

Awareness of Mental Wellbeing in Urban India- A Structured Study

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Abstract: Mental health is an indispensable and the very fundamental basis for our overall well health. It is a prerequisite factor of sound and innate functioning of our brain and mind. It is vital for effective functioning of individuals. It includes mental well-being, prevention of associated Psychopathologies, healing, recuperation and a comeback to the mainstream. Now if I ask you as a reader, can you tell how aware we are about our own mental health? What answer would you put forward? Most of us will have few words to say, because we actually don't know because we in India are taught to hide our mental woes. Those who are aware will just refrain from speaking. The fact is that we just don't want to engage in any type of conversation which is not aligned with our daily routine and not supported by our families, friends or society at large.

Keywords: Mental Health, Awareness, Stigma, Government Health Policies, Campaigns.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It's a common saying that if you don't work on what is unseen it will be difficult to sustain what is seen. We usually don't ponder upon the facts which need us to stop and ask ourselves, how are we? Is everything okay with us or something is bothering us? These worries are the determinants of mental health. These include individual attributes such as the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, behaviours and interactions with others. In addition, social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors have a role to play as do specific psychological and personality, and genetic factors. Our basic understanding of psychology and mental health comes from the American perspective. How India perceives mental health is a different story all together.

When asked what is mental health, most people describe being happy is about having good mental health and poor mental health means signs and symptoms of severe mental illness. Earlier people used the words like 'retarded' and 'crazy/mad/stupid' to describe mental health. Now in the world of social media people have started using the words like anxiety, depression, low mood, burnout, mental and emotional fatigue. But using these words on a daily basis and creating business modules around these words have not helped in any way. On the contrary when it comes to an individual mind, the signs and symptoms of ill mental health are often ignored and suppressed.

They are thought to be just a passing phase that will go away on its own. We are not yet ready to accept that yes, there is something going on in our mind which is hurting us and causing an unseen pain. Another problem arises when there is a whole lot of misinformation which aggravates the pre-existing ignorance. This mainly arises due to the huge stigma attached to mental health. Understanding the effects of stigma on help-seeking behaviour and approaching for treatment is crucial.

Stigmatizing attitudes can lead to delays in seeking professional assistance, resulting in failure to detect the onset of the disorder and decreased quality of life. Time and again we have seen that poor mental well-being has affected interpersonal relationships, cognitive abilities, self-confidence, and social interactions. Be it at home or work place it becomes difficult for the person suffering and those who revolve around them. It's high time we realise that our mental health is of utmost importance and we should not be drowned by its burden.

According to WHO, mental disorders contribute significantly to the global burden of disease, and untreated conditions can lead to high economic costs. Mental health awareness programmes involve creating an environment, which promotes healthy living and encourages people to adopt a healthy, clutter free mind. Enabling and educating the masses through national mental health policies and legal frameworks are compulsions for effective management of mental health disorders and providing easy and simple directions for ensuring mental health campaigns.

Cost is also a major concern in mental health. People feel that it's a slow process and hence a costly affair. Most of the savings in Indian families are done for education and physical illness, but mental health is not even considered a form of disorder. Early signs of mood disorders are often neglected and it's thought to be a rebel against hierarchy and just an adolescence trait. There is no insurance policy covering mental health, even when hospitalization is required.

This Research was conducted to study the fact, how Indians see mental health and mental illness. How aware they are about their own mental condition, their family members and friends. Do they know how to help themselves and others facing emotional turbulence? Do they have easy access to mental health practitioners and social workers who could come in support? The Government of India has undertaken many initiatives regarding mental health but are the public educated to understand it? By passing information and promoting psycho- education some relevant changes can be brought to reduce stigmatization and embrace one's own state of mind. The quality of life, of the person facing the issue and their care givers, can be improved.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature mainly looks into the state of awareness of Indians about their own mental health as well as their family members. Their perception of mental illness, stigma attached to it, how much they are ready to open up and how well informed they are about the government policies. A study on mental health awareness in the Indian scenario (2016) was done by Kalpana Srivastav, Koushik Chatterjee and Pookala Shivaram Bhat. It revealed that progress in mental health service delivery has been slow in most low- and middle-income countries.

Barriers include the existing public-health priorities and its influence on funding; challenges to delivery of mental health care in primary-care settings; the low numbers of those trained in mental health care; and the lack of mental health perspective in public health leadership.

A blog from Live Love Laugh states that the burden of mental illness is on the rise. With the number of people reporting mental health concerns slowly increasing, it has become difficult to ignore the impact that mental illness can have in our day to day lives, our society, and our economy at large. In India, while 20% of our population suffers from a mental illness, only 10-12% of them seek aid for their mental health concerns.

Having some awareness also helps us to better understand what we are going through and pinpoint exactly whom we need to ask for support. Mental health in India: evolving strategies, initiatives, and prospects. This study was done by Pranab Mahapatra and Shekhar Seshadri on January 24. It states that mental, neurological, and substance use disorders account for over 10% of the global disease burden, but about 85% of individuals in low-income and middle-income countries lack access to treatment.

These challenges are compounded among people from marginalised populations or hard-to-reach areas, leading to inconsistent usage of these services. The consequent treatment gap can be attributed to the unequal distribution of mental health resources and the variable implementation of mental health policies.

Despite this dire need, the Indian government spends only about 0.06 per cent of its total health expenditure on mental health, with only 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 people⁶ and even lesser on mental health nurses, social workers and psychologists.

Moreover, lack of mental health awareness continues to be a major issue in rural areas and disadvantaged strata of the society. For example, 64.2 per cent of suicides were amongst those earning an annual income of less than ₹ 1 Lakh⁵. Although close to 200 million Indians could benefit from mental health services, fewer than 30 million seek care due to limited access and stigma.

Increasing awareness of mental health in India & exciting opportunities for the future. This study was done in 2024. This editorial discusses three main topics: (i) the growing awareness of mental health in India, (ii) the contribution of westernization/development to increasing certain mental health issues in India, and (iii) the contributions that India can share for the world's future mental health. These include innovative public health work and traditional spiritual practices with the potential for preventing and treating mental health issues.

Mental Health: Current Issues and Challenges in India was studied by Raghunath Mishra in 2016. It was observed from the National Mental Health Survey 2016 that mental morbidity excluding tobacco use disorders currently is 10.6% and lifetime prevalence was 13.7%. Mental Morbidities include a range of mental disorders F10 - F49 categories within the International Classification of Diseases (ICD - 10). It was estimated that nearly 150 million Indians are in need of active interventions. Stigma contributes to the huge burden of mental morbidity, being a road-block to treatment seeking. Nearly 80% of persons suffering from mental disorders had not received any treatment despite the presence of illness for more than 12 months. Stigma associated with mental disorders affects access to work, education and marriage of those with a disorder and it also affects family members of those affected.

Mental health in India: Sociocultural dimensions, policies and programs – An introduction to the India Series this Study was done by Venkatesan Chakrapani and Shalini Bharat in 2023. In 2015, a famous Bollywood actor – Deepika Padukone – opened up in the media about her struggle with depression (Indian Express, 2021). It was her mother who recognized the symptoms and ensured she got treated for it. It opened up a country-wide discussion on the hidden and ignored burden of mental health in the country, its prevalence and impact, the associated stigma and lack of awareness about its symptoms and pathways to prevention and treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance

of focusing on mental health.

III. RESEARCH GAPS

- A systematic district wise study is needed for implications of policies regarding mental health.
- Lack of education and awareness is of major concern; combat formulas should be developed.
- While campaigning local culture and language should be given importance and more investigation is needed in this area.
- Developing more rural mass friendly slogans in local language is needed to raise awareness.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

This is qualitative, exploratory and primary research. It was done to check the awareness level of the educated urban population regarding mental health. Transcripts of the interview were developed. Codes and themes were generated through an inductive approach.

Since it was done through interviews, the body language of the participants were closely noticed. Some were very enthusiastic, for some it seemed to be forced. Almost 70 percent were keen to know how to approach a mental health worker if needed at all. Some felt there was no need at all.

➤ Data Collection

Collection of data was done in the form of an online interview. Middle class educated groups from different fields and gender were sent google links for interviews which were recorded with prior permission. 110 people were approached via known groups, out of which only 100 people agreed for the interview. 82 of them allowed recording and the rest were not comfortable with it. They agreed to do it without being recorded.

➤ Sampling

- Non-Probability purposive sampling was used.
- Known persons were asked to share with common groups.
- The age group of the sample was between 50 to 70.
- This age group was intentionally selected so as to know what the older adults perceive, about mental issues and what is their opinion of handling it.

➤ Data Analysis

Since it was in the form of a face-to-face interview, statistical analysis was not done. Body language of the participants were closely monitored. Notes and observations were made and the interviews were recorded with prior permission of the interview. At last thematic analysis was done. The words and sentences that came out while interacting are explained, question wise in detail. Themes and codes were explained.

A. Systematic Explanation of Question Asked

➤ General Awareness

1. What comes to your mind when you first hear the word Mental health. Mad, crazy, Scary, guilt, Shame, to keep shut, Confinement, Blue van with grilled windows, Mental hospitals. Fashion statement
2. What is the importance of mental health for you? Important in today's world, very important, Must be thought about The types of crimes going around us give clear indication of poor mental health. Suicides are caused due to poor mental health
3. Do you feel it is as important as physical health? Even more important than physical health, equally important, Both are interrelated
4. Now that you have crossed 50 how would you like your mental health to be? Family's health, Higher education for children, Savings before retirement, Health Insurance, Bank balance, Solitude, Peace
5. Do you discuss mental health with your family and friends? Usually not Don't feel it's necessary Somethings are best unspoken Together means no need for that Sometimes but in an indirect way
6. While you were young did your parents or teachers ever discuss mental health? Those where wonderful times There was no need Parents where usually reserved Problems were not discussed openly
7. We get to see many people around us with different personalities, so what is your perception of personality disorder? No idea Not behaving properly Something different Mad
8. Offlet have seen someone outgoing, happy and close to you, slowly withdrawing themselves? Yes, but never asked why Don't want to interfere Personal matter

Never thought that way
9. Don't you think that physical health gets all the attention from everyone around but when it comes to mental health people tend to dissociate, distance or just act as if nothing has happened. Physical health is visible Can offer to help People often discuss their medicines, so it's easy to know. Can come to know about surgeries
10. Have you ever seen anyone facing mild mental health issues around you? Many times, Family members don't like the interference Limited knowledge so cannot offer help
11. If that person comes to you, how will you respond, will you try to help? Will definitely tries Can provide monetary help I have no idea, so will like to stay away Sometimes I wanted to help but couldn't find a proper solution.
12. Have you ever heard about psychological first aid? Never Can sense the meaning Maybe something like physical first aid
13. Have you ever participated in mental health camps organised in your surroundings? I have never heard of any such camps Never attended Wellness camps are being organised but not mental health
14. What is your coping mechanism against your own mental health issues? Reading books Music Travelling Going out for short walk Meeting friends Meditation

➤ *Stigma*

- There is a huge stigma regarding mental health, even when we know that our near one facing the issue cannot be held accountable, we tend to blame first and then hide ...why?
- ✓ Blaming is the easiest way-out Lack of knowledge
- ✓ Feeling of helplessness when it comes to mental health
- ✓ Fear of isolation in society
- ✓ Embarrassment in front of others
- Have you ever seen mental health centers, say where mental health workers or the counsellor work Public / Private, clearly mentioning their service?
- ✓ Not a common site.
- ✓ Not in the smaller towns or even cities.
- ✓ Nowhere to be seen as beauty salons or any other shop. Not in the areas where people commonly visit.
- ✓ There may be some but not mentioning their service clearly. There are mental hospitals.
- Do you feel people in India would rather visit an Astrologer for guidance regarding mental health than a qualified Psychologist?

- ✓ Astrologers are always considered as spiritual healers. People feel peace in their presence.
- ✓ Sometimes people don't want scientific intervention and get labeled. We are always in favour of quick solutions.
- ✓ Some feel astrologers can be manipulated and can get favourable answers.
- There were some topics and issues in the past which were not openly discussed, but since time has changed. don't you think we should discuss this more and make it a common term.
- ✓ Yes, it should be normalized.
- ✓ Society won't allow and will label the person. Some things are best, when kept secret.
- Do you think in these modern times a person should not suffer in silence.
- ✓ Absolutely not.
- ✓ Mental health workers should develop trust among the masses.
- ✓ A person suffers because we don't have a proper support system.

➤ *Government Policies*

1. Are you aware of the National Mental Health Program (NMHP) launched in 1982? No.
2. Mental Health policies launched in 2014 and 2017? Never heard
3. Do you have any idea about District Mental Health Programmes initiated by the Government? Never heard about it. There are mental health hospitals near us.
4. Have you heard the Government machinery doing something about it like awareness programme, allotting funds etc Not in a large scale Conditions in mental hospitals are pathetic They lack proper infrastructure.

5. There are innumerable campaigns going around since India got freedom. But have you heard about any mental health campaigns done by political parties or any organizations or NGOs in your area?
Never.
So much content in social media makes it difficult. There are NGOs but not sure about.
Political parties never campaign about these.

➤ *Cost*

1. People spend huge amounts on physical health but not for mental health.
Mental health is not considered as a health issue. It goes away on its own.
Spending on travel and entertainment is also an indirect approach. Lack of mental health workers.

2. Why do we feel mental health is a costly affair hence for the upper class of the society only?
Lack of awareness
It is considered as an educated class illness.
The lower class have many more problems to solve. Earning to feed a family becomes utmost important.

3. Insurance companies don't cover mental health..even if the patient needs hospitalization, what you have to say about this.
Insurance companies don't even cover dental treatment. Most of the companies follow standard procedure.
Even most of the terminal illnesses are not covered.
Mental health should get the status of serious illness first.

4. WHO has declared mental issues a huge economic burden. What do you say?
How many of us are aware of WHO? We understand but can't help.
In India we talk with elders and friends and try to sort out our problems

➤ *Suggestions to Make People Aware*

1. How can we make people aware of mental health issues?
Awareness programmes. Media Campaign.
Through entertainment.
Door to door campaign like Polio vaccine. Small camps by mental health workers.

2. Do you think psychoeducation at the school level is a good option?
Yes, there should be proper counselling classes. Early intervention is always good.
Just like sex education, mental health education should be there. Not only for the child but their parents as well

3. People suggest that great leaders, celebrities and social workers should come forward and spread awareness?
Yes, it will be a great help.
We have to accept things first. Self-awareness is most important

4. Do you think big hospitals and corporate houses should come forward with a mental health drive?
Corporate houses should definitely come forward at least with their staff. Big hospitals will make business out of it.
If the giants come forward the actual drive will be lost somewhere.
If any organisation arranges the drive for their staff, it would be better.

5. Even after having so many digital initiatives, like TELE- MANAS, Mental health apps Etc, after spending so much time on the social media, it seems we just don't want to educate ourselves.
Lack of awareness

Deficit in attention span Too much of information Instant gratification

• *The Chart Below Shows the Number of Persons and Their Level of Awareness in Each Section*

Table 1 The Chart Below Shows the Number of Persons and Their Level of Awareness in Each Section

Level	General Awareness	Fear of Stigma	Awareness of Government Policies	Awareness of cost	Suggestions Of Campaign
Low	50	60	70	30	20
Moderate	40	30	20	20	30
High	10	10	10	50	50

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

➤ After interacting with so many people belonging to different professions, it was found that most of them feel that there is an urgent need of proper counselling and guidance for the younger lot.

➤ For them mental fatigue is just any other form of experience they have gone through. They feel that is a part of their journey and all of them had to go through it.

➤ When it comes to mental health, most of them think it's just a passing phase and will go away on its own. When

they are in a low mood, they prefer taking different routes to address it, like travelling, entertainment, physical fitness, maintaining lifestyle etc.

- If the matter is more serious, they will talk with someone whom they trust. But visiting a mental health worker is not thought of in most cases.
- In this digital world words like depression and anxiety are so common that most of them feel that it is natural and one has to stay with it as there is no way to escape.
- Counselling and therapies are not very common in India and the major finding is that most of them are quite apprehensive about it. They are not sure whether it will work or not.
- Most of them don't know how the process works and they have a vague idea of Psychologists, as shown in movies.
- Most of them have no confidence in the way mental health issues are addressed and thus feel it's just a waste of time and money.
- Many of them feel that mental state should be dealt with spirituality and seek help from astrologers.
- Some people who go through more serious issues like mood disorder, prefer keeping it within the family. The social stigma is so highly relevant in our society, that we fear losing our friends or social status. It remains to be a closely guarded secret and in turn the symptoms get worse.
- The pressure of losing jobs, customers if in business, marriage proposals and even friends is immense. Sometimes the entire family is avoided because one member is suffering from mental disorders. They just don't understand how to handle the issue and thus keep it under hiding.
- There is no awareness campaign through which it might get constantly highlighted.
- People have no idea about the government initiatives and feel they might not get proper help when required.
- The media and entertainment industries do keep on highlighting mental issues but it fails to create longlasting effect on society.
- Many of them said that mental health has almost become a business module and people make money out of it.
- There is a lot of confusion between overall wellness camps and mental health treatment.
- Pathetic conditions of primary government mental health care institutions also keep people away from them.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The major findings suggest that there is a lack of awareness among the masses in the urban areas, leave alone the rural areas. When it comes to mental health people just don't want to share any of their problems, in fear of being judged and losing their status in and out of their home. Most of them have settled with an understanding that their mental woes are part of their busy life and they have to face it on their own. When it comes to their younger generation, if not getting out of hand they prefer to hide and avoid the topic. If it is their older generation it is considered to be part of aging. It's not that they don't face any problem or pain, but they feel that there is no proper guidance available and accessible resources are very scarce. It's very important to plan a systematic way to promote and spread awareness, so that the quality of life is not reduced to mere existence.

- In this digital world accurate and sensitive information is a must.
- Platforms must be provided where open conversation is encouraged so that there is reduction in stigma.
- Just like sex education, psychoeducation is also very important and it should be introduced at school level.
- Information regarding warning signs and symptoms of mental health issues should be explained at schools.
- Workshops and community programmes should be used to break the taboo.
- Mental health awareness programmes should be introduced in multiple languages to serve the diverse population in India.
- Forums where personal success stories and their positive outcomes can be shared must be highlighted.
- Mental health should be taken as seriously as any other physical ailments.
- Designated columns in newspapers should be allotted to share new initiatives.
- Government policies regarding mental health should find a better way to reach the masses.
- Most importantly, resources should be accessible so that they can be used easily when needed.
- Giant corporate houses and hospitals should come forward with a mental health drive.
- Mental health camps should be organised in the community set up just like blood donation or eye checkup camps.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The sample size is very small for this type of study.
- The sample age is such a group that is not open to many new initiatives and information.
- They have some preconceived notions that are hard to deviate.
- Educated middle class urban populations were interviewed, so the information is from just one part of the society.
- Only a few big cities with similar cultures were targeted.
- For this type of study, a large sample size with major representation from all states India is required.

SCOPE OF FUTURE RESEARCH

- Systematic representation is required from all states of India and it should start from the primary level.
- Cultural differences and ethnicity will provide better understanding of the awareness state.
- Most research should be done to understand how to reach the rural masses.
- Policy makers should do ground level research before implementing new initiatives.

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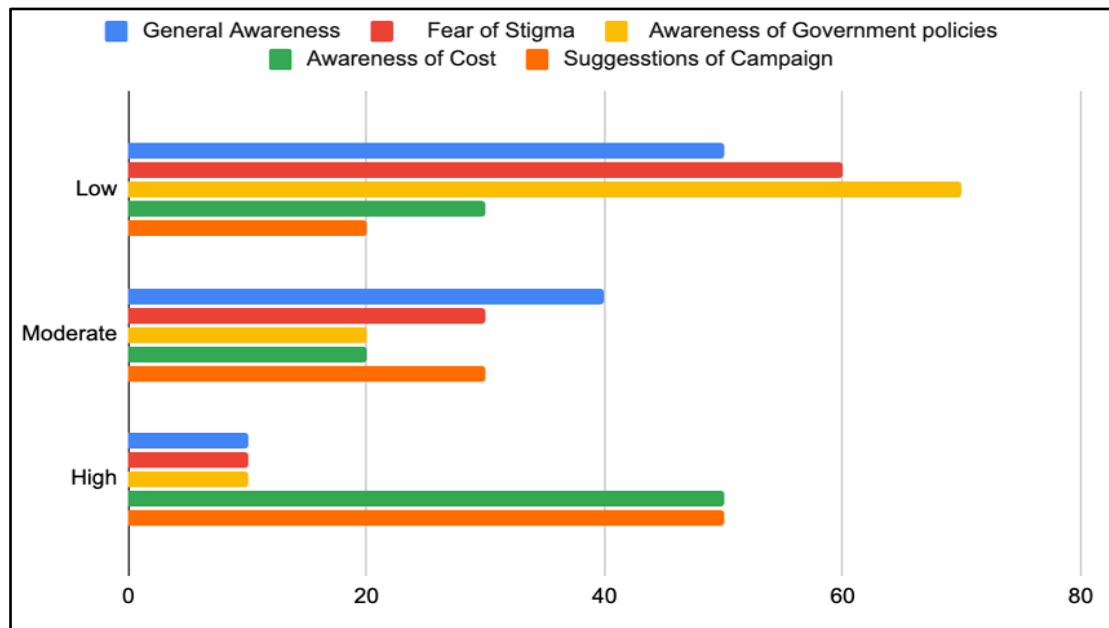


Fig 1 The Graph Below Show the Number of Participant and Their Level of Awareness in Each Section

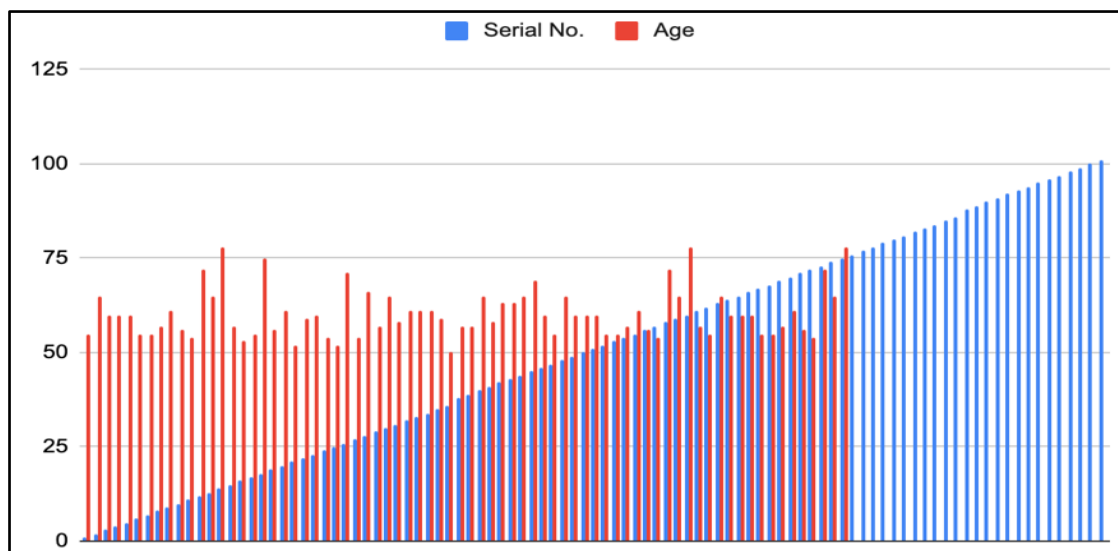


Fig 2 No of Participant and their Age

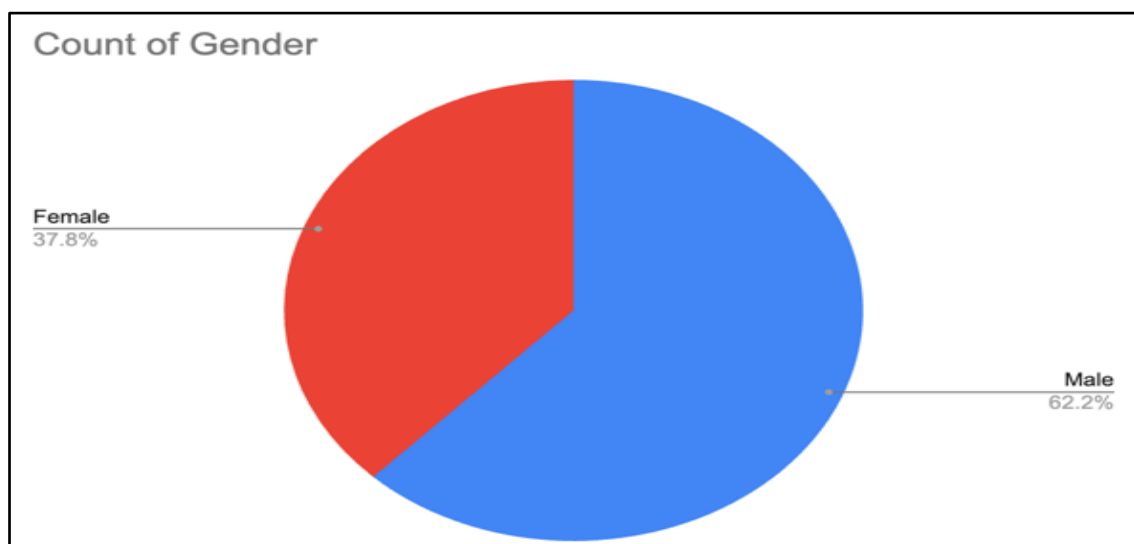


Fig 3 Gender of Participant