

## Report on the 10th World Congress on Women's Mental Health 5-8 March 2025 - Bangalore, India

*Compiled by Chethana Kishore, Pavitra Jayaram, Ashlesha Bagadia and Prabha Chandra (Co Hosts - NIMHANS and PARC, Bangalore, India)*

*It was our pleasure and privilege to host the 10th World Congress of Women's Mental Health, of the International Association for Women's Mental Health (IAWMH). The conference was co-hosted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) and The PARC from the 5<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2025 in Bengaluru, India.*

This landmark event had a confluence of around 650 mental health professionals and advocates, art therapists, researchers, policymakers, and individuals with lived experience from across the globe, with participation from over 38 countries. The central theme of the Congress was 'Inclusion and Integration Across the Life Span', reflecting a commitment to examining women's mental health in a holistic, inclusive manner across developmental stages, identities, and life circumstances.

The scientific program, chaired by Dr Judith Usall (President-Elect, IAWMH), featured a diverse array of formats, including 14 plenary lectures—comprising the presidential panel and presidential address—six panel discussions, 68 symposia, nine conference workshops, 13 pre-conference workshops, and competitive categories with 121 oral and 158 ePoster sessions.

The Congress commenced with a vibrant opening ceremony that set the tone for the proceedings through a series



of talks and panel discussions focusing on the history of psychiatry in India, current policies and mental health systems, strategic directions in women's mental health, and the powerful narratives of women with lived experience. Eminent speakers for this session included Dr Lade Smith, Prof Pratima Murthy, and Ms Neha Kirpal.

A total of 13 high-impact plenary sessions, including a Presidential Address and two virtual keynote talks, were the draw of the scientific content of the Congress. These plenaries featured leading voices in global mental health.

Prof Norman Sartorius discussed the key priorities for mental health in 2025 setting a visionary tone for the congress. Prof Gihan ElNahas provided insights on navigating mental health in the Arab states while Dr Hela Ouennich shared the best practices in perinatal mental health specific to the MENA region. Prof Vidita Vaidya gave us a glimpse as to how early adversity has a link with accelerated ageing. In the domain of clinical care Prof Lakshmi Yatham discussed the nuances of the management of bipolar disorders in women, Dr Lakshmi Vijayakumar highlighted the unanswered questions about suicide in women and girls, and Dr Judith Usall explored the challenges and complexities surrounding research in women and psychosis. Two engaging virtual talks, by Dr Gina Rippon examined the concept of gendered brain and by Prof Iris Sommer on gender and estrogens with regards to pharmacotherapy added a different facet to the neurobiology segment at the congress. Dr Christina

Hoven shed light on the role assignment to infant girls to women's mental health. Dr Vindhya Undurti gave a talk on caregiving and mismatch of gender role expectations- women's mental health at the cusp of societal change.

#### **Archives and online access to the talks**

Selected abstracts from the congress will be published as a supplement in the Archives of Women's Mental Health.

For those of you who missed the Congress, videos of select talks will also be made available soon. We thank Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies for supporting the recording and editing of this important repository.



The Presidents Panel titled “Women's Mental Health – Vision 2025”, comprised distinguished panelists such as Prof. Gihan ElNahas, Prof. Florence Thibaut, Prof. Savita Malhotra, Dr. Aastha Tomar, Prof. Uriel Halbriech, Prof. Helen Herrmann, and Prof. Anita Riecher-Rössler.



The Presidential address by the IAWMH Outgoing president, Prof Prabha Chandra focused on the various aspects that would be essential towards a women-friendly mental health care system.

**The Professor Donna Stewart Award** was initiated at the conference to honour the contributions of Prof. Stewart for women's mental health. It was conferred on Prof. Jane Fisher in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the field of women's mental health. She also headlined the plenary on consideration of gender is essential for prevention, practice and policy in women's mental health.





The Congress also featured a series of **pre-conference workshops** designed to provide hands-on learning and skill-building opportunities for early-career professionals and seasoned practitioners alike.

Furthermore, **thematic panel discussions and symposia** covered a diverse range of themes comprising reproductive perinatal maternal mental health, trauma, conflict and related conditions, mental health conditions and management, addiction, psychosocial determinants, suicide, publishing, AI in mental health etc to name a few.

#### **For early career professionals**



The opportunities designed for early career professionals (ECP) was a big draw at the Congress. We were able to offer financial support to deserving ECPs –11 Full bursaries covering complete registration costs and 20 Partial bursaries in attending the congress. The Bursary Program was supported by India Mental Health Alliance and some plenary speakers.

Early career professionals also were given an opportunity to learn and interact with esteemed faculty: Dr Anita Riecher-Roessler, Dr Judith Usall Rodié, Dr Lade Smith, Dr Arun Ravindran, Dr Helen Sharp, Dr Antje Horsch, Dr Helen Herrman, Dr Sathya Rao, Dr Thara R, Dr Maria Muzik, Dr Florence Thibaut, Dr Astha Tomar, Dr Claudia Klier, Dr Pratima Murthy, Dr Jane Fisher, Dr Veerle Bergink, Dr Jodi Pawluski and Dr Gihan El Nahas, at the **Breakfast with Mentors** program that was organised on all days on the Congress.

The Dr. Ramachandra N. Moorthy Foundation also generously provided 50 scholarships for NIMHANS students, ensuring greater participation and exposure for young professionals. This support enabled aspiring mental health professionals to attend the Congress and engage in valuable learning experiences.

The conference also gave away 6 Best Oral and 6 best ePoster awards in the competitive categories which carried a gift Voucher and certificate of merit.

Centering voices of experts by experience as well as users and caregivers in the discourse and practice of women's mental health was a major focus at the IAWMH25. The India Mental Health Alliance highlighted lived experience through various segments across the conference including a powerful inaugural plenary by Ms. Neha Kirpal and a symposium. During the conference experts by experience shared stories and played an active role in scientific discourse at the conference to promote a culture of inclusivity, collaboration and respect in mental health care. The Alliance also supported bursaries for early career professionals.

### The Conference Fringe

Designed to complement the powerful discussions happening at the heart of the conference, the conference fringe included a specially curated book stall by Champaca a women-led local book store, a live and growing art installation that invited delegates to participate and share their expressions on canvas curated by Bangalore based non-profit Foundation for Art and Health India, traditional Indian board games, and a Quiet Room for delegates to get away from the bustle of the conference designed by the conference co-hosts, The PARC.



We also took Congress to the people of Bangalore with a book panel discussion on intergenerational trauma and mental health of women in the continued context of the Partition of India, a public talks by Dr Norman Sartorius at the Bangalore International Centre on caregivers and mental and Dr Jodi Pawluski at Science Gallery, Bangalore on the Mommy Brain.



### **Gala Dinner by El Camino Health**

And there were fun and games too! All delegates were invited to shake a leg at the Gala Dinner, generously supported by our partners El Camino Health, California, USA. We thank the team from El Camino Health- Dr. Sandoval Dr. Katherine Taylor and Dr. Nirmaljit Dharmi for their generosity and collaboration.



### **International Women's Day Celebration with a special floral decoration – March 8<sup>th</sup> - the last day of the congress**



**We come away from the Congress with new energy and ideas for women's mental health and look forward to more learning in Barcelona!**