



Navigating the Mind: The Interplay Between Mental Health Literacy and Health Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety. The sample consisted of 100 young adults, 50 males and 50 females. The sample was randomly selected from Delhi NCR. The findings revealed that there is no significant relationship mental health literacy and health anxiety. Thus, the hypotheses formed was rejected and not statistically significant.

Keywords: *Mental Health Literacy, Health Anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

This term is a state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with life's stresses, reach their full potential, pursue education and career efficiently, and contribute to their communities. At any one time, a complex combination of familial, community, structural, and personal variables can work together to either protect or harm mental health. Most individuals are resilient; but, those who experience adversity, such as poverty, violence, disability, or unfairness, are more prone to develop a mental health issue. Many mental health issues may be effectively treated at a low cost, yet medical institutions are continually short of funds, resulting in treatment inequities throughout the world. Mental health services are typically of poor quality.

Wang et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of mental health literacy interventions in decreasing stigma and enhancing help-seeking behaviours among college students. The findings showed that focused educational programmes boosted understanding of mental health concerns, reduced stigma. Furthermore, Barney et al. (2018) investigated the relevance of mental health literacy in improving resilience among children exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The study found that teenagers with higher levels of mental health literacy were more resilient and used adaptive coping methods in the face of trauma, showing the protective benefits of education and awareness

Additionally, Barry et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of data from several studies to evaluate the efficacy of mental health literacy treatments across varied groups. The study discovered that treatments aiming at enhancing mental health literacy resulted in good outcomes such as more knowledge, better attitudes towards mental illness, and a higher chance of seeking professional help when necessary.

These studies all emphasise the significance of mental health literacy in tackling the complex issues of mental health. Mental health literacy projects aim to improve well-being and promote supportive communities by increasing awareness of mental health issues, encouraging help-seeking behaviours, and eliminating stigma.

Symptom and Sickness Recognition

Recognition may be divided into symptom and sickness recognition. Symptom recognition is the capacity to identify ideas, behaviours, and other physical signs of mental disorders without knowing the condition they are associated with. Specific sickness recognition is the capacity to identify symptoms of a condition, such as severe depression.

The mental health literacy paradigm is mainly based on comprehending the distinction between knowledge and attitudes. While some initiatives have concentrated on information dissemination, other studies have discovered that altering attitudes through stigma reduction is a more effective strategy to create meaningful change in mental healthcare utilisation. Overall, both techniques help to improve results.

Knowledge

Psychological literacy is strongly based on knowledge, which is often obtained through networks and systems. This might include friends, family, educators, or more broad sources like entertainment or social media. What variables put a person at risk for mental health disorders? Unemployment, insufficient income, a lack of education, prejudice, and violence are all potential risks. Self-help strategies, such as self-help literature and media, can help in the treatment of mental illnesses without the need for professional intervention. Unfortunately, many self-treatments are inefficient and sometimes harmful owing to a lack of information.

Attitudes

Attitudes are divided into two categories: attitudes towards mental disorders or those suffering from them, as well as opinions towards seeking professional aid or treatment. Personal perspectives can vary widely, making them tough to quantify through intervention. Nonetheless, there is a substantial amount of study literature on both sub-components, which is not usually directly linked to education about mental wellness. According to a recent study, mental health professionals hold more negative attitudes on prognosis, long termed outcomes, and the risk of discrimination than the general society. Mental health practitioners' attitudes on therapy differ, albeit this variation is mostly related to professional inclination.

Several nations conducted public surveys to measure mental health literacy. These polls show a lack of mental health understanding and an unfavourable attitude towards many basic psychiatric treatments, especially drugs. In contrast, psychological, supplemental, and self-help treatments are often regarded as beneficial. The public prefers self-help and lifestyle cures over medical and psychopharmacological therapies. Public views about mental illness have led to negative stereotypes, prejudice.

Furthermore, O'Connor et al. (2014) conducted a cross-cultural study to assess mental health literacy levels among various ethnic groups, demonstrating differences in understanding and attitudes towards mental disease. The findings highlighted the importance of culturally relevant treatments in addressing obstacles to mental health knowledge across communities.

Additionally, Kutcher et al. (2016) conducted a comprehensive analysis of data from diverse studies to examine the effectiveness of mental health literacy programmes in decreasing stigma and enhancing mental health outcomes among teenagers. These studies highlight the significance of focused interventions to improve awareness, eliminate stigma, and allow early intervention for mental health illnesses.

Problems associated with mental health literacy

Low literacy in a population is a genuine worry, as mental health literacy is fundamentally connected to general literacy. Without this foundation, persons who suffer with the ability to read and write would be unable to reap the benefits of mental health literacy. Increased literacy rates must be leveraged to empower and encourage self-help components of mental health literacy.

Populations might be varied, thus barriers such as cultural and socioeconomic status must be addressed. Economic financial, and political concerns impact mental health both inside and among ethnicities. Poverty, education, and social assistance are all factors that affect physical health. More study into mental health literacy and varied viewpoints is needed.

HEALTH ANXIETY

Health anxiety, also known as illness anxiety disorder, is characterised by extreme worry or fixation over the risk of contracting a serious disease, despite the absence of medical evidence to support such anxieties. Individuals with health anxiety may experience unpleasant physical symptoms and seek reassurance from healthcare practitioners, undergo unnecessary medical tests, or over-monitor bodily sensations. This condition can significantly impair daily functioning, promote avoidant behaviours, and have a negative impact on quality of life.

According to Barsky and Ahern (2004) health anxiety is “a continuum that runs from mild concern about one's health to excessive fixation with illness.” The authors underline that, while some amount of health-related stress is acceptable, clinically significant health anxiety is differentiated by excessive worry and maladaptive actions. Despite the doctor's reassurances, health concerns persists. If an individual has health anxiety, they may seek reassurance from doctors, insist on repeat medical tests, and attend the emergency department or urgent care. This propensity leads us to rely on such reassurance to alleviate our health concerns. A vicious

cycle begins whenever individuals notice a feeling or learn about an illness in the world, misinterpreting it as dangerous, Googling the symptoms and learning about terrible diseases, becoming increasingly concerned as we constantly check the symptoms, and then rushing to the doctor for reassurance.

Illness anxiety disorder may quickly become a self-perpetuating cycle. Stress can cause many of the physical symptoms linked with illness. People with illness anxiety disorder are anxious about a wide range of physical symptoms, including joint and muscular pain, sweating, nausea, and skin issues. Worry can intensify existing symptoms and cause new ones to emerge. Health anxiety is classified into two types: somatic symptom disorder and disease anxiety disorder. Many persons with health anxiety are unable to function or enjoy their lives because of their anxieties and preoccupations. They become preoccupied with biological activities (breathing, pulse), physical anomalies (skin blemishes), and pain. They may be concerned about one particular organ (the brain, the heart) or an issue they learned about in media coverage or at work. They are concerned about the risk of developing a serious disease. Many patients will seek physicians and tests for relief, but they are reluctant to seek mental health care because they believe that their illness is physically related.

This disorder is usually diagnosed when physical exams and lab tests come back normal, but the individual stays concerned and worried about an underlying health condition. This disorder is diagnosed using the patient's symptoms, medical history, physical findings, and any concurrent mental health symptoms, such as acute anxiety. Diagnosis may be compounded by the fact that people with this condition are sceptical of normal physical or test results, thus they may disregard their doctor's findings and seek another practitioner.

Reassurance from the doctor can reduce anxiety and bring short comfort, but the cycle is quickly repeated with a new condition. Individuals with health anxiety may avoid going to the doctor because they are terrified of discovering they have a serious illness, having to undergo medical tests, or being triggered by something the doctor says. The entire experience produces a great deal of worry, which an individual with illness anxiety would want to avoid.

To recap, health anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon characterised by excessive worry and a preoccupation with illness. Understanding the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components of this condition is crucial for accurate diagnosis and customised therapy to alleviate symptoms and promote overall well-being. Health anxiety is a disorder. There are several disorders that are distinguished by excessive anxiety in reaction to somatic symptoms, a disease, or a condition. Adults suffering from these disorders are obsessed with one or more bodily symptoms, as well as an existing or developing serious sickness or condition.

Naturally occurring sentiments are commonly misinterpreted as signs of illness, leading the individual to become unnecessarily anxious about their health. This usually results in excessive checking activities to ensure they aren't sick, such as frequent trips to medical experts and the use of home gadgets, as well as relentless questioning of others to establish whether they are unwell, among other things.

Furthermore, research has revealed that health anxiety is frequently associated with other mental diseases, such as generalised anxiety disorder and depression (Newby et al., 2014). Comorbid diseases can complicate diagnosis and therapy, emphasising the significance of a thorough evaluation and coordinated strategies for successfully managing health anxiety. Additionally, a person suffering from health anxiety may avoid obtaining medical help totally due to fear of what would be disclosed. Even when the individual has an illness or condition,

the amount of worry and related monitoring actions is substantially higher and takes longer than predicted given the conditions. Although, many individuals worry about their health and general well-being on occasion, persons with health-related anxiety disorders suffer excessive, continuing, uncontrolled, physically demanding concern that greatly impacts the person's, as well as their family and loved ones' quality of life.

Tyrer et al. (2019) also conducted a longitudinal research to investigate the natural course of health anxiety across time, discovering characteristics linked with symptom persistence rather than remission. The findings showed that early intervention, which addresses cognitive biases and avoidance behaviours, might reduce chronic health anxiety and enhance long-term outcomes.

Wheaton et al. (2020) investigated the efficacy of mindfulness-based therapies in lowering health anxiety symptoms and promoting psychological well-being. The study found positive findings, indicating that mindfulness-based techniques may be an alternative or supplementary therapy option for those dealing with health issues.

To recap, current research is contributing to a better knowledge of health anxiety, from its cognitive and behavioural causes to its influence on functioning and potential treatment options. Understanding the varied nature of health anxiety allows clinicians and academics to better serve those who suffer from it.

Literacy about mental health literacy as a factor in health anxiety

Impact of Literacy about mental wellness: The findings indicate a strong association between greater levels of mental health literacy and decreased levels of anxiety about health. Individuals who have a greater awareness of mental health issues, such as identifying symptoms, understanding treatment choices, and knowing where to get help, are less concerned about their health.

Minimising Stigma: Mental health literacy is essential for minimising stigma connected with mental health issues. When people get correct knowledge about their mental health, they are less likely to regard symptoms as odd or humiliating, lowering their concern about their mental health.

Empowerment and Coping: Greater mental health knowledge allows people to cope more successfully with pressures and mental health issues. Individuals can alleviate anxiety and suffering by devising proactive coping techniques based on their feelings and available resources.

Need of Education and Awareness: The findings emphasise the need of mental health education and awareness initiatives. We can raise literacy levels and provide a more supportive and understanding atmosphere for persons who are concerned about their mental health by offering easily available and culturally appropriate information.

Integrated Healthcare strategy: Addressing mental health literacy as a component in health anxiety requires a multifaceted strategy within healthcare systems. Healthcare practitioners should include mental health education in standard patient care and give information.

Future Directions: Future research should concentrate on creating and testing strategies to increase mental health literacy and minimise health anxiety. Longitudinal research may assist to explain the causal association between mental health literacy and health anxiety, giving valuable insights for intervention development.

Finally, it emphasises the need of mental health literacy in minimising health anxiety. One can help individuals understand and manage their mental health by increasing education, understanding, and destigmatization of mental health concerns, which will ultimately lead to improved overall health outcomes

METHODOLOGY

AIM

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between literacy about mental health and anxiety related to health.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To find out the relationship between literacy on mental wellness and health anxiety.

HYPOTHESIS

There will be significant relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study is a correlational study that aimed at investigating the relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety, participants from the general population will complete validated measures assessing their mental health literacy and health anxiety levels. Demographic information such as age, gender will also be collected. Data analysis will involve bivariate correlation analysis to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety. Potential moderating or mediating variables will be explored. Ethical considerations will include obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality. This study aims to provide insights into the association among literacy about mental health and anxiety about, that contributed to learning about the factors influencing mental wellness.

VARIABLES

Independent Variable: Mental Health Literacy

- **Definition:** The term refers to an individual's knowledge and understanding of mental health concepts, including awareness of different mental health conditions, recognition of symptoms, understanding of available treatments, and knowledge of where to seek help.

Dependent Variable: Health Anxiety

- **Definition:** Health anxiety refers to excessive worry or preoccupation with having a serious illness despite having no or minimal symptoms. It involves heightened distress, frequent medical visits, and impaired functioning in daily life.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The sample design consists of 100 college -going students (50 males, 50 females). The age range of the participants was between 18 to 25 years old. The study was conducted in the Delhi NCR region using convenience sampling method from various colleges within the region.

Inclusion criteria

- a. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 19 years old.
- b. The research included both men and women.
- c. The study included people mostly from the Delhi and NCR regions.

Exclusion criteria

- a. The study did not include anyone under the age of 13 or more than 19 years old.
- b. Population with severe mental illness were excluded from the study.
- c. Individuals from other cities were excluded from the study.

DESCRIPTION OF TOOLS

Mental Health Literacy Scale: It is a standardised instrument with 35 items that evaluates people's knowledge and grasp of mental health issues, as well as their awareness of accessible resources for seeking assistance and support. This scale is often made up of a number of items or statements about several elements of mental health, such as recognising signs and symptoms of mental health issues, understanding treatment choices, and knowing where to get mental health resources. The scale attempts to capture the breadth and depth of people's mental health literacy, giving researchers and clinicians useful information into how well they are prepared to recognise, comprehend, and respond to mental health difficulties. Scale has been psychometrically verified and is extensively used in academic and clinical settings to measure mental health literacy skills across varied groups.

SHORT HEALTH ANXIETY INVENTORY: The Health Anxiety Inventory is a brief self-report questionnaire that measures people's levels of health anxiety. It usually consists of a succession of items or comments about health concerns and anxieties, such as dread of contracting a major illness, obsession with physiological sensations, and avoidance of medical facilities. Participants are asked to rate how much they encounter each symptom or behaviour on a scale of "not at all" to "very much." The HAI is a quantitative measure of health anxiety that allows researchers and doctors to identify people who are experiencing increased levels of worry or anguish about their physical condition. It is a useful instrument for screening, evaluation, and monitoring of health anxiety in clinical and research settings.

PROCEDURE

When the research proposal was accepted, a permission letter was prepared and distributed to participants. The research could only include individuals who gave their consent.

Each member was also informed that their involvement was entirely optional, that they may withdraw from the review at any time if they felt uncomfortable, and that no personal information would be disclosed to anybody. The data was analysed using SPSS version 20. A research debriefing was conducted with persons aged 20 to 30. Participants were invited to complete standardised questionnaires. Each participant received two scales. Each question was explained in a simplified manner to aid comprehension. Any ambiguities were clarified.

All data collection and interviews took place face-to-face in English. The following instructions were provided: "Here is a set of questionnaires to measure social interaction anxiety and body image problems. Please assess yourself after reading the scale. The first solution that comes to mind is most often the greatest one for you. If any of the questions are difficult for you, please contact me." Participants were told there were no correct or wrong answers. The secrecy of the study was highlighted. They were told that the data would be used purely for scholarly purposes.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To investigate the objectives of the study, correlational analysis was employed to analyse the data through SPSS software.

RESULT

After data collection, statistical analysis was employed to the raw scores. The primary objective of which was to acquire the meaning from the raw scores, test hypotheses and draw inferences. Correlational method was applied to observe the significant relation between mental health literacy and health anxiety. The coefficients of correlation were computed for the statistical analyses of the obtained raw scores. Table 4.1 depicts the mean values and standard deviation scores for the variables, viz, mental health literacy and health anxiety.

Table 4.1*DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Mental Health Literacy (MHL)	113.3400	17.47970	100
Short Health Anxiety Inventory (HAI)	19.7300	9.51326	100

Table 4.2*CORREALTIONAL TABLE*

Variables	Mental Health Literacy	Health Anxiety
Mental Health Literacy	1	-.119
Health Anxiety	-.119	1

Table 4.2 presents the correlation analysis between two variables: Mental Health Literacy and Health Anxiety. On analysing the table, the coefficient of correlation suggests that no significant relationship exists between the two variables i.e., Mental Health Literacy and Health Anxiety ($r = -.119$, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

Table 4.2 presents the correlation analysis between two variables: Mental Health Literacy and Health Anxiety. On analysing the table, the coefficient of correlation suggests that no significant relationship exists between the two variables i.e., Mental Health Literacy and Health Anxiety ($r = -.119$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of mental health literacy do not correlate with lower levels of health anxiety and is not statistically significant at 0.01 level. Hence, the hypothesis formed which states that ***“There will be significant relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety,”*** is rejected.

The negative correlation suggests an inverse relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety, but given the lack of statistical significance, it would be prudent to interpret this result cautiously. Further research with larger sample sizes or different populations might be necessary to explore this relationship more deeply and to confirm if the observed pattern holds consistently.

Several factors might contribute to the reported results. To begin, the sample size of 100 participants may not have been adequate to identify a meaningful association, particularly given the intricacy and diverse nature of mental health literacy and health anxiety.

Despite the lack of a significant association, the study's theoretical foundations are consistent with previous research on the possible influence of mental health literacy on many dimensions of mental well-being. Numerous research have shown that mental health literacy treatments reduce stigma, promote help-seeking behaviours, and improve overall mental health outcomes (Kutcher et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2019). These findings indicate that strengthening people's comprehension of mental health concepts can lead to better outcomes in terms of mental health awareness and treatment use.

Furthermore, while this study did not find a clear link between MHL and health anxiety, it is important to examine the larger context of how mental health literacy might impact people's health-related beliefs and behaviours. Individuals with greater levels of MHL, for example, may be better prepared to recognise and handle early signals of mental distress, lowering their chances of having concomitant physical symptoms linked with increased health anxiety (Jorm, 2012). Furthermore, MHL may have an indirect effect on health anxiety by influencing coping methods, social support seeking, and A sickness management behaviours

Furthermore, the findings by Reavley and Jorm (2014) highlighted the need for additional study in this field to fully understand the complex relationship between mental health literacy and health outcomes. Future research might use longitudinal designs, experimental treatments, or qualitative methodologies to delve deeper into the causal processes that underpin the connection between MHL and health anxiety. Furthermore, looking into possible moderators or mediators, such as demographics, cultural views, or past experiences with mental health care, might shed further light on the complexities of this link.

In conclusion, while the current study found no significant link between mental health literacy and health anxiety, the theoretical framework and existing literature support the idea that improving people's understanding of mental health concepts may have a positive impact on their overall well-being. Continued efforts to increase mental health literacy and include it into public health activities are needed to improve mental health outcomes and prevent unnecessary anguish caused by physical health difficulties.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between mental health literacy and health anxiety. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how individuals' comprehension

of mental health concepts influences their levels of anxiety regarding their physical health. The -0.119 -correlation coefficient indicates no significant link between mental health literacy and health anxiety. This suggests that when mental health knowledge grows, health anxiety tends to decline significantly, or vice versa. There appears to be a slight negative connection between mental health literacy and health anxiety in this group.

LIMITATION

The study's sample may not be entirely typical of the general population due to a lack of variety in age, socioeconomic class, and cultural background. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to larger populations. The study did not consider contextual factors that might affect mental health literacy and health anxiety, such as social support, cultural views, and exposure to trauma or adversity.

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