Greetings on World Mental Health Day!

World Health Organisation has recognised October 10th as "World Mental Health Day" to discuss and act on making mental health care a reality for people worldwide.

The National Mental Health Survey 2016 showed that an alarming 10.6% of Indians suffer from mental disorders, with the highest percentage in Manipur at 14% followed by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, and Jharkhand showing data higher than the national average. Despite a mental health policy in place, targeted interventions around mental health support for the community is fragmented and missing. On this day, we bring to you the story of Sumitra Gagrai, CII Foundation Woman Exemplar from Jharkhand who is contributing to WHO's campaign this year on "Making Mental Health & Well-Being for all a Global Priority".

With the lived experience of having a sister struggling with a mental health disorder, Sumitra rose beyond her personal challenges and developed a rural mental health care model. The model develops youth change agents for awareness and counselling support for patients, and connects them to medical support, if required. It has reached out to more than 20,000 individuals creating awareness of mental health disorders and their treatment.

Sumitra was subjected to emotional trauma from a young age with her mother's passing away. Situations became worse with her younger sister succumbing to the grief and taking her own life due to clinical depression. They were unable to receive quality care for her sister due to limited awareness, accessibility, and affordability; increasing their struggle to multiple levels. This was Sumitra's first exposure to the financial and mental struggle that came with mental illness.

Thinking that the availability of government treatment or a community mental health support network could have saved her sister's life, she started working on the mental health epidemic in her area. While working she noticed that most of the women in her village suffered from anxiety and depression, it aggravated due to domestic violence and abuse. During the community visits, she realised that due to a lack of awareness around mental illness, many of these women were further ostracised and subjected to witch-hunting*.

She started giving counselling to women who were exposed to violence every day. Observing tremendous improvement in the patients, she trained a team of change agents called "Yuva Sathis" who made village-level support groups of people suffering from mental illness.

These support groups met every 15 days to discuss each other's feelings and became very popular expanding from 3 support groups in 1 block to 8 support groups active in 3 different blocks with a membership of more than 200 individuals. It was not only the beneficiaries who felt heard but even the families and community at large benefitted from the 100+ village-level mental health awareness sessions conducted by "Yuva Sathis" and became accepting of the mental health condition.

> Receiving huge motivation from the community, the model has been successfully adopted in 50 villages of Jharkhand benefitting 500+ individuals with mental illnesses.

Sumitra's work has drawn her attention to the sudden increase in cases of suicide which she attributes to the spike in cases of domestic violence during COVID-19. With an interest in working on suicide prevention, Sumitra seeks training support to design community-led interventions for suicide prevention.

To help her in the journey of making India mental health friendly, write to us at:

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Witch Hunting*: A deliberate harassment that is usually done with a particular group of people because of their opinions and actions and not because they did something wrong