



# SCARF ZINE

2020 NEWSLETTER



# Message from the Director

An unprecedented year, 2020 – the year of the COVID 19 Pandemic .....Globally, the year saw a lot of change, new adaptations, new learnings, new strategies and many of these are here to stay.

Like several mental health organisations, we at SCARF have had to adapt – a necessity for providing timely help to persons with mental health problems. SCARF Zine tells you the story of change, the story of perseverance. I am proud that the entire team at SCARF has stood together, a show of strength to deliver, to innovate, to continue a comprehensive care for serious mental illnesses, with all care to protect against the corona virus has diligently been implemented.



I feel proud that we have gone beyond the call of our mission to organise daily living necessities to our patients in the villages during the bleak days of the lock down. I am proud that we have continued all services to meet SCARF's objectives with unrelenting vigour! At a time when people around were losing jobs, losing wages, the management ensured that the staff at SCARF did not suffer a similar fate- I am thankful that we have been in a good situation to take care of all our staff!

The year 2021 has begun with signs of the pandemic abating .....but we need to remain vigilant.

**Take Care and Stay safe**  
**Padmavati**

**“Things Work Out Best For Those  
Who Make The Best Of How Things  
Work Out.” – John Wooden**



# From the Editor's Desk

== Dr. R. Mangala- Assistant Director (Media & Awareness) ==

**Wishing everyone a very happy new year!**

The year 2020 was defined by a single event that overwhelmed humanity globally, an unprecedented pandemic, which will remain fresh in our memories for several years to come. The pandemic put life out of gear making a huge impact in major spheres of our lives, physical health, emotional well-being, economy, work and education.

2021 is not just another calendar year but a new beginning for all of us who have survived the pandemic. The whole world is very eager to pick up the threads of our lives and move on carrying with it the lessons learnt and leaving behind the bitter and unpleasant memories of the pandemic.

A once in a lifetime experience, the pandemic and the consequent lockdown has helped us realize our potential and has pushed us to explore newer avenues for betterment of services. We geared up to handle this crisis very early on, and ensured uninterrupted services for our clients throughout. Every individual in the organization deserves to be applauded for rising to the occasion to contribute to the almost seamless continuity of care for clients. Every day threw at us newer challenges which were tactfully and patiently managed as a team. Kudos to one and all!

The staff of all the 3 residential centres deserve a special mention for their dedicated services throughout the 9 months of the pandemic despite several challenges and constraints. Thanks to their commitment and efforts we did not have even a single case of Covid 19 infection among



residents. Telephonic consultations that started off as a timely support to patients and families during the lockdown gradually evolved and a COVID related mental health telecounselling helpline was established within a few weeks of the lockdown. Extending this further, in this new year, we have added structured teleconsultation services for the benefit of several of our clients, enabling more people to access our services.

Besides providing free medication to ensure uninterrupted treatment for those in need, home delivery of medication was attempted during the lockdown. This has now been included as a regular feature of our services from 2021.



With WFH and online communications defining the new normal, SCARF quickly adapted to effectively use online platforms for several activities. Frame of Mind film festival went virtual this year and opened a new avenue for SCARF to explore and improvise.

One of the major highlights of the year was the virtual launch of the book, “ SCARF- Caring for the Mind: A Journey of 35 years.... and counting” by our beloved founder Dr.Sarada Menon in the presence of national and international luminaries. A moment all of us were proud of!

Before the curtains came down for 2020, SCARF added another feather to its achievements by conducting the clinical examinations for the national board ,leading to DNB in psychiatry for 8 students. A very well coordinated effort by all!

With decreasing numbers of infected persons and the availability of vaccines 2021 has indeed started off on a positive note. Arrangements have been made for vaccination of all staff members of the organization and is currently in progress.

The Awareness award given by the Tanker Foundation to the YMH team of SCARF for their dedication and commitment during Covid times in the very beginning of the new year is a shot in the arm and we are proud of the team’s achievement. Congratulations to Team YMH!

Amidst the hope and enthusiasm of the new year, SCARF is deeply saddened by the passing away of Padmashri. Dr. V.Shantha one of the pillars of the Cancer institute ,Adayar, a dynamic, inspiring and untiring leader till the very end.

With lockdown relaxations and near normal routines in place our focus now has shifted from Covid 19 to the forthcoming elections to the assembly. Our team has managed to get a good number of our residential patients enrolled as eligible voters. Kudos to all who tirelessly worked for it!

SCARF thanks all those who made monetary contributions and joined us to provide basic needs to a group of underprivileged people in Pudukottai district during the lockdown.As a show of solidarity and gratitude to the organization, several members of the staff made generous donations to SCARF which we wish to acknowledge and appreciate. Thank you friends!

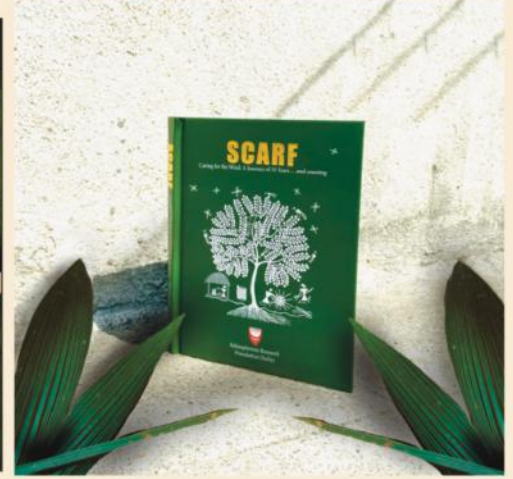
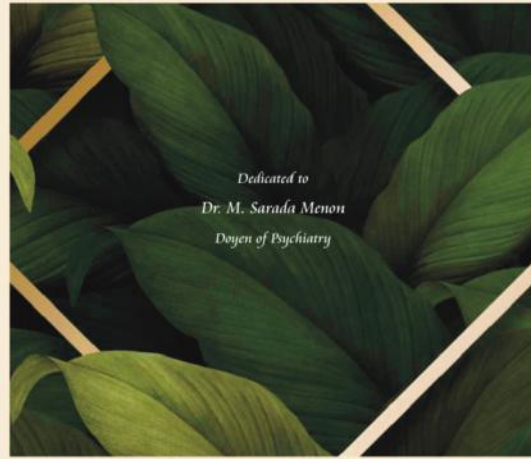
While we share the grief of bereavement of families of all lost lives and understand the turmoil of those who experienced the infection, we remain grateful that the entire SCARF family has survived the pandemic and we have stepped into 2021 together . I should say, that Team SCARF has come out of this not just unscathed but better equipped for the future too.

A positive outcome of the entire Covid experience was a change in the public perception of mental health, its universality and significance in everyone’s lives. People seem to be more willing than before to acknowledge and discuss mental health issues and this is an encouraging sign.

With newer research projects and other activities 2021 is bound to keep all of us busy and active and we will continue our efforts with renewed enthusiasm and dedication .



# Highlights SCARF BOOK



The book “SCARF-Caring for the Mind: A Journey of 35 Years... and counting” curated by our Vice Chairman, Dr. Thara Rangaswami features the history, people’s experiences and the journey of our organisation. The theme of the book is “Tree of Life” mirroring the growth of our organisation over 35 years.

We launched our book virtually on December 5th 2020 by Dr. Sarada Menon felicitated by Dr. Benedetto Saraceno and Mogan Agashe followed by the Second Edition of Dr. Sarada Menon Oration.

The book is now available on our website  
[www.scarfindia.org](http://www.scarfindia.org)





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# Second Edition of The Dr Sarada Menon Oration

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Second edition of The Dr Sarada Menon Oration was successfully conducted virtually via Zoom and YouTube Platforms on 5th of December, 2020.

**Frances Dark**, Director of Rehabilitation Services, Metro South Mental Health Service, Brisbane, Australia delivered the oration, on **RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF A GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS**

**Dr Helen Killaspy**, Professor and Honorary Consultant in Rehabilitation, London, UK chaired the session.

The Oration is available on our YouTube channel.



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The 9th edition of IConS scheduled to happen in September 2020 stands postponed due to Covid 19 pandemic.

**We Hope to See You Soon!**



# SCARF'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID PANDEMIC

The Government of India decided to impose a nation wide lockdown from March 24, 2020. All nations, big and small had to go into a full response mode.

SCARF too had to make an emergency response to the situation. We aimed to continue to provide services while taking into account all precautionary methods to safeguard against spread of the virus.

- Reallocation of movement in the out-patient facility was a priority. We focussed on a single entry point for patients and families. Signage boards placed in appropriate locations to facilitate movement. Seating arrangements ensured physical distancing.

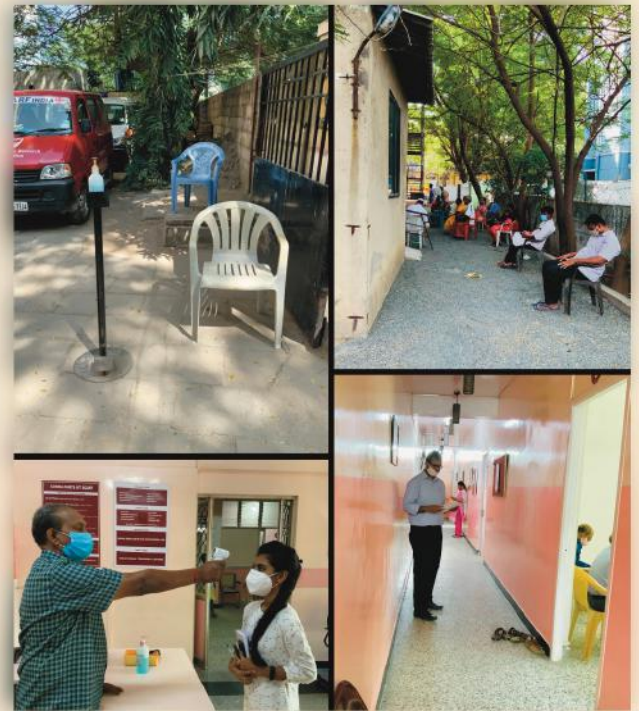
- Screening for temperature checks, sanitisers stands and facility for hand washing were made available. All patients and families were asked the mandated screen questions for COVID 19. In the event of a positive history the person was seen separately by a dedicated staff, who was well protected with appropriate PPE.

- Staff duty roster was put in place for all clinical staff to run the OPD, in operation 4 days a week.

- Education of patients and care providers on safety measures is done periodically when they wait to see the clinical staff.

- COVID 19 related posters and stickers were displayed in visible places so that, patients were reminded of the basic hygiene like hand washing, regular use of face-mask and social distancing.

- Tele counselling services were initiated, advertised through social media.



## COVID CARE IN OUR RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

“Our patients admitted for care are perhaps better protected from COVID than if they were in the community” - A staff in the residential facility

- All centres were provided with sanitizers, infrared thermometers and PPE kits.
- All health care staff were given proper guidelines and instructions to be followed during their interaction with patients.
- Isolation ward had been identified in the facility in case if any patient needs to be isolated
- No visitors were allowed during this period. The relatives of the patients were allowed to do video calling.
- All our patients were given immunity boosters like kaba sura kudineer as instructed by government..
- Patients were regularly reminded of the basic hygiene like hand washing, regular use of face-mask and social distancing.
- All patients were given COVID 19 related awareness and counseling by our case managers and social workers.
- While exposure to media information was not restricted, we ensured that all our patients were reassured when disturbed by the barrage of negative news.



### **Receptionist GunaSelvi's Lockdown Experience**

Corona situation at SCARF gave me a new experience especially during the lockdown. I handled numerous phone calls every day from patients asking for consultation and medications. Most of the calls were from outside Chennai. Since they are stuck in their hometown, they had a hard time getting their medicines. I would explain the procedure and our situation at SCARF. Elderly patients struggled to get medicines and during that time, I helped them in sending the medicine via courier after getting their prescription. We have had instances where a patient walked 20 kms just to get medicines at SCARF. Since I stayed at SCARF, I was able to understand the need and importance of timely medicines. Once the lockdown was lifted, our OPD was rearranged abiding COVID protocols and I would explain the patients about this change from the front desk.

### **Robust Administration and Finance Management the backbone of SCARF**

Strong administration and finance departments have been a tremendous support system to all clinical operations in the past year. SCARF operations are hugely contingent on public funding and accountability of finances and administration are deemed critical. The administration helped in ensuring sanitisation, facilitating staff movement during lockdown, talking to the police for managing staff movement, keeping track of the COVID helplines, managing communications and so many more similar tasks. This has been no easy task!

Most funding through the country was prioritised for the management of the pandemic and donations to SCARF, as is true of several other organisations dwindled. With dwindling of donations, the financial management team has risen to the task of managing funds to ensure that staff salaries are paid throughout and all contingency expenditures were met. A big acknowledgement to the teams!

## **Psychological Services at SCARF during the Pandemic**

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the lock down as a preventive measure has a major impact on all our lives at varied levels. During this period many people fear about their health condition as they are vulnerable to develop the infection at any point of time. This would make them feel anxious all the time which affects their sleep, appetite and mood. The next aspect is frustration and boredom as a result of lack of routine, disconnected from the family and outside world, uncertainty in the situation etc. They tend to spend their time by involving in social media which in turn produces adverse effects on their mental health. There is a pressing need to provide support to those who experience psychological distress during this pandemic.

Keeping this in mind SCARF initiated a helpline to cater to the psychological needs of the general public. This helpline service started from 1st April and continues to be active till date.

People in all age groups from all over tamilnadu, mostly from rural areas have been calling the helpline. We also receive calls from all around Chennai. 50 percent of the calls are covid related anxiety, financial stress, boredom and frustration due to lock down. 30 percent are those who are already on treatment for mental illness seeking consultation to renew their prescription, remaining 20 percent are those who have low self esteem, social anxiety for a very long time but hesitant to seek help in person. The tele-consultation caught their attention and they felt more comfortable in seeking help.

Seven mental health professionals who are experienced in providing psychological support are part of this 24X7 service and they take turns from sunday to saturday to handle this helpline.

These callers were supported by providing psychological first aid, crisis interventions, supportive counseling etc by the mental health professionals. Callers who needed continued support are referred to Psychologists for therapies and psychiatrists for clinical evaluation and treatment.



# RESEARCH

- Experiences and Needs of Caregivers of Persons with Dementia in India During the COVID-19 Pandemic—A Qualitative Study
- Psychometric properties of outcome measures in non-pharmacological interventions of persons with dementia in low-and middle-income countries: A systematic review.
- Support groups for family caregivers of persons with dementia in India (innovative practice)
- A New Approach for Developing “Implementation Plans” for Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) in Low and Middle-Income Countries: Results From the CST-International Study.
- Psychosocial interventions for dementia in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs): a systematic review of effectiveness and implementation readiness
- Mixed methods implementation research of cognitive stimulation therapy (CST) for dementia in low and middle-income countries: study protocol for Brazil, India and Tanzania (CST-International)
- Community stakeholders’ perspectives on youth mental health in India: Problems, challenges and recommendations
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- Learnings from conducting mental health research during 2004 tsunami in Tamil Nadu, India.
- A qualitative study on the use of mobile-based intervention for perinatal depression among perinatal mothers in rural Bihar, India.
- Mobile phone usage and willingness to receive mental health support through mobile phones among perinatal mothers in rural Bihar, India

## **Research: Fear and anxiety of COVID-19 among Persons with mental disorders and caregivers at SCARF**

The ongoing COVID pandemic has affected the lives of all people around the world in different magnitude and severity. Along with the mortality and morbidity associated with the COVID, the mitigating measures put forth by the government have also impacted the lives of the people. While psychosocial impact of COVID-19 has been explored among the general population in India and elsewhere, this will help us to understand if persons with pre-existing mental illness are worried or anxious about COVID and to develop and deliver interventions at the clinical level to reduce COVID related anxiety and fear among persons with mental disorder.



# Community Mental Health

**“The Pandemic had given us all a tough time but we made sure our Services continued for the Community”**

It is evident that COVID 19 has made an impact in all of our lives at the same time this situation helped us understand the importance of continual mental health support within the community. We ensured that patients get their interventions regularly without any hassle. 26 training and awareness programs have been conducted throughout the year involving more than 2000 people in the community.

At SCARF Pudukottai :

- 114 patients received PSR programs during the pandemic
- 73 patients received their Disability Pension during 2020.
- SCARF field staff were able to distribute a generous package of rice and provisions to many patients and their families in Gandharvakottai and Karambakudi taluks. We thank the donors who made this possible.
- Patients also received COVID Relief Grocery Kits from the Government.



## Media for Mental Health Awards 2020

As part of our efforts to improve public awareness on Mental health and reduce stigma, we have been giving away Media for Mental Health Awards.

Dr. Jaya Sreedhar, (Chairperson of Media Awards) and Mr.Venkatesan.R, (Editor - Pattam, Dinamalar) chose the winning articles and our Chairman, Mr.Seshasayee announced the winners.

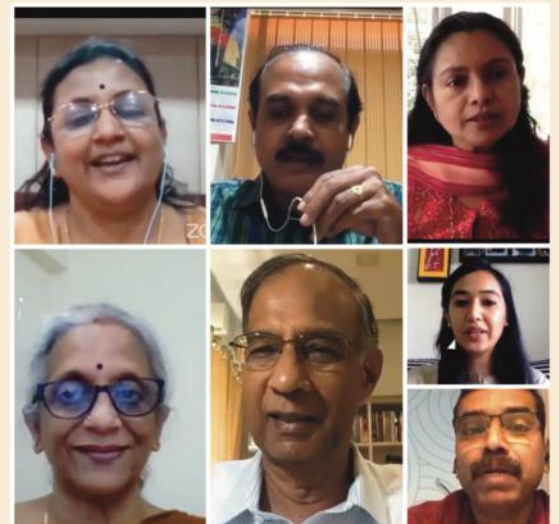
The prize winners of the 8th Edition are

**English**

1. Tabassum Barnagarwala (The Indian Express)
2. Tanishka Sodi and Abhimanyu Hazarika - (The News Laundry)
3. Shreevatsa Nevatia - (The Huffington Post)

**Regional Language**

1. Narjis Hussain (Schatraag Online) - Hindi
2. Santhosh Sisupal (Manorama Arogyam) - Malayalam





# Going Digital!

Around the same time last year, the news of Covid 19 virus was slowly creeping into our lives. While the whole world was still working out means to contain this infection, a nation wide lockdown was announced by the PM to curtail spread of the virus.

Telephones became lifelines connecting all of us with patients and families. Social Media not only serviced for communal purposes but opened doors and acted as vehicles of information and education.

We started exploring the digital platform for ways to reach the general audience in order to raise awareness and bring about timely content for people. We were able to connect not only locally but also nationally for several online seminars and conferences.

## Media Training

- SCARF in association with SANGATH, Bhopal developed a free online 4 week course for journalists on Sensitive reporting of mental health issues. This was part of capacity building component of NIMH funded project ESSENCE. This course highlights the necessity to bring sensitivity for responsible mental health reporting
- The course is four-week self-guided course with recorded lectures, resource materials and assessment with weekly webinar discussions with course faculty and fellow participants to enhance the understanding of the course.
- Two batches of 25 journalists each completed the course
- 3 national and 4 regional fellowships of 12 months duration have been given to encourage better reportage of mental health issues in the media. More than 20 articles have been published as part of the fellowship.

**Kamini Mathai** - Senior Assistant Editor (English), Times of India, Chennai

**Prem Vijay Patil** - Chief Reporter (Hindi), Nai Dunia, Dhar

**Revathi Rajeevan** - Senior Correspondent(English) - CNN- News 18, Bengaluru

**AnilMangalath** - Senior Editorial Coordinator(Malayalam) - Manorama Arogyam, Kerala

**Deepika Gumaste** - Freelance Writer (English), Mumbai

**Narjis Husain** - Freelance Writer (Hindi) , New Delhi

**Seethalakshmi .V** - Journalist (Tamil) - Pattam, Dinamalar, Chennai





## Television & Radio Programs

- Two Live programs on Puthiya Thalaimurai , discussion on Coping with Covid  
- Dr.Thara and Dr. Mangala
- Live program on Sun News on Covid  
-Dr.Mangala
- Two interviews on DoorDarshan  
-Drs. Sridhar and Shivaprakash
- Panel discussion on J news on dealing with anxiety related to NEET exams  
-Dr.Mangala
- Talk in AIR on tips to cope with Covid for women  
- Dr.Mangala
- Talk in AIR for Schizophrenia day  
-Dr. Mangala

## Social Media Programs

- We started a YouTube series called Let's Talk Mental health where we addressed topics related to COVID-19.
- 7 Short videos in Tamil for women SHGs on Covid related mental health for TNWDC - TamilNadu Women's development corporation
  1. Introduction
  2. Anxiety
  3. Depression
  4. Alcoholism
  5. Lifestyle
  6. Child Abuse
  7. Social Media Awareness
- We also conducted a Social Media Campaign 'Mental Health Bingo' for World Mental Health day. The Campaign had an active participation and was well received.

## Public awareness programs - Talks

- Dr. Mangala spoke in a webinar by Ariviyal Palagai
- Webinar organized for journalists with Sangath on MH reporting during Covid times
- 2 Panel discussion organized with Patients Engage for World Schizophrenia day
- Participated in 2 Webinars by NASCOM for IT professionals by Dr.Thara and Mangala
- Participation in Webinar by The Hindu on career guidance By Subhashini
- Dr. Mangala gave a talk to 300 employees of an IT company.
- A Talk given to 60 employees of HDFC bank, Bangalore
- Webithon by Dr. Mangala on Responsible Media Coverage of Suicide Survivors and Those we have lost with WOW mind and Behavior Clinic
- A talk conducted by Dr Mangala to the students of MSSW on Suicide prevention day.
- Dr.R.Thara, R.Padmavati and Sridhar Vaitheswaran participated in webinars by TOI during Mental health week in October.
- 10th October - Marking World Mental Health day, Ms. Sruthi Mohan spoke at Symbiosis School of Photography on Artists and Mental Health



# Frame of Mind 2020

**Registration link** - [https://zoom.us/join/register/WN\\_FdBBJ-DGQa22Zx5yw\\_OY6A](https://zoom.us/join/register/WN_FdBBJ-DGQa22Zx5yw_OY6A)

## FRAME OF MIND 2020

**6.00 P.M**

**WELCOME ADDRESS AND Introduction to Frame of Mind**

**6.15 P.M** Short film Screening

Sandhya, Ithu Madira Alla, Connected, WFH, Dasegit, La Partida, Sochi Radio and De Facade

**7.00 P.M** Panel Discussion on the Film **HOUSE OWNER**

A movie that depicts the challenges of caregiving in Alzheimer's Dementia

Moderator: Dr. R. Mangala

Panelists: Ms. Lakshmy Ramakrishnan (Film Director)  
Dr. Mitchell Weiss (Chair Person, Frame of Mind)  
Dr. Seetha Vaidyanathan (Old Age Psychiatrist)

**6.00 P.M** Short film Screening

Mohan Thatha, Far from Home, One day, Run Away, Socking Truths, Prigara (Cape), Back from the Future

**6.40 P.M** Panel Discussion

Portrayal of Mental Health Professionals in regional Cinema in Indian Times - Its Impact on Public Attitudes.

Moderator: Dr. R. Mangala

Panelists: Mr. Venkatesh (Film Director)  
Dr. Jeya Shreehar (Media Health Consultant, Writer and Former Censor Board Member)  
Ms. Lakshmy Ramakrishnan (Film Director)  
Dr. N. Rangarajan (Psychiatrist)  
Ms. Vinodhini Vaidyanathan (Actor)  
Cable Shankar (Writer and Film Critic)

**7.40 P.M**

**Valedictory and Awards Presentation**

Jury's Perspective: Dr. Mitchell Weiss (Chair Person, Frame of Mind)

Award Distribution: Mr. Rajiv Menon (Director and Cinematographer)

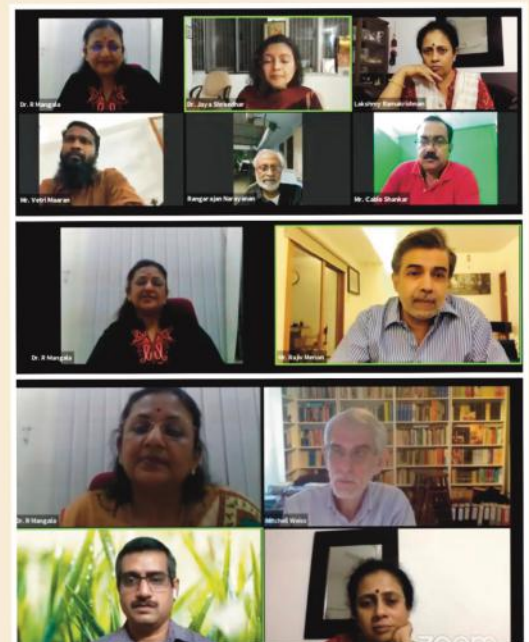
To know more, Contact: 9444027388/9677116059 [www.scarfindia.org](http://www.scarfindia.org)

With no end in sight to the pandemic and the restrictions, we chose to conduct a simplified version of Frame of Mind, virtually. In keeping with the times the theme for the short film contest was “Coping with the new normal”, which attracted about 100 national and international entries. An eminent jury including Dr. Mitchell Weiss (Chairperson), Ms. Lakshmy Ramakrishnan (Director and Actor), Ms. Vinodhini Vaidyanathan (Theatre and Film personality), Mr. Raju Sundaram (Film Director) and Mr. Harsha Koda chose the winning films and the prizes were distributed by Mr. Rajiv Menon (Director and Cinematographer).


The event spread over two days had 2 important panel discussions. The panel on Day 1 discussed the challenges in taking care of a person with Alzheimer's Dementia using the film “HOUSE OWNER”. A very interesting and informative discussion happened with a good amount of participation from the audience.

On day 2, the panel of media and mental health experts discussed the portrayal of mental health professionals in regional cinema and its impact on public attitudes. The need for responsible film making on sensitive issues and keeping them close to scientific facts and reality was reiterated. The role of mental health professionals in improving public perceptions was also emphasized.

The shortlisted contest films and the panel discussions are available on SCARF INDIA Youtube Channel




**Congratulations**




**FIRST PLACE**  
SANDHYA - TEJASVI KANG

**Congratulations**




**SECOND PLACE**  
LA PARTIDA - DAVID MORA

**Congratulations**



**THIRD PLACE**  
CONNECTED - JITHIN THOMAS

**Congratulations**



**THIRD PLACE**  
FAR FROM HOME - MEHERASHAD WADIA



# Student Feature

## Lockdown Silver Linings:

Glimmers of Hope for Positive Changes in Mental Health

Kruthika Muralinath & Sanjhana Prasad

COVID-19 has proven to be one of the deadliest diseases humanity has seen. An almost inconspicuous microorganism has the entire world scrambling, trying to cope with its unpredictable course. Nations all over the world enforced curfews and lockdowns to contain the spread of this virus. While these measures were required to handle a global pandemic, the imposed lockdowns have affected and continue to affect people in disparate ways. On the one hand, beautiful acts of kindness and camaraderie have emerged while on the other, devastating ramifications. This article mindfully aims to feature the positive facets of the COVID-19 lockdowns specially pertaining to Mental Health.

### **Mental Health in the Spotlight**

In the new normal, there has been significant increase in the attention paid to the role of immunity and personal hygiene. At the same time, it has inevitably shed light on the state of mental health and the need for further interventions. United by a common foe, people have been reaching out to one another to share their angst over the uncertain future. Be it on social media or via support groups, online interventions and therapies or via helplines and outreach programs, there has been more conversation and connectedness in this space.

### **Some with Pre-Existing Mental Health Conditions Reported Alleviation of Symptoms**

Paradoxically, some people with anxiety disorders such as GAD and OCD showed improvements in their symptoms and reported an increased sense of well-being. Others reached out for help to those with these disorders as their lived experiences

enabled them to better understand the large-scale anxiety being experienced. Those with disorders helped others in battling uncertainty, facing their demons and even resolving conflicts. Although this does not level the playing field, we believe it did shed some light on the importance of being able to identify, understand and treat mental health challenges. There is increasing acceptance of the how imperative it is for us to collectively nurture not just our bodies but also our minds.

### **Older Generations Fared a Little Better Than Their Younger Counterparts**

The effort of surviving the pandemic with one's own resources and living life alongside restrictions like lockdowns can make a person's mind either robust or frail. The elderly who can be more susceptible to stress have actually been faring better than youngsters who have been distraught owing to- being confined indoors, unstable work-environments, and pay-cuts. The elderly, especially those with support from their families, coped well due to family members coming together and spending more time indoors. Parents have also reported being able to spend more time with their young children. In the case of an adolescent adapting to a new academic routine, family support and monitoring helped enhance learning and reduce absenteeism.

### **Education, Art, and Research Collectively Pave Way for a Cautiously Optimistic Future**

With courses transitioning from traditional classrooms to the online mode, many who only dreamt of getting an education or pursuing higher studies could do so from the comfort of their homes. New vocational skills were learnt and people used the opportunity to upskill when it came to using



thereby empowering themselves. Creative thinking exhibited by employees for their sustenance in their vocational and entrepreneurial ventures were admirable. Many were forced to rethink and pivot, bringing out their resilience. Clinical research studies and experiments are underway to better understand the overall impact of the pandemic on mental health and other spheres. This we believe will help with the all-important task of psychoeducation and de-stigmatization of mental healthcare, across age-groups and ethnicities. Apart from this, people have taken to art, photography, music and other creative mediums as a healthy coping mechanism. Engaging short films and anthologies have been made on and during the pandemic.

### **Altruism in Times of Crises**

There have been heartwarming instances of amity and family cohesion being celebrated. From socially-distanced balcony meals to random strangers paying grocery bills for others, the lockdown brought out the innovative and altruistic nature of scores of individuals. People from various geographies and backgrounds pooled in their resources to help the less fortunate. In certain regions, there has been decrease in accidents, criminal activity, sexually transmitted and other infectious diseases and an increase in pet adoptions.

### **Positive Environmental Impact**

With majority of the human population confined to their homes, the pandemic saw a plethora of flora and fauna flourish with no human interference. Lesser traffic and inactive industrial units led to bluer skies and cleaner rivers.

**Disclaimer:** This article in no way undermines the devastating effects of the on-going pandemic. From loss of lives to loss of livelihoods, millions of people have been left battered. Domestic abuse and complications of substance abuse and withdrawal have affected many. Vulnerable populations, especially those from the lower SES have been badly hit. We are deeply indebted to the precious sacrifices made by our doctors, nurses and other essential and frontline workers without whom we could not have weathered this storm thus far.

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# Mental Health Myths Busted during the Pandemic.

**Myth:** Mental illness affects only the weak and vulnerable. “It cannot happen to me”.

**Fact:** There has been a significant increase in the incidence of anxiety and depression worldwide showing that everyone is vulnerable to mental health problems. It is not a sign of mental weakness.

**Myth:** Mental health issues can be handled on our own. No intervention is needed

**Fact:** Like physical health, mental health issues also need the care of professionals. Seeking help is a sign of strength. Early intervention prevents complications.

**Myth:** Suicide is an impulsive act and those who attempt do so to seek attention.

**Fact:** Suicide is a serious psychosocial issue and can be a complication of undiagnosed/untreated depression. It is a cry for help and is preventable.

## What's New?

### Establishing Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP)

**Clients as Active Collaborators rather than mere Participants - A Unique Approach in Research Process.** All around the world, people with lived experience of mental health problems are taking a more active advisory role in research teams in addition to being participants of research. SCARF is pioneering the establishment of a lived experience advisory panel under the PIECEs Research project which will be testing a generic low cost psychosocial intervention for people with psychosis. The Advisory Panel will comprise of People with lived experience of Severe Mental Illness and Caregivers.

This panel will provide independent feedback to improve the relevance and practicality of the research, drawing on their own experience of and local knowledge, to advise and steer the researchers throughout the study. The Panel will also be actively involved in all events of the study like development of community engagement arts modules and provide their suggestions and input on materials used in the research.

### Introducing Cognitive Remediation Therapy

At SCARF we are now working on a research project to culturally adapt a manual called Compensatory Cognitive Training (CCT) The therapists at SCARF have been trained on this manual by Dr. Frances Dark of University of Queensland. This intervention focuses on 1) prospective memory 2) conversational and task vigilance 3) learning and memory and 4) cognitive flexibility and problem solving over 12 sessions. The research team at SCARF has completed the cultural adaptation and piloted the manual on a group of 10 individuals with a diagnosis of Schizophrenia. We completed seven sessions with them and had to terminate the same due to the onset of the pandemic. The learning's from this piloting was promising and rewarding to us.



# Article

## A Double Challenge – Distressing Behaviours during the Pandemic

Kalaveena

SP, aged 22, was admitted to SCARF's residential facility a month prior to the start of the lockdown. She had a 5 year history of psychosis and rheumatoid arthritis. A recent exacerbation of symptoms resulted in the admission - her family had been unable to manage her at home.

The early days of admission were tough to manage. Very suspicious about everything and everyone, she was verbally abusive, given to anger outburst and occasional physical violence.

Her personal hygiene was poor – with skin lesions all over her scalp and face. As her rehab therapist, I had to step in to manage her – a tough challenge – I was, at that time, also involved in educating all other patients and staff at the facility, in care measures to deal with the Covid infection!



It took a fortnight before I could establish a rapport with her – that too was unpredictable. My focus was– getting her take a bath. Persistent efforts through motivational conversations paid off and in two weeks, she willingly went for a bath. I was also able to get her wash her hand with soap – using others in the facility as role models. She also became less angry though, she would only talk to me politely. She also got involved in some activities at the facility. We were able to sustain this change .....till the lockdown was announced. When SP's family decided to take her home, our plan was to continue interventions at home.

Aware that we were prematurely discharging her to an overprotective environment at home, virtual interventions for the family were initiated. The family was oriented to implementing intervention for self-care and other activities of daily living. I held sessions twice a week for them and also addressed any behavioral issues that they had to deal with! Even minor issues in the family would provoke anger. The family found it very frustrating – this was a time when the entire family was at home all the time. The mother took to calling me several times in the day, urging me to talk to SP – who would disconnect the call! This was despite letting the mother know that there were appointment times that were scheduled! The mother would plead for readmission This was challenging, given that, I as a health worker, had to deal with the pandemic as well. Using a strategy that I used in the facility, I continued to have conversations with SP – I would initiate the call – and hope to catch SP when not angry. This helped rebuild the rapport and I was able to get SP to do some ADL and recreational tasks as well. She was able to engage in multiple activities such as writing, drawing, walking, bathing, washing vessels, talking to her brother, kolam, etc.



Simultaneously, the parents were encouraged to continue to monitor ADL. The psychiatrist had, in the meantime, reviewed medications and altered doses to help reduce the symptom severity. Three months later – SP has calmed down substantially and the family, more patient. SP takes bath regularly, washes her clothes, her meal plates/ glass every day. She writes notes to me. ADL has been improving. And the calls to me have reduced!

This has been a huge personal experience in continuity of care after discharge and very satisfying too!

## Vocational Training Center

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on our clients during the lockdown. We decided to communicate via telephone since we couldn't open our physical space. Initially our clients faced difficulties in adapting to the new normal but with constant follow up and positive reinforcement through telephone, our team was able to stabilize their routine by helping them to do their tasks regularly. Mr. Chithiraikkani had helped many of our clients during the lockdown to get the financial support in kind and getting groceries through Tamil Nadu Corporation.

We reopened our doors at SCARF from June'20 for inpatients exclusively. We continued to give telephonic help for others. Mr. Chithiraikkani organized online yoga session on the occasion of international yoga day on 21st June-2020. It was well received by our clients.

At the centre our clients involved themselves in reading books, physical activity, drawing and in other activities such as basket weaving, paper cover making and helped in manning the telephone. Our community home clients also engaged themselves in tasks with the raw materials we provided from the center. We encouraged OP clients to do the same from their residence.

Now few of our clients have started assisting in the OPD service, engaging in tailoring, up cycling cushion covers to bags, in areca plates manufacturing and in screen printing. We are very excited to open our day care centre in a couple of months.





# rYMs

Paraphrasing the words of James Allen - "adversity does not build character, it reveals it". Within 5 months of the inception of rYMs (Resource center for Youth Mental health by SCARF), the entire world was plunged into the throes of an infection that was not seen in a century. The effect of the SARS-COV-19 had put the entire country and world in a lockdown and exposed youth the world over to many difficulties. With a single minded goal to assist young people during these trying times, the youth group of rYMs transitioned from offline activities in a physical space to an entirely online activity. Each of the volunteers had worked on curating programs that would engage the youth and help them tide over the difficulties that they were faced while constantly providing hope. rYMs through its youth leaders has shown its true character that an organization that is run by the youth that addresses mental health issues is sufficiently nimble to take on new roles and challenges with ease.

During the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown, all the activities continued with the youth volunteers using online platforms to continue to engage the other youth. We have partnered with the local chapter of the national youth council, (Orinam, the National Youth Council, Warhorse, V-shesh, Kind Mind Garden, The Safe Space, Deleted Drafts, Medi Clown, (Young people for politics, Sneha Suicide Prevention Centre, Muktha foundation). We are proud to say that we have reached out to approximately 900 youth since April 2020 through our online events, conducted every saturday at 4pm and bi-weekly event conducted every alternate thursday at 4pm. Prior to this, when running in a physical space, over a period of 5 months, we had reached nearly 200 youth through our various programs. We reach out to the masses through our Instagram page (@ryms\_scarf), Twitter (@rYMs\_scarf) and Facebook (R Y M S).

We also initiated a "warmline" called the Youth-For-Youth (Y4Y) Warmline to support young people in calling in and speaking with peers who have had extensive training in providing support online. Since its inception in October 2020, we have received calls not just from youth in Chennai but also from Mumbai and Delhi. Furthermore, our contact based learning program has shown to be beneficial in destigmatizing mental health problems in children.

Two of our volunteers Ms. Angelin Lidyia and Ms. B. Priyadarshini articles were published on IIT Bombay Techfest.

**Over 71 Events have been conducted over the year ; 26 Live events and 45 Online Events**

The collage features several event posters and a prominent warmline flyer. The posters include 'The World is Fresh', 'Mending the Young Mind', 'Going Online', 'Conversations About Suicide', 'Justice, Liberty, Equality Constitutionally Ours!!', 'Independence Day', and 'Orinam COLOURS OF PRIDE'. The flyer is for the 'Youth 4 Youth Warmline' with the phone number 9150455736, available Monday-Friday 1PM-9PM.



Angelin Lidyia

Loss of Loved ones during Pandemic and its Impact on Mental Health



B. Priyadarshini

SLEEP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING



# DEMCARES!

**Over 33 Training workshops have been conducted over the year at DEMCARES. Some of the Significant Training Workshops are as follows**

- 15th Feb 20: Clinical Approach to Diagnosis & Management of Dementia; IMH PG students and faculty
- 7th March 20: Behavioural and Psychological symptoms in dementia – a case study: In the
- Dementia Update 1.0 meeting; for all dementia specialists from India
- May 20: Cognitive Stimulation Therapy for dementia; IMH students and faculty
- 16th June 20: Cognitive Stimulation Therapy for dementia – an Introduction; for TN Clinical Psychologists Association
- 26th July 20: Recent advances in drug research for AD – Organised by ARDSI
- 3rd Aug 20: Experiences and needs of caregivers of persons with dementia in India during the COVID-19 pandemic – Organized by the London School of Economics
- 21st Sep 20: Let's talk about dementia; for the medical students of Karpaga Vinayaga Institute Of Medical Sciences And Research Centre
- 2nd Dec 20 :CST Training for NIMHANS



**Early Career Researcher Bursary for ADI 2020 Conference was won by Ms Nirupama Natarajan and she was invited to present at the conference during the 'Early Career Researcher Highlights Symposium'**

## CONFERENCE

### 1. Oral presentation

**Title: "Recognition of Facial Expression of Emotions by Persons with Rarer Types of Dementia"**

Presenting author: Nirupama Natarajan

Authors: Natarajan N, Vaitheswaran S, Lima RM, Wairagkar M, Vaidyanathan, R.

Conference: Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) 2020

### 2. Poster presentation

**Title: "Use of Potentially Inappropriate Psychotropic Medications and Polypharmacy in Persons with Dementia in Chennai, India"**

Presenting author: Nirupama Natarajan

Authors: Natarajan N, Vaitheswaran S

Conference: Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) 2020

### 3. Invited Talk

**Presenter: Nirupama Natarajan**

Topic: Use of Robotics in Dementia Care in India

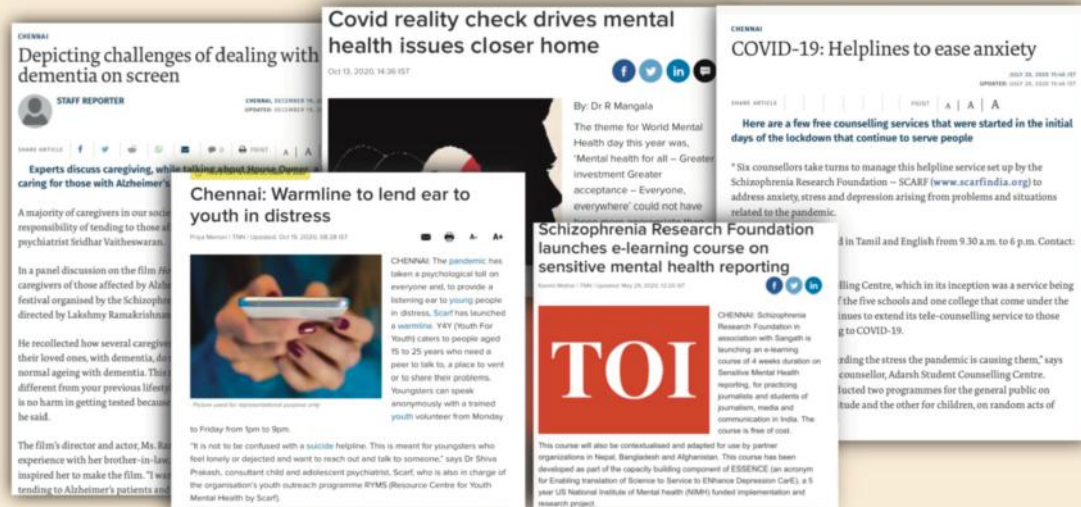
Session: Early Career Researcher Highlights Symposium – IFPMA Sponsored Symposium

Conference: Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) 2020

START (STrategies for RelaTives) is an evidence-based intervention developed for the caregivers of persons with dementia (PwD), by the University College London. It aims to improve caregiving experience by focusing upon strategies to manage behavioural problems of PwD, improve communication patterns, explore their and their relative's future needs; and provide relaxation exercises for the caregivers. START consists of eight sessions with each session lasting one hour long being delivered once a week for eight weeks. **DEMCARES is now working with Foundation for Research and Advocacy for Mental Health (FRAMe), Mysore, on cultural and linguistic adaptation of START in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi for use in India.** The project is funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund at University College London (UCL). The adaptation process includes engaging various stakeholders to generate knowledge; integrating generated information with theoretical, empirical and clinical knowledge; review of the culturally adapted START intervention by stakeholders and further revision; testing the culturally adapted intervention using a feasibility study; and synthesising stakeholder feedback and finalising culturally adapted manual. We hope to offer START as one of our regular services to the families when the adaptation is complete.



# SCARF in the Media



- Article in TOI on persons with SMI during Covid (Inputs from SCARF)
- Schizophrenia Research Foundation launches E-learning course on sensitive mental health reporting - Times of India
- Covid-19 helps to ease anxiety - The Hindu
- People with mental health issues getting more restless in lockdown: Expert - The Indian Express
- Covid Reality Check drives Mental Health issues closer home” - India Times, Times of India
- Chennai: Warmline to lend ear to youth in distress - The Times of India
- Depicting challenges of dealing with dementia on screen - The Hindu
- Making mindful movies - The New Indian Express

“In three words I can sum up everything  
I’ve learned about life: it goes on.”

- Robert Frost



“For it is in giving that we receive.”

- St. Francis of Assisi

It's about Making a Difference !

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# THANK YOU!



For choosing us even at the most difficult times



We could not have accomplished  
our goals without the support of our  
committed supporters

