



Annual Report

2023-2024

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Founders' Note

Three decades ago, a woman's plight on the streets propelled us to establish The Banyan—an act of responsiveness born not from careful planning but from the need to be present as allies amidst insurmountable distress. Living alongside those we served allowed us to advance our programs in sync with values of justice, equity, and radical empathy. From emergency care to community living, child and adolescent services, and founding of the Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM), this journey has been shaped by collaborative thought and action with service users and partners, where we introspected what worked and what did not, confronted ethical dilemmas and engaged in sustained actions to improve and adapt based on learnings.

The Banyan and BALM's strategic growth has been informed by intense, profound lessons from service users' lived experiences of withdrawal, resilience, and renewal on their own terms. We are today a community driven by passion to center those at the margins and challenge the status quo. Our leadership, board, service users, peers, collaborators, and friends advance our vision of an inclusive, just, and humane world that promotes capabilities and participation among persons living with psychosocial distress. This year has borne testimony to this steadfast conviction.

The Emergency Care and Recovery Centres (ECRCs) for homeless people with mental health conditions and the Home Again approach for those requiring long-term care have expanded across 10 locations in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh through direct and partner-operated initiatives, emphasising social health and community participation, thanks to Azim Premji Foundation (APF) and Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST), commitment to the most distressed

and The Banyan. NALAM, the community mental program, that offers well-being oriented services through grassroots mobilisers, is set to expand to Madhya Pradesh and Odisha in collaboration with partners, in addition to the continued implementation in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra with support from the Infosys Foundation.

Parallely, BALM's academic initiatives and partnerships have supported the development of cadres of professionals and change agents for underserved communities through Master's programs, diplomas, and short courses, drawing on findings based on research and experiential learning emerging from The Banyan's work. Education remains the cornerstone of our efforts, and we are excited to announce the launch of the Master of Social Work in Mental Health program in 2024, developed in collaboration with Madras School of Social Work (MSSW) and TVS Sundram Fasteners Limited. This curriculum equips passionate individuals with the knowledge and skills to address complex challenges in the mental health sector, fostering a holistic, recovery-oriented approach to care. The impact of these educational initiatives is evident in the transformative stories we have witnessed, from individuals reclaiming their lives to communities welcoming people with mental health conditions.

Research remains a driving force that informs our efforts as we continue to explore newer approaches that may address unique concerns amongst persons experiencing acute social disadvantage; in the process, we generate actionable insights. Our studies have shed light on the experiences of homelessness, the effectiveness of interventions, and the interplay of factors influencing mental health.



Our social action initiatives have been instrumental in shaping policies and fostering collaborations that amplify our collective impact. We have actively engaged with state and national authorities, contributing our expertise to the development of mental health policies. Our community-based initiatives, such as education support for children of parents with mental health conditions, social entitlement camps, and support groups, have supported individuals and communities to overcome barriers and access the resources they need.

We are grateful to TVS Sundram Fasteners for their unwavering support in pursuit of our mission for

the past decade. Your generosity has reinforced our hope that collective visioning, effort, and intent can shift the status quo towards a future of healing and inclusion for all.

With gratitude

Vandana Gopikumar, Vaishnavi Jayakumar and Balraj Vasudevan

Co-Founders and Trustees, Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health

Message from Sundram Fasteners Centre for Social Action and Research

When we established the Sundram Fasteners Centre for Social Action and Research in 2016, our vision was to address the critical gaps in human resources for mental health services addressing marginalised populations. The centre was founded on the understanding that existing approaches often failed to account for the complex social realities and structural barriers faced by those experiencing persistent adversities and mental health issues.

Over the past 8 years, I am proud of the strides we have made in advancing a development agenda for mental health through education, research, and social action. Our practice-based educational programs have equipped a new cadre of mental health professionals with the perspectives and skills to deliver culturally sensitive, justice-oriented mental health interventions. Through strategic partnerships, we have extended care models like the Emergency Care and Recovery Centres (ECRC) and Home Again (HA) to multiple states and two low-medium-income countries, addressing the intersections of homelessness and mental health.

Our research efforts have generated valuable evidence on the intersections of mental health, poverty, and social marginalisation - informing policy and practice. Perhaps most importantly, we have fostered a growing community of practitioners, researchers, and advocates committed to reimagining mental health care through a social justice lens.

As we look to the future, much work remains to be done. We aim to further our mission by building solidarities, intensifying the depth of our research and social action initiatives, and amplifying voices from the margins to shape mental health discourse and policy.

I am deeply grateful to our partners, staff, and the communities we serve for their invaluable contributions to this mission. Together, we will continue working towards a world where mental health is pursued as a fundamental component of social development and human rights.

R Dilip Kumar

TVS Sundram Fasteners



Director's Report

I am pleased to present this report on the activities and performance of the Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM) for the fiscal year ending 31st March 2024. This past year has been marked by significant achievements and a continued dedication to advancing mental health education, research, and social action.

BALM remains steadfast in its commitment to cultivating a skilled, passionate and justice-oriented mental health workforce. Our flagship educational initiatives have continued to attract talented students who share our vision of a more robust and inclusive mental healthcare landscape.

We are pleased to report the expansion of our academic offerings with the launch of the Master of Social Work in Mental Health in collaboration with the Madras School of Social Work (MSSW). To complement the expansion of Emergency Care and Recovery Centres (ECRCs), Home Again (HA), and NALAM, BALM has developed a Diploma in Integrated Mental Health Systems. Further, to support leadership that can engage in collective visioning and dynamic action, the Diploma in Transdisciplinary Research and Practice has been launched in collaboration with the Athena Institute, VU, Amsterdam. These initiatives offer our program participants renewed knowledge and skills and foster a spirit of collaboration and transdisciplinarity, crucial for navigating the complexities of mental healthcare.

BALM's research efforts have yielded valuable insights into critical areas such as the experiences of children with parents facing mental illness, comprehending suicidality among young adults in LMICs, conceptions of mental health among indigenous communities and access to care, notions

of homelessness in a mental health context, and the efficacy of interventions such as Home Again, a housing with supportive service approach for long-term care. These findings have the potential to inform policy decisions, elevate best practices, and positively impact the lives of marginalised communities.

BALM's commitment to social action is reflected in our ongoing engagement with policymakers in Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya and Maharashtra, collaborations with partners across India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, academic partners like Madras School of Social Work (MSSW), Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, and civil society organisations such as Gandhigram Trust. We actively influence mental health policies and initiatives at both the state and national levels by offering consultation, capacity building, and educational support.

The BALM team remains optimistic and energised for our future. We are resolute in our collective pursuit of transforming mental healthcare and promoting the well-being of diverse communities through education, research and social action.

Dr Lakshmi Ravikanth

Director, Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health

Education



Paucity of human resources in the mental health sector in India is often illustrated by citing the low ratios of psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers and psychologists to the population. The narrow focus on availability as an issue sidesteps the critical issue of quality with widespread lack of relevant perspectives and skills that can address multifactorial issues such as homelessness, persistent trauma and familial discord and drive meaningful outcomes for people living with mental health conditions. Education as a priority area at BALM emerged in response to this issue of dominance of medicalised approaches among mental health professionals obfuscating psychosocial and structural issues.

Education at BALM complements both diffusion and value-transmission of the interventions developed by The Banyan, Emergency Care and Recovery Centre (ECRC), crisis intervention to community re-entry for homeless people with mental health conditions, Home Again (HA), housing with supportive services for long-term living, and NALAM, a frontline grassroots well-being mobiliser anchored comprehensive community mental health approach. ECRC, HA and NALAM represent a continuum of care with convergence in services – for example, transitions from ECRC, inpatient care to community setting whether with families or independent living or HA is mediated by NALAM for continuing care and connections to social welfare benefits and employment opportunities. Courses are developed to align with these collaborative processes and longitudinal services across the continuum of care. Further, select micro-interventions, which center service users and are aligned with recovery principles, are offered through short courses and trainings.

BALM's education offerings are uniquely placed as the curriculum across courses is grounded on insights derived from service user-informed implementation and development of a continuum of care for homeless, low-income populations. Faculty

are drawn from a global network of practitioners, academics and researchers, many with lived experience.

Master of Social Work in Mental Health – *Collaboration with Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)*

In the past year, the Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM), in collaboration with the Madras School of Social Work (MSSW) and with the support of Sundram Fasteners Limited, has developed the Master of Social Work - Mental Health program, which will open for enrolment in June 2024. The two-year program aims to attract passionate individuals committed to addressing the complex challenges and care gaps in the mental health sector.

The curriculum was designed by faculty from BALM and MSSW, in consultation with lived experience experts and stakeholders across the mental health ecosystem, to ensure that it aligns with the current challenges and opportunities in the sector. The development process involved a review of existing mental health education programs and interventions, both nationally and internationally, to identify best practices and priority areas. Throughout the development phase, the focus remained on creating a program that offers students the opportunity to gain perspectives and skills necessary for effective mental health practice embedded in contemporary social realities.

The program's curriculum is designed to prepare students to engage in value-driven, critical social work practice cognisant of diversity and differences and make meaningful contributions in various mental health contexts. The content is centred around social parameters of mental health and recovery experiences, integrating non-health pathways to better mental health. Through hands-on and engaging learning experiences, participants in the program will acquire insights and



competencies necessary to address complex mental and social health issues using a comprehensive, interrelated approach that considers the synergistic interaction of mental health conditions and their underlying social, environmental, and biological factors. The pedagogy emphasises the development of original, culturally resonant, and critical perspectives in care formulation through real-world exposure, mentorship, and access to a global network of experts.

The program will welcome applicants from diverse backgrounds and is committed to collaboratively addressing any barriers to participation. Upon completion, graduates will be prepared to work as clinical care specialists, social-care specialists, program managers or leads, incubate social

enterprises, and contribute to research and policy development in a range of settings, including development-sector organisations, government hospitals and mental health programs, private hospitals, and research institutions.

To further support the professional development of graduating students, BALM will offer the BALM-Sundram Fasteners Fellowship in Mental Health and Social Care. This intensive 1-2 year fellowship will offer a unique opportunity for graduates to gain differentiated practical experience across various aspects of mental healthcare, including service delivery, capacity building, transdisciplinary research, and advocacy for marginalised populations, under the guidance of experienced mentors.



Diploma in Residential Mental Health Care

Awarded by Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)

The one-year Diploma in Residential Mental Health Care for frontline staff offers comprehensive training in two care approaches - the Emergency Care and Recovery Centre (ECRC) for homeless people with mental health conditions and the Home Again (HA) model for those institutionalised long-term.

The ECRC module covers the full continuum from outreach and crisis intervention to acute care, stabilisation, recovery services, and community re-entry for homeless persons with mental illness. Students learn crisis de-escalation techniques, mental health screening, collaborative treatment planning, and psychosocial rehabilitation. They study the unique shelter, nutrition, health and

social care needs of this population. The module emphasises a low-barrier, harm-reduction approach to engage even the most seriously affected individuals. Special focus is given to trauma-informed design principles for therapeutic residential spaces that promote safety, autonomy and cultural congruence. Students learn to work as part of a multidisciplinary team comprising social workers, nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists.

The HA module trains students in scatter site, supportive housing approach integrated within urban and rural communities. HA fosters authentic living and community inclusion for individuals with severe, persistent mental illness transitioning out of psychiatric facilities. Central to HA is the role of Personal Assistants who offer day-to-day in-home support customised to each resident's needs and preferences. Students learn to facilitate collaborative care planning centred on user-defined goals, social roles and priorities beyond symptom management. Other key competencies

include facilitation of entitlements, problem-solving support, social and leisure engagement, and promoting service user choice and self-direction. The module covers affinity group dynamics, peer support processes, and creating an environment akin to a family.

Both modules strongly emphasise recovery principles of hope, self-determination, and building resilience through harnessing lived experiences and personal narratives.

The diploma employs an immersive pedagogy with classroom lessons supplemented by significant fieldwork at operational ECRC and HA sites. Students gain first-hand experience through shadowing care teams, facilitating group sessions, collaborating on care plans and participating in the living environments. They develop competencies in coordinated, multi-disciplinary care tailored to complex needs at the intersection of homelessness, institutionalisation, poverty and mental illness. Critical thinking, ethical decision-making, cultural responsivity and client-centric care planning are cross-cutting skills inculcated.

In the year 2023, 19 students encompassing existing and new staff across direct and partner-run ECRCs and HA have been offered the Diploma in Residential Mental Health Care.

Diploma in Community Mental Health Care

Awarded by Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)

The Diploma in Community Mental Health Care is aimed at developing a grassroots cadre of mental health and well-being mobilisers who can deliver essential services in the context of their communities. The program's curriculum is grounded in a holistic, evidence-informed approach to mental health care. Through immersive coursework and applied training experiences, students gain

in-depth knowledge of mental health conditions, underlying factors, and tailored interventions. Key areas of study include mental health assessment and screening, counselling modalities, case management, welfare facilitation, and developing cultural competence. Students learn to administer standardised assessment tools, conduct mental health screenings, and interpret results to identify individuals in need of support.

Students are guided to explore the impact of cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental factors on mental health, and develop sensitivity and tailored engagement and approaches to support diverse populations effectively.

BALM, with support from the HCL Foundation, offered a fully sponsored Diploma in Community Mental Health Care, and 34 participants from rural villages of Lalgudi and Pullambadi blocks in Tiruchirapalli district successfully completed the programme. A mixed methods evaluation by the Department of Social Work, Srimad Andavan College of Arts & Science, Srirangam revealed statistically significant improvements in participants' ability to recognise mental health conditions and their beliefs about people with mental illness post-assessment. Qualitative findings highlighted personal growth among students, including improved communication skills, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities. Positive changes were observed in dealing with personal growth challenges, family relationships and community involvement. More than 60% of the students have also been placed successfully in related implementation programs.

"With this course, I feel I can bring about a change in my society. By change, I don't mean a large-scale socioeconomic transformation or an employment revolution. Instead, the transformation we have undergone through this course has equipped us to help prevent mental health issues in my community and aid in the recovery of those who are already coping with mental illness." - Student A



Diploma in Integrated Mental Health Care

Awarded by Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)

BALM's Diploma in Integrated Mental Health Care, reframed in the year 2023 from the earlier Diploma in Community Mental Healthcare and Diploma in Residential Mental Healthcare, is intended as a flagship program to produce a cadre of highly skilled and close to-community frontline mental health professionals. This comprehensive 6-month diploma equips students with the knowledge and practical experience necessary to address the growing demand for accessible, culturally responsive, and integrated mental health services within communities. It provides options for specialisation in community-based mental healthcare and residential mental healthcare.

Students participate in community-based and institution-based internships and practicums,

allowing them to apply classroom concepts under the guidance of experienced mental health professionals. These experiences foster the development of essential skills in areas such as client interaction, treatment planning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and resource navigation.

Notably, the program has strengthened its emphasis on integrated care models this year. Students explore the interconnections between mental health, physical well-being, social determinants, and environmental influences. Modules further focus on developing expertise in managing complex cases, coordinating care across multiple service providers, and advocating for client rights and access to resources.

The Diploma in Integrated Mental Health Care continues to attract a diverse cohort of students passionate about positively impacting the mental health landscape, with 24 enrolments. Students are well-prepared to assume frontline roles in

various settings, including community mental health centers, social service organisations, schools, hospitals, and other agencies providing mental health support.

Through this program, BALM remains committed to developing a skilled and compassionate workforce capable of addressing mental health challenges, reducing healthcare disparities, and fostering resilient and thriving communities.

“Before joining this course, I used to get scared when I saw people with mental illness. But now, the fear is gone. Through this course, I have learned ways to approach them, understand their needs, and work according to those needs.” - Anandhi, Assistant Physiotherapist at The International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC)

“I work in a Residential Mental Health Care Centre. Through the learnings from the class, I can understand more about the needs of the service users and provide appropriate services. Through the field visits, I also learned about various services offered by private and government institutions for the differently-abled and people with mental illness.” - Manjula, Healthcare Worker at The Banyan, Mogappair

Diploma in Transdisciplinary Research and Practice

Awarded by Athena Institute, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)

Contemporary societal issues related to health care, sustainable development, and other domains are often highly complex and deeply rooted in organisational, political, and social structures. These 'wicked' or 'persistent' problems involve diverse stakeholders with varying priorities and perspectives, necessitating a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing them. The fields of global health and sustainable development research increasingly recognise the importance of defining these challenges through the lens of all involved actors.

To tackle persistent problems effectively, it is essential to integrate multiple disciplines, scientific frameworks, and experiential knowledge, collaborating with those directly affected to generate actionable insights. Transdisciplinary approaches offer the tools to unpack the multifaceted nature of such issues and develop effective, context-specific solutions.



Athena Institute, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, BALM and MSSW have collaborated to launch a 7-month hybrid program to equip researchers and practitioners with the skills needed to tackle persistent problems. Offered in English, this course combines in-person and online learning, providing participants with over 50 hours of immersive education. The program focuses on six key areas:

1. Understanding complex and persistent problems
2. Exploring the theoretical foundations of transdisciplinary research
3. Designing and evaluating transdisciplinary projects
4. Navigating diversity and fostering inclusive collaboration
5. Employing transformative research methods
6. Examining the researcher's role, power dynamics, and reflexivity

Launched in January 2024, with the first cohort of 15 students, this extensive curriculum is expected to prepare participants to apply transdisciplinary approaches across various settings, including health and community development.

Diploma in Mental Well-Being of Vulnerable Children

Awarded by Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)

Half of the world's mental health conditions start by the age of 14, with most cases going undetected and untreated, potentially worsening as the child enters adulthood. The National Mental Health Survey (2015-2016) found that 7.3% of children aged 13-17 in urban areas and 6.9% in rural areas reported mental health conditions. Factors such as family dysfunction, poor socio-economic status, experiences of violence, parental mental illness, and neglect can increase a child's risks for developing mental health issues. In response to this growing concern, an educational course was launched as a collaborative effort between BALM and Rainbow Homes, Hyderabad. The diploma aims to equip professionals, teachers, carers, and individuals interested in child welfare with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand, identify, and work with vulnerable children to promote their mental well-being.





In 2023, BALM forged a partnership with MSSW to jointly redevelop and deliver the diploma in working with vulnerable children, along with Rainbow Homes, Hyderabad. A revised version of this 6-month course was initiated in March 2024. The course, offered in Tamil, follows an in-person teaching structure, combining over 150 hours of theory (6 hours per week) with 150 hours of fieldwork embedded in the participants' work environment. The course covers five key modules: personal and professional self, mental health and development of children, recognising vulnerability in children, skills and techniques for working with vulnerable children and policy, legal, and program framework for care and protection of children.

48 students are enrolled in the ongoing batch of the Diploma.

Certificate Course in Open Dialogue & Dialogical Practices - Supporting Humanistic changes (Foundation Training)

Awarded by Madras School of Social Work (MSSW)

Developed in Tornio, Finland during the 1980s, Open Dialogue (OD) has emerged as a pioneering intervention for persistent mental illness. This humanistic approach seamlessly combines family interventions and psychotherapy principles, gaining global recognition for its success in reducing hospitalisations by up to 90%. OD has been instrumental in fostering a democratic, non-directive, and inclusive philosophy within the realms of therapy and perceptions surrounding mental health challenges.

At its core, OD empowers individuals and families to navigate mental health issues by placing the family at the center of the therapeutic process. It actively engages carers, service providers, and extended support networks, ensuring that decision-making is collaborative and transparent.

A hallmark of this approach is the system-wide joint network meetings, which bring together the individual at the center of concern, family members, and their broader social network. This collective effort mobilises all available resources within the community, creating a supportive and inclusive environment for recovery.

The course is delivered in a hybrid format and is designed for mental health professionals and is facilitated by international trainers and professionals from BALM and The Banyan, drawing upon their years of practice across diverse contexts.

In February 2024, 28 participants enrolled in the fourth edition of the course that was anchored by Dr Pina Ridente (formerly with Trieste University) and delivered in partnership with BALM and MSSW.

Short Course on Public Mental Health

This course offers an overview of mental health issues from a public health perspective and covers prevention and intervention strategies at the population level, including policies, programs, and services aimed at promoting mental health and addressing these conditions in communities.

Key topics include: the burden of mental illness globally and nationally, mental health disparities, the mental health system and workforce, mental health promotion and prevention, intervention models across the lifespan, the role of families and communities, mental health in special populations, integrating mental health and general health services, the role of public health in crisis prevention and management, legal and ethical issues, and emerging issues in public mental health.

Through readings, lectures, discussions, and projects, students understand the various dimensions of addressing mental health using a population-based public health approach. The course emphasises the importance of an

interdisciplinary, socio-ecological, and evidence-informed approach to improving mental health at local, national, and global levels.

In its second edition, 21 participants gained from the 11-week course.

Short Course on Trauma Informed approaches in mental health care

Recognising the wide-ranging impacts of trauma in the context of mental health and marginalisation, BALM and The Banyan offered a specialised certificate course on Trauma Informed Practice. Designed by drawing on both global best practices and the local experience of The Banyan in delivering mental healthcare, this 10-hour online course offers comprehensive training to identify and conceptualise trauma across different settings, address trauma among vulnerable populations, facilitate post-traumatic growth and healing, and ways to introduce a framework for trauma interventions in existing organisations.

In its first edition, 29 participants from across the country gained from this course.

Internships across The Banyan sites

BALM facilitates internships and educational visits across The Banyan's sites. Throughout the year, BALM coordinated a total of 173 interns, including both concurrent and block placements. In addition to the individual internships, BALM organised field visits for students from 14 educational institutions, totalling 383 participants. These institutions included universities and colleges from Tamil Nadu, such as the MSSW and KREA University, as well as the University of Houston from the United States. Internships and field visits attracted students from diverse disciplines, including social work, psychology, nursing, engineering, and even schools.

Program and Description	Participants	Month
<p><i>Art-Based Interventions for Selfcare Among Healthcare Workers</i></p> <p>4-week program delivered by Dr Lakshmi Sankaran and Niti Deoliya to healthcare workers in art-based activities for self-care and to transfer these skills in mental health services</p>	<p>33 participants, Healthcare workers at ECRC and HA</p>	<p>May – August 2023</p>
<p><i>Counselling Skills</i></p> <p>3 session Training program delivered by practitioners and researchers at BALM to equip staff of shelter facilities for children with counselling skills</p>	<p>15 participants, Staff of Rainbow Homes, Chennai</p>	<p>September 2023</p>
<p><i>Mental Healthcare Training for School Teachers, Chennai to Madras Seva Schools (Government aided schools and private)</i></p> <p>3 sessions delivered by Dr KV Kishore Kumar and BALM team to equip government school teachers to recognise mental health needs</p>	<p>84 teachers – Chennai</p>	<p>October 2023</p>
<p><i>Designing, Conducting and Evaluating Transdisciplinary Research for Learning and Improving Practice</i></p> <p>Prof. Dr. Teun Zuiderent-Jerak and Dr. Tjerk Jan Schuitmaker-Warnaar from Athena Institute, VU, Amsterdam</p>	<p>25 participants</p>	<p>April 2023</p>
<p><i>Using Transdisciplinary Approaches for Knowledge Integration and Interviewing Strategies</i></p> <p>2-day workshop by prof. Dr Barbara Regeer and Dr Emily De Wit from Athena Institute, VU, Amsterdam</p>	<p>25 participants</p>	<p>September 2023</p>
<p><i>Intensive Write-shop for PhD Candidates and Researchers</i></p> <p>Facilitated by prof. Dr Barbara Regeer, Dr Emma Emily de Wit, Dr Joske Bunders, Dr Tjerk Jan Schuitmaker-Warnaar and Dr Teun Zuiderent-Jerak.</p>	<p>7 researchers</p>	<p>April, September and January 2023</p>

Mental Health and Wellness sessions at Cognizant Tech Solutions (CTS)

Session by Mr. Sanjay Chaganti on 'Mindfulness amidst a busy life'

6 sessions by BALM team relating to mental health awareness were conducted with CTS throughout the year as a part of employee wellness programs

Over **150** CTS employees per session

October 25, 2023

Trauma-informed Care approaches: Training for Nalam and Healthcare Workers

Two-month refresher workshop on integrating trauma-informed care into mental health services delivered by Akshata Chonkar and Dr Lakshmi Sankaran

25 Nalam mobilisers & Healthcare workers at The Banyan

September & October 2023

First Responders and Mental Health Aid

Training clinical staff & carers as first responders for mental health needs by Dr. Lakshmi Sankaran, Dr. K S Ramesh, Meera Vishwanath, Akshata Chonkar

171 total enrolments, staff working in health and dialysis units, OP services, Organ Donation (Tanker Foundation) and in Mental Health care in Chennai, Kovalam, Tiruvannamalai and Bangalore (The Banyan, HBS, Project Smile, Thanal)

September 2023 onwards

Foundation in Mental Health Disorders

A session on "**Stress Management**" by Dr K S Ramesh

25 staff at Sri Ramanasramam Dispensary, Tiruvannamalai.

December 2023

Session on "**Social Work as Profession**" by Dr. K S Ramesh

150+ NSS (National Service Scheme) students of Stella Maris College, Chennai

February 2024

100+ BSW (Social Work) students of Stella Maris college, Chennai

March 2024

Session on "**Stress Management**" by Dr K S Ramesh and Dr Lakshmi Sankaran

60+ Auto & Van Drivers working for Schools, Organised by Road Transport Office, Tiruvanmiyur

February 2024

Managing Grief, building coping and resilience

32 healthcare workers from The Banyan (Chennai & Chengalpattu)

May to November 2023

Webinars & Lectures

Date	Speaker	Affiliation	Topic	Participants
May 9, 2023	Prof. Pallab Kumar Maulik	University of North South Wales & George Institute of Public Health	Implementation Research in Tribal Mental Health in India	42
June 16, 2023	Dr. Sujatha Ramesh	Private Practice conducting risk assessments of individuals who have committed sexual offenses	Treatment and Risk Assessment of Individuals who commit Sexual Offences	36
June 29, 2023	Prof. Ramkrishna Biswal	National Institute of Technology, Rourkela	Local Perception of Mental Illness & Healing in Eastern India	37
July 7, 2023	Prof. Andrew Willford	Cornell University	The Need for Enemies: Modernity and Malevolence in Tribal India	85
July 5, 2023	Dr. Meena Vythilingam,	Senior Mental Health Advisor, OASH	Evidence-Based Approaches for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder- 'Lost in Translation?'	25



Research

Experiences of children of parents with mental illness (COPMI) at The Banyan, South India: A qualitative study

Collaboration with Athena Institute, VU, Amsterdam

Deepika Easwaran, Vandana Gopikumar, Barbara Regeer, Elena Syurina**

Background: Parental mental illness can have diverse effects on children, particularly in contexts of poverty and social disadvantage. There is limited research on the experiences of children of parents with mental illness (COPMI) in India.

Objective: To understand the experiences and perceptions of adult COPMI during their childhood and adolescence, their coping mechanisms, interpersonal relationships, and views on mental health.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted with five adult COPMI who grew up receiving care at The Banyan. Focus group discussions explored their experiences at two-time points - as teenagers in 2016 and young adults in 2023. Thematic analysis was performed.

Results: Key themes included: 1) Early experiences of confusion and distress related to parental mental illness 2) Intersection of mental illness with poverty and challenging life circumstances 3) Disruptions in relationships with parents and extended family, alongside strong peer support 4) Stigma and discrimination from relatives, neighbours and classmates, leading to fear of judgement and selective disclosure 5) Coping through hope, faith, meaningful activities, and supportive relationships.

Conclusions: COPMI faced multiple, cumulative psychosocial stressors and risks. Comprehensive health and social care for families, mental health awareness, and societal efforts to reduce stigma are needed. Nurturing hope, self-belief and social support emerged as perceived protective factors that interventions could aim to foster.

** Athena Institute, VU, Amsterdam*





Home Again: Housing with Supportive Services for People with Psychosocial

Disabilities Experiencing Long-Term Care Needs

Vandana Gopikumar, Lakshmi Ravikanth, Deepika Easwaran, Aishwariya Ramesh, Akshata Chonkar, Mrinalini Ravi, Archana Padmakar, Vanitha Rajesh, Pallavi Rohatgi, Apurva Srinivas, Lakshmi Narasimhan

Background: A significant proportion of individuals with psychosocial disabilities experience prolonged stays in psychiatric institutions, often in restrictive and socially isolating conditions. Home Again, a housing with supportive services program developed by The Banyan and recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO), aims to address this issue by providing sustainable pathways to full inclusion for people with psychosocial disabilities, particularly those with histories of homelessness and long-term institutionalisation.

Methods: This study employed a mixed methods approach to evaluate outcomes from the implementation of Home Again across nine states in India and one site in Sri Lanka between October

2020 and September 2023. A single group pre-post design was used to measure participants' outcomes over a 12-month period, with a focus on community integration, disability, symptoms, hope, and quality of life. An embedded process evaluation consisted of focus group discussions with participants and personal assistants, and interviews with partners.

Results: Statistically significant improvements were observed across all outcome measures at the end of the 12-month period. Participants experienced increased community integration, hope, and quality of life, along with reduced symptoms and disability. Factors such as gender, type of institutional setting exited, and duration of institutionalisation were found to influence outcomes. Qualitative findings highlighted the complexities of navigating autonomy, belonging, and recovery in the context of the intervention.

***Discussion:** The multi-site, multi-partner implementation of Home Again across diverse settings offered insights into the effectiveness and scalability of a complex, multi-faceted mental health intervention for marginalized populations. The study demonstrates the potential of housing with supportive services to facilitate comprehensive improvements in the lives of individuals with psychosocial disabilities transitioning from long-term institutional care to community living.*



Effect of Arts-Based Therapy on Women with Long-Term Needs Recovering from Mental Health-Related Problems*

Lakshmi Sankaran

Background: This action research project investigated the effects of integrated Arts-Based Therapy (ABT) on women with long-term mental health needs residing in community-based shared housing with supportive services.

Methods: A pre-post intervention study with mixed methods was conducted in 2018 on a sample of twelve residents. The five-month intervention included thirty-five hours of ABT sessions focused on body image, pain, social systems, and well-being.

Results: Regular ABT sessions yielded positive effects on social systems, health, and body image. Thematic analysis revealed the use of melodies, storytelling, body maps, movement, visual art, and rhythm exercises in sessions. Participants reported

improved mood, affect, task comprehension, initiative, communication, and cognitive function. ABT fostered emotional expression, somatic memory processing, patience cultivation, and a sense of presentness. Challenges included scheduling, resource limitations, and addressing residual symptoms.

Conclusion: ABT complements biomedical approaches and integrates well with talking therapies and vocational training. Findings support the 2014 NICE guidelines on including art therapy for individuals with psychosis and schizophrenia.

**report was produced to fulfil requirements of the ABT course offered by Bapu Trust, Pune*

Understanding Risk Factors for Adolescent Suicide in the Indian Context Using the Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model

Collaboration with LEAD, Krea University

Aishwariya Ramesh, Akshata Chonkar, Lakshmi Sankaran, Sharon Buteau, Morchan Karthik*

Background: Suicide among adolescents is a growing concern in India. This systematic review aimed to 1) identify risk factors and their prevalence contributing to suicidal behaviour among Indian adolescents, 2) explore linkages between transitions from suicide risk to ideation, planning and action using the Integrated Motivational-Volitional (IMV) model framework, and 3) explore potential data sources providing evidence for the above objectives.

Methods: Primary research articles and news reports from 2008-2022 were analysed. Academic databases and Google News were searched using relevant keywords to identify studies meeting inclusion criteria of focusing on 10-19 year olds in India. Data were synthesised using thematic analysis aligned with the IMV model's pre-motivational, motivational, and volitional phases.

Results: Key findings revealed a complex interplay of risk factors across the IMV phases. Pre-motivational vulnerabilities included academic pressure, sexual harassment, family conflict, and psychological distress. Prevalence of suicidal ideation ranged from 1.3-6.8% and attempt from 0.4-4.1%. Motivational phase factors like social isolation and entrapment increased risk, while volitional phase factors included access to means and exposure to suicides.

Data gaps made it difficult to fully trace connections between ideation, planning and action. NCRB data, while valuable, lacked nuance to comprehensively understand specific risk profiles. Triangulating data from health records, news reports, and research literature may provide a more complete picture.

Conclusion: *The study highlights the multifactorial nature of adolescent suicide pathways in India and the utility of the IMV framework for conceptualising this trajectory. Recommendations include training stakeholders to identify early risk, promoting general population wellbeing, and improving research and data systems. A multi-pronged strategy addressing individual, familial, societal and systemic factors is needed.*

*LEAD, KREA University





Navigating Homelessness: Establishing a sense of place and creating home

*Purnima Prakash, Preetha Krishnadas,
Mrinalini Ravi, Emmy De Wit*, Teun
Zuiderent – Jerak*, Deborah Padgett+,
Vandana Gopikumar*

Background: Homelessness is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of those living on the streets. This qualitative study explored the processes of establishing a sense of place and creating a home among rough sleepers in Chennai, India, during 2021-2022.

Methods: Lived experiences and home-making practices of 60 homeless individuals were examined through surveys and in-depth interviews with 15 participants,

Results: The study findings challenge the notion that homelessness is a fixed and homogeneous experience. The findings reveal that gender and the presence or absence of family members significantly impact how individuals approach their dwellings and their sense of home while living on the streets. Women were more inclined to create practices that led to making a home despite adverse circumstances and sparse resources. The study

also highlights the challenges faced by homeless individuals, such as uncertain dwellings due to eviction threats and inclement weather, and the aspirations for an ideal home, which often included basic amenities like toilets and doors.

The study situates the debate on urban poverty in non-slum spaces and emphasises the need to examine the experiences of homeless individuals beyond their economic or suffering roles. The complex dynamics between the homeless and the state are explicated, as the physical presence of homeless individuals within the urban fabric serves as a form of resistance against the state's prescribed norms and regulations.

Conclusion: The research contributes to the growing literature on home-making practices of rough sleepers and underscores the diversity of experiences and strategies employed by individuals in their efforts to find stability and a sense of belonging in their dwelling spaces. These insights can inform policies on homelessness regarding care and support approaches. Incorporating participatory and collaborative methods in policy making processes may enhance responsiveness of care and support approaches for rough sleepers as well as ensure that policies are informed by lived experiences.

**Athena Institute, VU, Amsterdam +Silver School of Social Work, New York University*

Understanding the Mental Health Needs and Wellbeing Practices of Indigenous Communities in Chengalpattu (Tamil Nadu) and Aghai (Maharashtra)

Mrinmoy Ghosh, Akshata Chonkar, Lakshmi Sankaran, Ramesh KS

Background: Indigenous communities in India have historically experienced systemic marginalization, powerlessness, and social exclusion. This study aimed to explore the mental health needs and practices of these communities in Shahapur Taluk of Maharashtra and Chengalpattu Taluk of Tamil Nadu. The objectives included understanding the notions, language, stories, and ideas surrounding mental illness; exploring the unique mental health requirements and needs; and understanding the existing practices surrounding mental wellbeing and treatment methods employed within these communities.

Methods: Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted across different indigenous communities in Chengalpattu Taluk, Tamil Nadu and Shahapur Taluk, Maharashtra. Thematic analysis

was employed to analyse the data, with multiple researchers involved in coding and interpretation.

Results: Socio-cultural, economic and environmental stressors like strained relationships, financial difficulties, harmful substance use and spiritual beliefs emerged as perceived contributors to mental distress. Traditional methods involving rituals, herbal remedies and divine interventions were interspersed with medical models of care. However, geographic inaccessibility, lack of cultural resonance and alienation experiences with mainstream services hampered access to formal mental healthcare.

Conclusion: *The findings highlight the need for culturally resonant, community-driven initiatives harmonising traditional wisdom and contemporary psychosocial approaches to address the unique needs of these marginalized populations. Capacity building, gender-sensitive programs, stakeholder involvement were recommended for sustainable services. This study paves the way for further participatory research centering indigenous epistemologies and agency in mental health praxis among adivasi communities in India.*



Outcomes of Homeless Persons with Mental Illness (HPMI) through the Pandemic years - Care and Recovery Pathways

Monisha Lakshminarayanan, Vandana Gopikumar, Priyanka M, KV Kishore Kumar, Sanjeev Jain*

Background: Homelessness and mental illness are complex, intertwined issues that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). This study aimed to bridge knowledge gaps by defining the socio-demographic profile of homeless persons with mental illness (HPMI) in Southern India and investigating their experiences of homelessness, abuse, mental illness, exit pathways, and continued engagement in mental health care. The study was conducted across seven sites in three states (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala) and included 388 participants who availed services at the Emergency Care and Recovery Centre (ECRC) of The Banyan, an Indian NGO, between 2020-2022.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilising retrospective records, including medical and legal documents, psychiatrist and physician notes, and case manager reports.

Findings: The study found that mental illness often preceded homelessness, and a significant proportion of participants experienced recurrent homelessness. Abandonment by or death of a carer, worsening mental illness, and hostile home environments were some of the self-reported reasons for homelessness. Gender differences were observed, with women being more likely to be married, have comorbid health conditions, and experience abuse, while men were more likely to be homeless for longer periods and have higher employment rates and incomes before becoming homeless. The Banyan's ECRC model, which integrates public and private systems for sustainable care, demonstrated higher retention rates compared to existing literature.

Conclusion: *The study emphasises the importance of comprehensive, person-centered care that addresses the complex needs of HPMI, and calls for forward thinking policies and stakeholder engagement to transform mental health services in India. Collaborative and culturally relevant approaches are crucial for creating meaningful impact, even in resource-limited settings.*

*National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)

Publications and Dissemination

Namrata Rao, M., Lakshmi Ravikanth, A., Sankaran, L., Bansal, P., Chowdhury, R. (2024). *The Banyan Journey: A Continuum in Community Mental Health Care*. In: Anand, M. (eds) *Mental Health Care Resource Book*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-1203-8_14

The Home Again study's findings were also presented at a symposium on Residential Rehabilitation Models, focusing on learning about severe mental illness. This event was held at the Sakalwara Community Mental Health Centre, NIMHANS, Bengaluru, on 7 October 2023.

Social Action



Policy Advocacy

BALM has been actively involved in shaping mental health policies and initiatives at both the state and national levels. Between April and June 2023, BALM representatives attended two meetings convened by the State Mental Health Authority, Maharashtra, to contribute to the development of the state mental health policy. The committee is currently working on the budget, and policy discussions are set to resume in May 2024.

Dr. KV Kishore Kumar, representing The Banyan and BALM, participated in a mental health consortium initiated by Child Rights and You (CRY). The consortium, comprising experts in the field, aimed to prepare a document with suggestive recommendations for strengthening the Mental Health Care Act, 2017, from a child rights perspective. CRY is consolidating the recommendations to submit to relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of

Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Ministry of Social Justice.

Support to Community Mental Health Programs

BALM has also been offering consultation, capacity building, supervision, and monitoring and evaluation assistance to Gandhigram Trust's new community-based mental healthcare program in Athoor Block, Dindigul District, which serves a population of over 1.25 lakh. A pilot visit was conducted in August 2023. Awareness programs, pre-adolescent workshops, and mental health camps have been conducted in various locations, including Bandhanpada-Devgaon and Bhuishet in Aghai, for the community mental health program focused on indigenous communities in Shahapur Taluk of Maharashtra. Social Entitlements Camps were conducted to facilitate and support the indigenous population in accessing various government schemes and social entitlements.



Supports for Children and Adolescents of Parents with Mental Health Conditions

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH) program is preparing to initiate after-school learning support for Children of Parents with Mental Illness (COPMI) in urban and rural locations, including The Banyan's new outpatient centre in Ambattur and The Banyan's health center in Kovalam.

Regular academic scholarships are being offered to children of parents accessing ECRC and Home Again services. The team has received funding from Madras Round Table 1 to enable scholarships for approximately 300 children in the community, specifically targeting children of aftercare clients. A comprehensive database has been compiled to ensure that these children receive educational scholarships for the upcoming academic year, promoting their academic progress and overall well-being. Recognising the challenges faced by

staff from vulnerable backgrounds, BALM has also gathered a list of these staff members to extend the scholarship program to their children. This inclusive approach aims to support the education and development of children within The Banyan and BALM community, regardless of their parents' roles or backgrounds.

Further, starting from March 2024, BALM has introduced two rolling 6-month fellowships specifically designed for children of parents with mental illness. These fellowships aim to support the career aspirations of these young individuals and help them build social and financial capital, supporting them to overcome the unique challenges they may face due to their parents' mental health conditions.

Disability Access Directory for Mental Health Services

BALM developed a comprehensive Disability Access Directory for Mental Health Services, designed to assist individuals with physical and mental disabilities across India. This directory, curated meticulously by a team of professionals and students, includes verified addresses and provides updated information on available mental health support services. The second edition, released in November 2023, is now accessible on the BALM website. This resource aims to bridge the gap in service accessibility and ensure that those in need can easily find and utilise the support available to them.

Strategic Priorities for 2024-2025

Aligning educational initiatives with diffusion of ECRC, HA and NALAM and amplifying impact through creation of human resources equipped to deliver mental health and social care across the continuum

BALM will continue to support the replication of interventions developed by The Banyan – ECRC, HA and NALAM. In addition, BALM will build solidarities with and among educational institutions and broader development sector organisations and institutions and enhance the capacities of human resources to engage in mental health justice work

- practice-based continuing education programs for human resources at diverse levels and cadres in development sector organisations, offered in collaboration with a network of local and global experts, drawn from academics, practitioner and lived experience experts
- practice-based courses for those pursuing post-graduation to develop knowledge and skills for intersectional mental health practice
- Fellowships in mental health for entrepreneurs for self-driven implementations of ECRC, HA and NALAM, besides the current model of placement in The Banyan-BALM social action and replication sites

Amplifying mental health knowledge and perspectives from social-culturally minoritised populations

- research projects focused on understanding the role of structural determinants, intersectional identities and socioeconomic vectors in shaping the lives and trajectories of homeless persons and the effectiveness of interventions and supports designed to maximise community participation and flourishing, emphasising context-dependent factors, replication mechanisms and clarifying user-defined meaningful outcomes
- a repository of open-access resources and tools designed to support localised adaptation, stakeholder involvement, and access to existing knowledge
- capacity building and dissemination through presentations, webinars, training and continuing education series designed to bring together stakeholders and practitioners from diverse global regions

Participatory science-informed social action to address modifiable determinants of homelessness and mental health

- preventing the recurrence of homelessness and long-term institutionalisation trajectories among high-risk groups
- addressing social disadvantage and building competencies among children and adolescents from marginal identities
- developing indigenously derived praxis for mental health for Adivasi communities and their access to health systems

Institutional Review Board

We place great emphasis on ensuring the highest standards of ethics in research. The Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health - Institutional Review Board (IRB) was reconstituted in April 2023, comprising eminent researchers, social workers, representatives from the disability sector, and persons with lived experiences. The purpose of the IRB is to guide and evaluate research proposals from both scientific and ethical standpoints. As of March 2024, a total of 9 research proposals were cleared for investigation by the BALM-IRB.

Name	Qualification	Affiliation
Mr Vijay Nallawala	B.Com	Founder of Bipolar India
Dr. S. Raja Samuel	PhD (Social work)	Principal, Madras School of Social Work
Mr. Shashaank Awasthi	MBA	Founder of V-Shesh
Professor. Vijayalakshmi C	Ph.D	IFMR GSB Krea University
Dr Lakshmi Ravikanth	Ph.D	BALM
Dr Lakshmi Sankaran	Ph.D	BALM

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