.
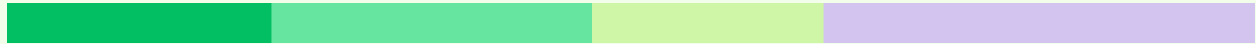
Prototyping & Outside Feedback

To test the efficacy of our project idea, we created a prototype model and conducted a session with parents and teachers associated with Parikrma Humanity Foundation. As was the intent of our project, we stayed relatively hands-off and provided guiding questions for the parents and teachers to have an interactive group discussion with one another. Some of the questions we asked were: What is mental health? What are examples of mental wellness? What are examples of someone struggling with mental health? If you realize that someone is struggling with mental health, what steps should you take? When should you reach out for professional help? Why is it important to have a conversation about mental health?

The prototype session went smoother than expected. The majority of the members present were enthusiastic participants that all became involved in the conversation. By the time the session was over, we asked everyone how they felt about the experience and if they had any feedback. The Parikrma parents, who all came from backgrounds in slum communities, genuinely enjoyed the experience and even said that they all felt they learned something new from the mental health session. Most people also believed that the program was interesting and definitely something that could prove to be useful.

One other piece of feedback that we received was to consider the importance of confidentiality and creating a space where individuals may feel comfortable to open up about their own personal experiences. With our program structure, some concern was expressed over people's willingness to be too personal, since parents would not want gossip to spread once they left the session.

Team Building

For our next steps, we intend to first introduce a local chapter in Bangalore. This will involve paid and trained moderators that will be hired to lead different parent circles throughout Bangalore. The moderators will need to be empathetic and sensitive individuals that are

passionate about the Shanti Family Circle's mission. Once a circle in Bangalore is established, the company's reach can expand to other parts of India as well so more parents can participate in conversations surrounding mental health.

Additionally, an administrative team will be required to help run the website and manage other logistical tasks for the organization. Some of their responsibilities may include: designing the curricula for the moderators to present, analyzing feedback surveys provided by parents for different clubs, and managing finances.

Additionally, we will have an "Events for Hire" program, where we partner with interested corporations to conduct mental health discussions at the workplace. This will help promote mental wellness for office employees who may otherwise be stressed with work and not taking care of their mental health. A similar program will be conducted in schools such as Parikrma to help promote mental awareness and wellness among teachers.

Having qualified mental health professionals that are accessible to the parents for more serious concerns is a very important element to our program as well. To help provide this resource, we also intend to partner with mental health organizations such as Rocket Health so parents can always have a professional to turn to for questions that other parents and even our moderators cannot answer.

Appendices

Randomized Control Trial

The randomized control trial will involve a long-term study on the effect that these mental health discussion sections have on parents. The trial will first consist of a pre-program survey, sent out to 30 randomly selected parents that are about to attend their very first session. The survey will ask questions on what the mental state of the parent is, how much they value the importance of discussing mental health, whether they think they will gain something out of a program such as this, and other related questions.

After a period of 4 weeks, these same 30 parents will be surveyed once again to assess how they feel about the program and whether they found it to be useful or learned something new. In the event that many of the parents that were initially surveyed ended up quitting, we will survey 30 different random parents that have attended 4 or more sessions and see how they feel about the program instead. We will then compare and contrast the responses that were provided before and after the mental health session were conducted and assess whether the sessions had a tangibly productive impact on the parents.

Finally, we will assess parents that have been a part of the Shanti Parent Circle program for a long period of time (over 6 months) and ask whether they feel more comfortable talking about mental health and whether they feel that the stigma surrounding the topic has decreased for them. We may then conduct more street interviews with parents who have never been a part of our program to compare and contrast the responses.

Theory of Change

What is the problem you are trying to solve?	Who is your key audience?	What is your entry point to reaching your audience?	What steps are needed to bring about change?	What is the measurable effect of your work?	What are the wider benefits of your work?	What is the long-term change you see as your goal?
- Mental health is highly stigmatized in India, leading to a neglect of mental wellness in people	**Customers** - Parents, particularly parents of children in grade school **Beneficiaries** - School children - Parents - Public at-large (due to destigmatization)	**Customers** - Online advertising - Direct outreach from networking events - Networking through partner organizations (such as Parikrma with parents of students) **Beneficiaries** - Children will benefit and be reached by the parents	- Create a website with all resources such as curriculum ideas, literature sources, steps to creating a club, etc. - Find mentors who are interested in volunteering to lead weekly meetings and are passionate - Outreach to parents who may be interested, then organize the club meetings	- The number of new parents who sign up to partake in our program, as well as the number of recurring members - Feedback surveys - number of volunteers interested in becoming meeting leaders	destigmatizing mental health in the public sector - improving relationships between parents and children Improving trust between parents and children - getting adults more comfortable with discussing important mental health topics	- Discussion groups spread all across india - children and parents freely discussing mental health with one another and having full trust - There is no longer a stigma surrounding the topic of mental health
Key Assumptions 💡 Youth aren't comfortable opening up to their parents 💡 There is a stigma surrounding mental health in India 💡 Many Parents don't have a lot of knowledge on mental health	💡 Many individuals would be interested in being meeting leaders for these group discussions 💡 Our idea would help address the problems we listed surrounding mental health in India	💡 Community members are willing to engage based on online ads and school outreach 💡 Youth and parents want to be more comfortable with one another in trust and communication				Stakeholders - Youth - Mental health organizations - Schools - Parents - General public

Empathy Map

1. WHO are we empathizing with?

We are empathizing with the students that are growing up and struggling with mental health but are unable to find the proper resources or openly confide in other people like their parents. We are also empathizing with parents who often have their own mental problems, wish they could communicate better with their children, and also don't know that much about the mental health topic.

2. What do they need to DO?

Find a safe space within which parents and children can freely learn about and discuss the topic of mental health. They need to learn about different mental health terms, examples of mental illness in real life, what steps to take in those situations, and how to handle sensitive discussions with their children.

3. What do they SEE?

Other parents who are maybe going on with their normal lives and seemingly have great relationships with their kids. An air of stigma is present in public surrounding the topic of mental health as well.

4. What do they SAY?

Parents: I wish I was able to open up more with my kids. I don't know much about the topic of mental health, I wish I could learn more. There is a stigma in public surrounding mental health, I don't feel very comfortable talking about it openly.

5. What do they DO?

Try to search online or find materials that can give them some ideas or options. Otherwise, many parents often do nothing to educate themselves on the topic of mental health. They often feel they may not have time with how busy work and chores may be. When their child is struggling with mental illness, they may respond inappropriately by berating or beating the child instead of being empathetic.

6. What do they HEAR?

Mental health is a strange topic to discuss openly. People who have mental illnesses are weird. Toxic masculinity: men (fathers and sons) should be strong and emotionless, and having problems like depression is a sign of weakness and poor willpower.

7. What do they THINK and FEEL?

   a. Pains: Scared of backlash; judgment from relatives and the public; showing signs of weakness.

   b. Gains: self-confidence,comfort, mental wellness, improved relationship and trust between parents and children

Prototyping & Feedback Plan

Prototype

- We will run an hour-long pilot Parent Circle at the Parikrma Humanity Foundation with a group of local parents and Parikrma staff.

- We will attempt to run a typical Samadhana Parent Circle meeting with a sample lesson:

  - First, we will ask group members if they can define the weekly term, "depression." We will then provide a dictionary definition of the word, followed by a definition that is more grounded in reality.

  - The presentation will then dive into what signs of depression can look like, both in children as well as parents. This will be followed by what types of measures individuals can take, as well as approaches that parents can take to help their own mental needs as well as their children's in a mindful manner

  - After the presentation, the discussion portion begins. The floor will open up for parents to discuss any questions that may have arisen from the presentation and subject matter in a small group.

  - Discussions will be held in a comfortable environment with snacks and coffee. Our goal is to have this be a stress-free environment where parents are not feeling overly cautious or uncomfortable, since mental health is a personal and sensitive topic.

  - At the end, some articles or books on the weekly topic can be recommended to individuals who are interested in exploring the subject further. Once the meeting is over, there will be open time for parents to socialize.

- Participants will also get a preview of our website and we will ask them to try and register a club using our online materials.

Feedback:

- After the pilot parent circle, we will ask the participating parents to fill out a feedback form addressing the following criteria

  - Quality of the mental health education module

  - Comfort in small group discussions and overall sense of community

  - Practicality of the program learnings

- Attending parents are also open to make suggestions for future circle meetings

- We will ask for advice from our connections at Parikrma such as Shukla and Akash and if they have any opinions on the feasibility of keeping the project running

- We will attend networking events across Bangalore and see if meetup leaders are interested in promoting the parent circle

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