



Dissemination Meeting Report

THE MANTHAN STUDY

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Transgender Persons in Delhi NCR using a Peer Support Model

9 December 2025



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Background



Transgender persons in India face a high burden of mental and physical health concerns, along with limited economic opportunities¹. Many traditional livelihoods available to transgender communities are becoming less viable², further increasing insecurity and stress. Research consistently shows high levels of mental health distress among transgender persons. Studies report that nearly half of transgender participants experience moderate to severe depression or other psychiatric conditions, and they are at a much higher risk of substance use, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts compared to the general population^{3,4}.

In India, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019⁵ marked an important step towards recognising transgender rights. However, gaps remain in access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and community-based mental health services.

The Manthan project, implemented by The George Institute for Global Health India, was designed to address some of these gaps. The project tested the feasibility and acceptability of a peer-support-based mental health intervention for transgender persons.

Through structured group sessions and online engagement, Manthan aimed to improve psychological wellbeing, increase mental health awareness, and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The Manthan project was led by Dr. Y. K. Sandhya, Programme Lead for Mental Health at The George Institute for Global Health, India. Dr. Sandhya highlighted that the findings “underline the importance of community-led approaches,” showing that peer-support models rooted in lived experience can make a measurable difference to mental health outcomes for transgender persons, building trust and resilience while addressing stigma and isolation.

To share key learnings from the project and encourage dialogue on community-led mental health approaches, a dissemination event was organised on 9 December 2025 at the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi. The event brought together transgender and gender-diverse community members, peer leaders, researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and civil society representatives.

At the findings, the Manthan intervention was presented, and discussions were held on how peer-support models can be strengthened and integrated within existing systems. The programme included community reflections, a keynote address, and two panel discussions, highlighting personal journeys and system-level perspectives.

1 Shivakumar ST, Yadiyurshetty MM. 2014. Markers of well-being among the hijras: the male to female transsexuals. In: Cooper S, Ratele K, editors. *Psychology Serving Humanity. Proceedings of the 30th International Congress of Psychology*. Vol 1. p 218–232

2 Kalra G. 2012. Hijras: The unique transgender culture of India. *Int J Cult Ment Health*. 5(2). p 121–6

3 Virupaksha HG, Muralidhar D, Ramakrishna J. Suicide and suicidal behavior among transgender persons. *Indian J Psychol Med*. 2016.

4 Halli SS, et al. Suicidality among gender minorities in Karnataka, South India. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2021.

5 <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/13091/1/a2019-40.pdf>

Panel 1:

Community Reflections from the Manthan Programme

The first panel featured transgender participants and peer leaders who shared their experiences of being part of Manthan. These were not formal testimonies, but honest reflections rooted in everyday life—covering struggle, growth, vulnerability, and hope. The panel was moderated by Satvik Sharma who is a co-founder and director of Misfyt Trans Youth Foundation.

1. Peer support

A strong theme throughout the discussion was the value of peer support. Panelists shared that being among others with similar life experiences made it easier to speak openly and without fear of judgement. Peer leaders reflected on how trust developed gradually, creating space for difficult emotions and personal stories to be shared. At the same time, they acknowledged the emotional responsibility of supporting others while managing their own experiences, was at times draining, highlighting the need for care and support for peer leaders themselves.

2. Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Participants spoke openly about stress, anxiety, anger, overthinking, and emotional ups and downs. These were often linked to family relationships, workplace experiences, financial pressures, and access to gender-affirming care. Many shared that the Manthan sessions helped them better

understand their emotions and introduced simple, practical coping strategies—such as pausing before reacting, expressing feelings safely, finding coping mechanisms, such as listening to music, prayer, or engaging in creative activities.

3. Safe spaces

The importance of safe spaces emerged strongly. Online sessions allowed participants to join despite challenges related to travel, work, or safety. However, many emphasised that in-person sessions enabled deeper connection and emotional bonding. Sitting together, listening, and sharing space was described as especially meaningful and healing.

4. Looking ahead

Several speakers described Manthan as more than a programme—it felt like a family and a space of belonging. Participants expressed a strong desire for the sessions to continue and for more such spaces to exist. Many shared that they had started supporting others in their own lives using what they learned through Manthan, showing how care and learning extended beyond the programme. Overall, the panel highlighted that when mental health support is rooted in community, trust, and lived experience, it becomes more meaningful and effective.



Keynote Address

In his keynote address, Dr. Giriraj, Senior Deputy Director, Transgender Division at the National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, highlighted the continuing social, economic, and mental health challenges faced by transgender persons. He emphasised that beyond financial support, transgender persons seek dignity, recognition, and acceptance from families, communities, and institutions.

He outlined key government initiatives, including the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, transgender identity cards, Ayushman Bharat TG Plus healthcare coverage, Garima Greh shelter homes, and free counselling services. While acknowledging the importance of these measures, he noted that their impact depends on awareness, accessibility, and effective implementation.

Dr. Giriraj stressed the need to sensitise healthcare providers and service systems to reduce discrimination and improve access to care. He concluded by calling for coordinated, cross-sector efforts to ensure transgender persons can live with dignity, safety, and equal opportunities.



Dr. Giriraj

Senior Deputy Director, Transgender Division at the National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Panel 2:

Policy Pathways and System-Level Support for Mental Wellbeing of transgender persons

The second panel brought together experts from research, clinical practice, public health and media to discuss how policy and systems can strengthen mental health support for transgender persons, drawing on evidence from the Manthan project. Prof. Dr. Pallab Maulik, Director of Research at The George Institute, emphasised that stigma—both social and structural—remains a major barrier to care. He noted that inclusive mental health environments require systemic change, where transgender persons are recognised as part of the broader community rather than treated as separate or marginal. He highlighted the shared responsibility of professionals and peers in creating safe and empathetic spaces for care.

Dr. Apoorva Sharma, from the Indian Council of Medical Research, spoke about how the evidence from Manthan can contribute to policy-relevant understanding of transgender mental health. She acknowledged that the project went beyond

traditional research by linking data with lived experience. She also enumerated upon some of the projects being undertaken by ICMR that highlighted gaps in legal identity documentation and insurance coverage among transgender persons, which directly affect access to healthcare, and stressed the importance of actionable evidence for inclusive policy design.

Prof. Dr. Om Prakash, Deputy Medical Superintendent and Professor of Psychiatry at the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), highlighted the role of family and social networks in promoting emotional wellbeing. He noted that mental health challenges affect not only individuals but their families as well, and that care models should reflect real-life contexts by encouraging family involvement where possible. He reaffirmed institutional openness to supporting community-driven initiatives like Manthan.

Ms Rekha Dixit emphasised that media plays

a critical role in shaping public perceptions of transgender persons, and biased or sensationalised portrayals can reinforce stigma and exclusion. While mainstream journalism has shown some improvement over time, transgender identities are still often highlighted unnecessarily, especially in negative contexts. She raised particular concern about cinema and social media, where stereotypical and limited representations remain common. Ms Dixit stressed that responsible, nuanced storytelling and regular sensitisation of journalists and content creators are essential for promoting dignity, mental well-being, and social inclusion of transgender communities. She urged the trans community to take to social media and use it as a tool to create greater awareness among people about their realities.

Across the panel, speakers emphasised the need for sensitisation and capacity building among healthcare providers, administrators, and other stakeholders. They highlighted that evidence-based, community-led models such as Manthan, offer valuable blueprints for scalable and inclusive mental health interventions.



Conclusion

The dissemination event reaffirmed that meaningful mental health support for transgender persons must be rooted in lived experience, trust, and community connection, while being backed by responsive systems and policies. Reflections from Manthan participants clearly demonstrated how peer-led spaces can strengthen self-understanding, confidence, and emotional wellbeing when people feel safe, respected, and heard.

Discussions across the keynote and panel sessions highlighted that while important policy frameworks and services exist, gaps in awareness, access, and implementation continue to affect mental health outcomes. Sensitisation of healthcare providers and other key stakeholders, involvement of families, and better use of existing national mechanisms emerged as key priorities. Overall, the event underscored the value of community-led, peer-support-based interventions like Manthan—not only as time-bound

programmes, but as spaces of belonging, care, and collective healing as reflected in improved mental health outcomes for the study participants. Sustained investment, cross-sector collaboration, and continued engagement with transgender communities will be essential to ensure mental health support that is inclusive, accessible, and grounded in real needs.

The dissemination event received considerable media attention that can be accessed from the links mentioned below



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12th December 2025

www.health.medicaldialogues.in/health/new-study-shows-peer-support-improves-mental-well-being-of-transgender-persons-160446



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11th December 2025

www.inshorts.com/en/news/peer-support-boosts-mental-health-in-transgender--1765519453117



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www.health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/peer-support-model-boosts-mental-health-of-transgender-persons-icmr/125890105



Date of publication

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www.miragenews.com/peer-support-boosts-transgender-mental-health-1587077/



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www.caasindia.in/transgender-mental-health-manthan-project-icmr-study/



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