



India's 10% population affected by mental health disorder, say experts

Coimbatore, Mar. 23: Over 100 million people in India (10 percent of the population) suffer from mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, but the society's views about these are clouded by several misconceptions, with exorcism and magic still considered a part of treatment in rural India and even some urban areas, said experts assembled at Amrita University for a three-day workshop on global mental health.

They singled out stigma as a major factor contributing to the huge burden of mental

morbidity in the country, preventing as many as 80% of patients from seeking treatment.

The global meet on Nurturing Global Mental Health was organized by Department of Social Work, Amrita University, and School of Social Work, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, with dozens of speakers from all over India and the US attending.

Talking about the prevalence of mental disorders in India, Dr. MK Suja, Chairperson, Department of Social Work, Amrita University, said: "Women, children, elderly and the disabled

are most vulnerable to mental disorders because of their dependency on others. Depression among pregnant women and those who have just given birth is common, and dementia in the elderly. There is also an urban slant, with the prevalence of schizophrenia, mood disorders and stress-related disorders being up to three times higher in cities than in rural areas. Overall, the prevalence of mental morbidity is almost double among males than females, though specific disorders like mood disorders, anxiety disorders and obsessive compulsive disorders are

higher in women."

Dr. MK Suja added: "Most people don't take treatment for mental illness due to the fear of stigma, isolation or rejection. Many patients prefer to visit a psychiatrist far away from their home town because they do not want to be recognized. There is also a lack of awareness about symptoms. Any change in behavior of a person is considered temper tantrums. Another challenge is denial on part of family members that someone is suffering from mental disorders, as they fear labeling the patient."