It's OK To Talk

Annual Report 2016-17

Insights from a youth mental health public engagement program in India

Implementer & Partners

It's Ok To Talk is a public engagement initiative by Sangath, India that raises awareness and engages adolescents and youth in India on mental health through digital and community activities.

Sangath is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation committed to improving health across the lifespan by empowering existing community resources to provide appropriate physical, psychological and social therapies.

The Wellcome Trust is a biomedical research charity based in London, United Kingdom. It was established in 1936 with legacies from the pharmaceutical magnate Sir Henry Wellcome to fund research to improve human and animal health.

Harvard Medical School is the graduate medical school of Harvard University.

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is a public research university specialised in public health and tropical medicine and a constituent college of the University of London.

Authors: Pattie Gonsalves and Sweta Pal
Date: 31 October 2017
Support: This project is supported by the Wellcome Trust, UK
Contact: Sangath, J-18, II Floor, Lajpat Nagar 3, New Delhi, India
www.itsoktotalk.in

1. Summary

Introduction

There is a critical need to expand the reach and acceptability of mental health information for young people in India. We delivered a combination of community events and digital media co-designed with young people to raise awareness about mental health.

About the program

It's Ok To Talk is an adolescent and youth-focused program part of the PRIDE adolescent and youth mental health research program at Sangath, India. It's Ok To Talk aims to increase awareness about mental health and wellbeing so that more young people are able to engage in a dialogue on mental health, and seek and get help. The programme works through partnerships with individuals and organisations that bring complementary expertise on community engagement, arts and social media in particular to organise public events, workshops and social media campaigns. This program is implemented in collaboration with Harvard Medical School and is funded by the Wellcome Trust, UK.

The first year of the program ran in two phases - from August 2016 to April 2017, followed by a social media campaign until August 2017. The program also benefited from some funding received from the Wellcome Trust DBT India Alliance and Instagram.

What we did

A mix of on-ground, digital and social media activities were implemented to reach diverse groups of youth. Feedback and monitoring data was collected through surveys, video interviews, testimonials and digital analytics.

Results

In six months, 1800 youth were reached through public events; 4,50,000+ users were reached via social media platforms, and 2000 people accessed a mental health website designed for the program. A preliminary pilot survey to understand mental health information gaps with 491 people showed more than 50% did not know how to respond if a friend or family member faced a mental health problem.
A post-event survey with 80 attendees after a public event containing de-stigmatizing content, showed that more than 90% reported their attitude towards mental health was positively impacted, and 72% responded they were more likely to seek help for a mental health challenge.

Conclusion

This new program demonstrates feasibility of reaching young people through public events and digital media and may help inform efforts to leverage websites and social media to make destigmatising mental health information more widely available and acceptable to youth. Early learning emphasizes the need for robust evaluation of community based and digital work.

2. About the program

About It's Ok to Talk

It's Ok To Talk is an adolescent and youth-focused program that aims to increase awareness about mental health and wellbeing so that more young people are able to engage in a dialogue on mental health, and seek and get help. We work through partnerships with individuals and organisations that bring complementary expertise on community engagement, arts and social media in particular to organise public events, workshops and social media campaigns. This program is implemented in collaboration with Harvard Medical School, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and is funded by the Wellcome Trust, UK.

It's Ok To Talk is rooted in the belief that the arts and new media are powerful catalysts to engage young people with mental health and wellbeing. It was envisioned with the motto - *good mental health makes life better for adolescents and young people.* The program aims to enable a dialogue with young people around issues related to mental health through a variety of community and social media-based activities.

The program consists of public awareness events, training workshops, a youth website and social media campaign to build awareness on adolescent and youth mental health. Youth are active stakeholders in the conceptualisation and design of activities, working together with the program team to address mental health stigma and gaps in knowledge and awareness about mental health and wellbeing, and address the lack of safe spaces for youth to engage in meaningful dialogue on mental health and access mental healthcare information. Activities include training workshops, public discussions, theatre and music performances, photo and art exhibitions and puppetry shows.

A youth website, www.itsoktotalk.in, was launched in April 2017, as India's first youth-focused mental health campaign. This web platform aims to increase awareness about mental health and to build capacity of youth to address mental health problems through crowdsourced mental health stories by youth across India in multimedia forms.

We need to go beyond prime ministers, film stars and celebrities and reach out to ordinary young people, the ones who actually bear the brunt and the burden of mental health problems because they not only have them but have no one to turn to when they struggle. Given the massive demographic of young people in our country, I think we need to harness the amazing confluence and energy of young people, the power of their stories, the reach of the Internet and the excitement of the arts. This for me is the very essence of It's Ok to Talk.
- Vikram Patel, Global Mental Health Expert, Sangath & Harvard Medical School

Rationale

In India, suicide and self-harm are presently the leading cause of death among young people. (*Lancet*, 2016) Globally, 20% of the world's youth in the 15-24 years age group are presently experiencing a mental health condition, and of these, 80% do not receive care. (WHO)

It's Ok To Talk aims to overcome some of the traditional barriers faced by adolescents and young people in talking about mental health problems and seeking help. These include psychosocial challenges such as the silence and stigma around issues of gender, sexuality and relationships; violence and abuse; poverty, caste and religion; lack of safe spaces for discussion and dialogue; lack of (youth-friendly) mental health services and information, fear, stigma, embarrassment to seek help.

It's Ok To Talk has positioned itself within the thriving social networking space in urban India that provides a great impetus for social media campaigns. The website www.itsoktotalk.in was conceptualised as a safe space for young people to talk about experiences with mental health, mental illness and wellbeing. The website was also designed as a 'mobile-first' website with the aim of overcoming feasibility and infrastructural challenges such as low bandwidth and limited Wi-Fi and internet connectivity.

Goals

1. Identify strategies to address the stigma associated with mental health amongst youth and adolescents
2. Increase awareness on mental health issues amongst youth and adolescents
3. Build capacity among youth and adolescents in India to address mental health problems

Theory Of Change

We believe that talking about mental health is the first step to breaking the stigma.

The program has been designed on the premise that engaging with real stories and narratives about mental health experiences can positively impact young people's attitudes and break down negative stereotypes and stigma attached to mental health and mental illness. We also believe providing young people with practical, imitable solutions will help them to address their own mental health challenges.

Strategy

1. **Young people at the center:** We engage adolescents and youth to make sure their voices are heard in the planning, implementation and evaluation of our program.
2. **Collaboration:** We want to improve mental health by working together with like-minded organizations and individuals to engage adolescents and young people.
3. **Arts-based:** We believe in the power of the arts to impact mental health and wellbeing. We collaborate and innovate across the arts and social media to raise awareness about mental health.
4. **Community engagement:** We partner with organizations that bring complementary expertise on engagement with adolescents in India. We organize public events and social media campaigns aimed at creating awareness and breaking down the stigma around mental illness.
5. **Capacity building and training:** We organize workshops and trainings through our partner networks to help young people build their capacity to address mental health challenges.

3. Audience

Age and Socio-Economic Background

The program was primarily aimed at adolescents (10-19 yrs) and youth (15-24 yrs) in New Delhi, India including those who may have experienced mental health problems across low, middle and high-income groups, and in different types of public spaces including urban slums, housing areas, educational institutions.

Partners

Our secondary audience included educational institutions including colleges and schools and parents.

The program also included active engagement with a national network of individuals and organisations working towards the improvement of mental health for adolescents and youth in India.

"It was an exciting experience sharing my story with It's Ok To Talk. The vibe they created during my video interview was so comfortable that I felt as if I'd known everyone for a very long time! The idea of building a community like this, where people can really open up without the fear of being judged and share their problem with others who are really listening is absolutely amazing. For someone facing anxiety, I'm not always looking for a solution. A lot of the time all you need is someone who listens and just inspires you to get back and believe in yourself. For a very long time I kept things to myself, but now I know, it's ok to talk about it!"

- Anhad Khanna, 19, Student

Activity	Audience
Public events including talks, discussions, arts performances	16 - 24+ year olds
Puppetry show on body image	11 - 17 year old in low-income schools
Forum theatre training workshop on mental health	19 - 25 year olds working with youth in non-profit organisations
Awareness workshops	11 - 17 year olds school-going adolescents
Social media campaign	18 - 24+ year olds online

4. What we did & Impact

Strategy Development

The It's Ok To Talk program was developed based on learning from various types of mental health organisations in India and across the world and lessons drawn from similar programs and campaigns including The Mighty, USA and Time to Change, UK.

Outlining the context: Through desk research and consultations with youth, experts and organizations working on mental health issues, we were able to identify gaps in mental health information for youth and how the program could be positioned.

Youth at the center and as planners: A Young Advisors Group consisting of representative young people from schools and universities was set up to be part of the conceptualization, planning and implementation of the program.

Strategy building and setting objectives: A national workshop was organized with 15 organisations working in the arts, social media, gender and sexuality, life-skills development and mental health to collaboratively design the public engagement strategy and set objectives for the program.

Identifying program activities: A combination of on-ground and digital and social media activities were selected for the first year of the program, to reach out to youth across platforms and living in different social and economic groups.

Monitoring and evaluation*:* A monitoring and evaluation plan was developed to collect qualitative and quantitative feedback and insights from the different program activities. The monitoring plan included feedback surveys at events, narrative reports, video interviews with attendees, testimonials and digital analytics and insights for the website and social media channels.

#ItsOkBaatKaro enables young people to share their expressions on mental health, encouraging peer to peer support and exchange, which is essential in fighting the stigma against mental health and wellbeing. Instagram is proud to have supported this initiative as part of our ongoing commitment to our community's wellbeing.
- Tara Bedi, Community Partnerships & Programs, India, Instagram

Public Events

We organized seven public events over August 2016 – April 2017 to provide young people with and without experiences of mental health problems the opportunity to learn and listen to each other, to challenge negative stereotypes and break down the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health.

Our events included participation in a large public fair, music performances, theatre performances, audio-visual exhibition, talks and discussions.

Impacts

- More than 1800 youth reached directly through events
- 50 volunteers and interns involved
- 15 partners and collaborators engaged
- Audience attitudes:
  - A preliminary pilot survey to understand mental health information gaps with 492 people showed more than 50% did not know how to respond if a friend or family member faced a mental health problem.
  - A post-event survey with 80 attendees after a public event containing de-stigmatizing content, showed that more than 90% reported their attitude towards mental health was positively

impacted, and 72% responded they were more likely to seek help for a mental health challenge. The event included an audio-visual exhibit featuring mental health stories and a series of short talks by mental health and youth advocates and survivors who talked about their journeys.

- Awareness and advocacy communications materials created including a Hindi and English comic book for adolescents distributed to 5000 students in schools and at events; videos showcasing youth experiences with mental health, handouts about mental health services, and other youth-friendly materials such as bookmarks, badges, stickers, bags, etc., for distribution at events
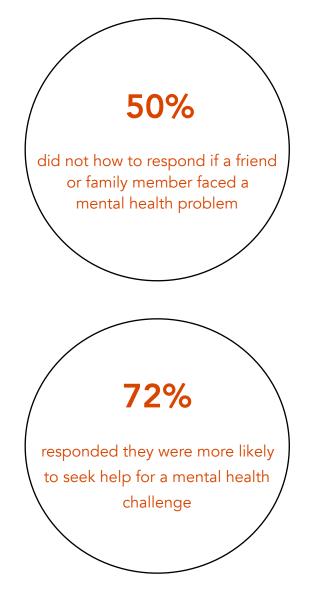- 25 articles by mainstream news outlets and online portals featured events between August 2016 - April 2017

Our learning

- **Think further about how to facilitate conversations about mental health at events.**
  While public events offered an excellent opportunity for youth to come together and talk about their experiences, it was important to have facilitators from the mental health community involved to steer conversations towards challenging mental health stereotypes, bust myths and provide easy-to-understand information about mental health and help seeking options.
- **Different kinds of events for different audiences.**
  Conducting events in different kinds of public spaces (from a large public fair, café, auditoriums, public park and urban slum community center) was a good way to reach audiences across different social groups. However there were challenges around achieving 'meaningful' contact as some events
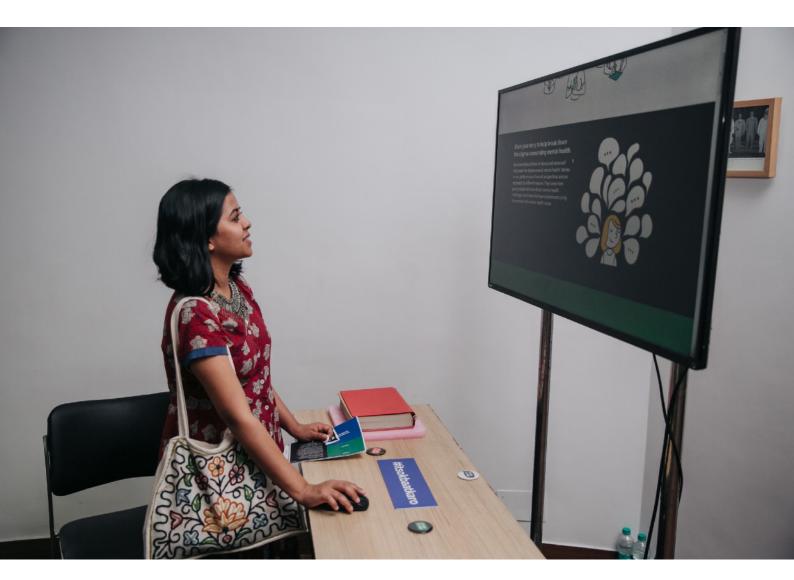
50%

did not how to respond if a friend or family member faced a mental health problem

72%

responded they were more likely to seek help for a mental health challenge

were often short or difficult to organise (e.g., urban slum community).

- **Volunteers are an integral part of community outreach.**
  It was also important to offer opportunities to volunteers and interns to get involved in planning and running of events. Our most successful events were executed by a dedicated volunteer group that included students from universities and youth with experiences of mental health problems.

"I think it's important to normalize it [mental health] and consider that it is like any other illness!" - **Feedback from youth attendee at public event**

Digital & Social Media

Our digital work involved launching the It's Ok To Talk website (www.itsoktotalk.in) and social media sites, including Facebook and Instagram, to support our program, increase awareness and reduce mental health stigma.

Website
www.itsoktotalk.in was designed as a safe space for young people to voice the difficult reactions, emotions and stories that accompany mental health — whether they are the one experiencing challenges, or are someone who sees it happening around them to family members or friends. The website publishes real stories

in a variety of media forms by young people facing mental health challenges. The website has three key features:-
- "Discover Stories": Offers first person accounts of young people's mental struggles and experiences with mental health problems
- "Submit Your Story": Offers visitors the option to submit their own story in any multi-media form of their choice
- "Find Help": Offers information and videos on practical ways for young people to take care of their mental health. Our website also included partnership with 9 national mental health helplines in India and collaboration with a free mental

health AI chatbot, Wysa.

Social Media

This included using digital platforms to support bursts of social marketing activity. For example, we live-streamed and promoted videos of talks for our website launch, promoted posts and stories from the website that young people in particular could access online.

We also posted regularly to our social media sites, and commissioned a young filmmaker to make short video stories about young people's experiences of mental health stigma and discrimination.
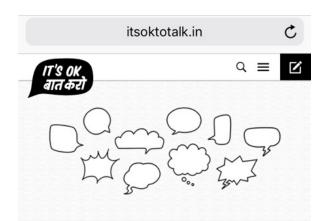
Impacts

- 450,000+ people reached out to via Facebook and Instagram social posts
- 2000+ unique visits to the It's Ok To Talk website
- 60 pieces submitted to the It's Ok To Talk website since April 2017
- 2000+ new supporters on Facebook
- 500 + new Instagram followers
- 75,000+ views of It's Ok To Talk online videos

Learning

- **Social media enabled us to involve, support and measure impact**
  We used our social media sites to inspire young people to get involved with the program and events, through regular posts, videos and stories from the website. We promoted posts through ad-support received from Instagram. Social media activity was used to measure the campaign bursts, for example, website visitors, new social media supporters, shares and likes for social media posts. These sites were also used to keep supporters engaged in between large bursts of activity or events. Personal narratives about mental health and regularly posting anti-stigma messages and videos were helpful ways to remind youth about the campaign online.

itsoktotalk.in

We all go through tough times. When we do, little things can make a big difference to how we feel and how we cope with life's ups and downs.

In this section, you will find videos and information on some practical ways to mind your mental health. If you or someone you know is facing a mental health challenge, there are a number of support services available which can provide help for what you need. You will

2000+

users reached via
www.itsoktotalk.in
in 3 months

60

stories submitted by young people via website

4,50,000+

users reached via social networking platforms in 6 months

Website use over 3 months

Total number of users	2055
% of male users	54%
% of female users	46%
New users	63%
Returning users	37%
Total number of contributions	60
Most popular age-groups	25-34 18-24
Most popular cities	New Delhi (30%) Mumbai (11%) Bangalore (8%) Pune (4%)

TUMBLR LIED

MANASVI CHAUHAN • FEMALE • 20 • PUNE

Tumblr* lied,
there's nothing beautiful about depression.
Hear me out loud and clear,
when I speak about this in agony sheer,
depression is not a melancholy song,
or poetry flowing free celebrating the wrongs.
No,
depression is a cry for help,
that never even materialised into a yelp.
Just sitting there,
gripping my oesophagus hard,
piercing my mouth's insides,
with its shattered shards;
depression is that one story,
I want to release and flood the world,
but it only leaks as stutters and stammers,
weakly hurled.
Depression is my dirty secret,
the skeleton I waltz with in my cramped closet;
depression, my friends,
is a lot of things
but it's never beautiful.

Last Monday night, I couldn't sleep at all,
but the following Tuesday,
my body just refused to fall out of the bed.
Anxiety was keeping me awake,
but resignation wanted an eternal slumber,
and the number of times
the monsters would sneak into my sleep
and seep into my already troubled dreams
is a different tale altogether
and that is not beautiful.

* Tumblr is a microblogging and social networking website that
  allows users to post multimedia and other content to a short-
  form blog. Users can follow other users' blogs.

EXCERPT FROM WWW.ITSOKTOTALK.IN

- **Online storytelling brought the It's Ok To Talk campaign to life**
Highlighting and showcasing real young people's experiences and stories about their mental health was a powerful way to show the impact of mental health stigma and discrimination. It brought the program to life, and was often a positive and empowering experience for the person telling their story. Most contributors wrote one-off blogs, which meant we could publish a diverse range of voices and stories.
We also commissioned a video series that explored a set of young people's personal experiences of coping with mental illness and mental health challenges.

- **Different social media sites helped us reach new audiences**
Facebook continued to be our biggest social media platform to share stories and videos, and Instagram became increasingly important to share short messages and pictures. It was important to keep up-to-date with social media developments and create a presence on a variety of sites including YouTube and Twitter given their different audiences. A weekly newsletter via MailChimp helped us stay connected with our supporters and share personal stories from the website.

- **We need to review how we measure the impact of digital work**
We know that young people have

engaged with our sites. There were more than 2000 visitors to the website and over 2500 new social media supporters between April and August 2017. We used monitoring tools including Google Analytics to understand how our site was used, for example, length of time spent on the website, number of times a page was viewed. However, there is scope to gain a better and deeper understanding of the impact of our digital work on audiences. This includes how it impacts on youth attitudes and behaviour.

Training

- **Gender, sexuality and mental health**
  We supported youth organization, The YP Foundation, to design and pilot a workshop and curriculum development project between 2016 - 2018, which focuses on mental health and issues related to gender and sexuality. This project is being implemented in the NCR and Chandigarh, and reached out to 150 youth participants in the first year.

- **Forum theatre & mental health**
  We supported the Center for Community Dialogue & Change (CCDC), Bangalore, to design and develop a 13-day Forum Theatre Workshop for youth practitioners working with adolescents and youth in local organisations/NGOs through the arts, life-skills education and education. 11 youth trainees were trained through this program in the first year.

Impacts
  - 300+ youth reached out directly via performances
  - 150+ youth reached out to through workshops
  - 11 youth advocates trained in Forum Theatre for mental health

"The Forum Theatre workshop provided us with an effective, collaborative, and ultimately fun way to engage with the issues we at The YP Foundation are passionate about. As facilitators, the forum theatre workshop helped us hone our own perspectives as well; we were not only given the space to step back and critique the situation presented in our plays, but were also spurred on to engage with the issue and find ways to change the situation for the better."
- Esther Moraes, 24, Coordinator Communications, The YP Foundation

After sharing my story, I received support and love from close family members. When they reached out to me it made me feel more positive and better equipped to deal with my struggle. I also got to know that I wasn't alone and many people face a mental breakdown quite often in their lives. At present, I do have bouts of anxiety and sometimes I feel very low but I have learnt how to relax my mind a little and move ahead. Music and writing are two things that significantly help me calm down and destress.

- Rubina Mulchandani, 24, New Delhi, Website Contributor

4. Learning

1. **Wider reach can be achieved through expansion to Hindi.**
   The first year of the program focused on delivering activities and content mostly in English. Expansion of activities in the second year includes a special emphasis on working in Hindi and launching a Hindi version of the website in order to reach a wider youth audience.

2. **Online activity impact should be measured better.**
   There is a high-level of engagement with our website and social media sites. This is evidenced through monitoring visits, posts, likes and video views. However, we have little evidence of the impact of our online activity, for example on public attitudes towards mental health, increased level of awareness or knowledge, etc. We therefore plan to start pilot surveys with our social media followers to learn more about the impact of their engagement with the sites.

3. **More work is needed to assess any longer-term attitude or behaviour change.**
   The feedback collected from the general public (e.g., youth attending events, submitting personal content to the website), was effective at finding out small changes in attitudes towards help seeking. However, longer-term attitude or behaviour changes were not being captured. As a result, we are introducing follow-up surveys and questions which will be run 3-6 months after an event or submission. These will include questions about whether young people have talked about mental health since the event, whether they feel any positive change after sharing their own experiences, and whether they been able to better take care of their own mental health or help others.

4. **Inclusion of a Young Advocates Group.**
   To further strengthen the youth-centered strategy, the program will recruit a group of Young Advocates from across India through an open application process. This group will work with the project, advise on the community and social media work as well as design and conduct activities in their own communities to advocate for mental health amongst youth.

5. **A more devolved approach to evaluation is needed next year.**
   The program will be supporting and working with 10 youth advocates and local partners to implement *It's Ok To Talk* activities in different cities across India, with a view to embedding anti-stigma work in schools, colleges and other communities. It is important that youth advocates and partners are able to use effective evaluation tools for themselves to ensure consistent metrics across activities. We will therefore need to review how we can effectively support them to evaluate work at a national level.

6. **Increased number of public events.**
   Based on feedback received from event attendees, workshop participants, interns and volunteers, the program aims to increase the number of events conducted in the first year from six to 20+ in the second year of the project. These events will be conducted in partnership with youth organisations and networks and will include community outreach events, puppet shows, arts performances, college and school awareness workshops.

7. **Make available more information about help-seeking.**
   Although key national mental health helpline numbers and details are

provided on the program website, multiple queries were received through the website, social media platforms and by email requesting emergency mental health information. This led to the development of an SOS escalation matrix in the first year of the program, to respond to emergency situations. Additionally, we plan to further publicise low-cost help seeking options including hospitals, helplines, self-help apps, etc., through social media channels.

"Sharing my story through It's Ok To Talk was one of the most cathartic and empowering things I have done for my mental health. Sharing my story with the world was nerve-wrecking, and I never thought I'd be able to do it. Further, I didn't think I'd benefit from it in any real way. But I did. It's Ok To Talk became the safe space I realised I needed in order to allow myself to be as completely and entirely vulnerable as I could be, a wonderful platform to inspire and be inspired."

- Student, 19, Website Contributor

For more information about our project please visit

www.itsoktotalk.in

If you'd like to discuss the project with us or partner with us, please contact Pattie Gonsalves at pattie.gonsalves@sangath.in

IT'S OK TO TALK