

## **Psychologists as positive social change activists in India: Ideas for action**

We talk a lot about ideas, what inspires them, how to act on them. But it's quite simple: the best ones come from just going about our professions- encountering, and then attempting to resolve, both major hurdles and quotidian annoyances. The new mental health bill introduced in 2013 is a sign of relief to the domain of mental health in India. Despite the twenty six year delay in bringing out the new bill, psychologists in India have done a wide spectrum of out of box services for Indian citizens. They have massively contributed to enlighten laymen through books, articles, newspapers, television programs, free intervention camps, free helpline services, agony aunt magazine columns, set up new hospitals and mental health care centres. Over the past ten years, psychologists have also attempted to help people through popular social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter etc. Various online portals have not served the purpose and have been fundamentally inefficient as it is a tedious process to update information and busy virtual helplines did not help needy patients. The population in India at large is still unable to get adequate services from mental health professionals. The paradigm shift of technology is a positive sign of hope that can narrow the gap of accessibility between the psychologist and the needy patient.

With increasing number of telecom service providers the number of people getting access to cell phones is on the rise. According to the Times of India, there are currently forty five million Indians using apps or applications from their phones. Now these app technologies are ingrained in all we do, informing from how we work, to how to dress and whom to marry as well. Indians are using apps for shopping, e education, ordering food online, managing shares, e- banking, scanning bar codes, finding an apartment, virtual reminders, booking airline tickets, voice memos, reading e magazines, downloading and watching movies, finding the nearest police station, locating the closest hospital etc., through a tap on their smart phones, the list is endless. Human interaction is under a revolution in the literal sense of connection and in that most intriguing new method of innovation is crowd sourcing. Buying in to this technological advantage can help the Indian population exceeding 1.2 billion. There is an urgent need to bring about a positive shift in mental health by creating a mobile app called "Psych App" for finding and taking the services of a psychologist from any part of India. Such an App could help psychologists and prospective patients cut through the obstacles of geographical barriers, language, time and mental health stigma.

A Psych App would require many features for mutual benefits of the psychologist and the patient as this App has two main users; the psychologist and the patient. The primary user of this App would be prospective patients. Time starved people can toss the local telephone directory, the Psych App serves off all the pre-verified psychologists in India at ones

fingertips. The initial feature of the App would be to find the right psychologist. The patient on logging on to the Psych App should be able to find a psychologist closest to where he/she is currently residing allowing for instantaneous booking of required services. The patient should be able to decide which type of psychologist he/she wants to go to e.g. : should I meet a clinical psychologist or a neuro psychologist for the issue I am facing?, in such an instance the Psych App should provide a drop down checklist, which would automatically collate the symptoms and offer options of the right psychologist. On finding the appropriate psychologist, the patient can check the available dates of consultation and make an appointment through the Psych App. The App streamlines the schedules of the psychologist allowing patients to make appointments which can help eradicate the queue and token system. Patients can avail services with credit card, debit card and online banking information stored on the App. This App should also offer features like video conferencing and audio conferencing for the psychologist and the patient, as this would be useful when the patient has no psychologist in his/her location .This feature can be used if the patient is worried about the stigma associated with meeting a mental health professional at a mental health care centre. The App could be interfaced with other existing video and audio conferencing features on a smart phone like Face time, Tango, Skype, Vonage etc. for virtual interaction. The Psych App should track details of the prognosis, number of sessions attended, number of sessions pending and associated dates of the same, type of therapy, medications prescribed etc., for future reference for both parties.

The Psych App also caters to the requirements of the psychologist. Instant access to DSM V and ICD 11 should be an important feature of this App. This would help quick prognosis for the psychologist. A digital notepad helps the psychologist record case details in word format, audio and video format. A virtual chart tracking the progress of the patient would save time and paperwork for the psychologist through this App. Tools of assessment like questionnaires and psychometric tests can be made virtual tests and summated reports of the same can be a formulated by this App. The Psych App should collate pharmacology reports and other lab tests which can be made accessible to both the psychologist and the patient. This App helps psychologists update their status providing other prospective patients to make appointments in sync with the availability of the psychologists.

Additional features of this App would be tracking the client is he/she goes missing or is susceptible to suicides. The Psych App is meant to be a location based App and hence can be used in this scenario to locate the patient when he/she have missed a session, by tracking his/ her phone and rerouting the I.P. address to the closest police station or person to contact in case of an emergency. The psychologist or family members can locate the patient easily through this feature. The App could aim at helping in bringing together support

groups for various mental ailments. This remote login feature helps patients participate in support group gatherings from any part of the world. Since this App requires the psychologist to register with it as well, the credentials of the psychologist would be cross checked by the App thereby eliminating quacks in this field. Former patients can rate the psychologists online through this App based on their experience which will be useful for prospective patients to choose the best psychologist. This feature would be useful for the psychologists too as it is an instant validation of his/ her skills and reputation.

Creating the Psych App requires complex algorithms, a tech savvy psychologist or an interdisciplinary team of psychologists and software professionals and a benevolent angel investor. The mobile app industry in India was worth \$ 4 billion in 2009 and is expected to grow to \$18 billion in a decade. This has led to an increase in the number of app developers in the market. As days roll on smart phones will become cheap and easily available to many. With each industry serving mankind, business strategies catering to the needs of the customers has changed with time tremendously. There is less than one mental health care professional for four lakh mentally ill patients in India. Psychologists in India need to change strategies of help and deviate from the conventional clinical settings clubbed with age old paper work. The Psych App concept could be just scratching the surface. It's a frontier and worth exploring. The need to use technology to solve the problem of a disastrous logistical issue is the need of the hour.

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