

Addressing social and mental health

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Working closely and harmoniously does not require magic but simpler commitments to trust and respect each other and accept alternate views. They are not hard to earn but sincerity.

Are we unified today? Do we work together towards our common good? Have all of us sat together and said in heart, 'It's time that we stopped dividing amongst ourselves and started to truly work together, for the good of all of us'.

Competitive environment is important to build a community, but competitive self-interest is destructive. When we compete, let's be fair and not bring in self-interest motives while working for common good.

We failed in our mission for democracy in Bhutan and repatriation because we remained divided. Let's learn lessons from our history. We have the opportunity to write a positive history and teach our younger generation that unity truly is the best policy.

We lost many of our family members to the hands of Bhutanese regime and poverty of refugee life. Over two decades of refugee life was like fuel to fire in our already traumatised minds. Even after settlement and availability of all amenities, we have not completely recovered our mental health. Suicides stories we have read post settlement are manifestation of the deep-rooted disturbances in our mental health.

Mental health issue is ever rising and is becoming an alarming issue.

1. Social isolation

Social, psychological and medical research have now demonstrated conclusively that there is a direct correlation between the degree to which a person feels connected to others and their physical and mental health. Post settlement, it necessitated working-age members of the family to find employment, leaving behind the aged-parents and people with disabilities at home alone. They remain unengaged, disconnected and isolated. Social activities and frequent interactions among community members have decreased to a great degree. Such is kind of a traumatic situation for senior community members – putting

stress on their mental health and depression. It has been medically proven that social isolation would increase the likelihood of chronic illness such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and more frequent bouts of sickness, such as colds or flu, and longer recovery times.

Sudden changes in lifestyle and social life, as we travelled from Nepal to Australia, have also given cultural shock to us, more specifically to our older generation.

The association shall invest time to find solution to control social isolation and cultural shock through various programs that provides opportunities for community members for frequent gathering, interactions and engage in social activities. It shall develop network with the psychologists and mental health practitioners to provide adequate and appropriate services to the members of the community on mental health.

2. Generation gap and linguistic barriers

We have observed social, political, economic or technological changes are quicker than before and for old generation it is very hard to learn and understand the new things. Whereas the younger generation is quicker to understand and adopt with the changes. This put old generation in disadvantaged position. In our context linguistic and cultural changes also added woe.

The newer generation is marching well on new fronts while our senior members of the community taking minor steps far behind. Cultural and linguistic barriers were the major hurdles causing generation gap in our community.

We attach great importance to our family lives and as a general rule of relationships among family members is highly valued, strong, and enduring. Children feel that they can never fully repay their parents for either the “gift of life” or the countless sacrifices they have made to raise them to adulthood. As with bonds between parents and children, relationships among siblings are of tremendous moral and emotional significance and are capable of withstanding a good deal of conflict. This strong bond and peace-driven values must be passed on to the newer generation and should remain alive and exemplary to wider Australian communities.

The association shall formulate programs to connect the generation – linguistically, culturally and technologically. Working to reduce the strain of generation gap will boost social harmony, family affection, social break-down and family violence. The association shall work to ensure both young and older generation work tandem to share their knowledge and experiences to each other which would benefit to them and understand sentiments.

3. Ethnic & Linguistic diversity

We are diverse within us. The beauty of our community is the diversity in culture, language, dialects, festivals and cultural attires. The unity in diversity is our strength and can form a good example for wider Australian community.

These diversities must be preserved. There are not many senior members in the community who speaks dialects like Gurung, Tamang, Ghaley, Kirat, Majhi, Newar, Limbu, etc The association shall work towards preserving these dialects and providing opportunities for young generation to learn them. Preservation and continuity of so many dialects and Nepali language is the most important task we must carry on for maintaining our identity.

4. Trauma from torture in Bhutan and refugee lives

Many of our community members have been tortured at the hands of the Bhutanese regime – many killed, others raped. Family members of these community members have come a long way under this serious mental condition. It shall be hard for us to explain in words how these members could feel the pain as they describe horror they have experienced.

Life in refugee camp further deteriorated our mental health. We hardly have got opportunities to overcome this trauma and build our healthy souls. Post settlement, mental health has become the serious killer. The family separation, disjoint family, reversed roles in the family, lack of community interactions, social gathering and cultural shocks all added fuel to the already traumatised mental status of the Bhutanese community members.

It's time we invest time in making ourselves mentally healthy and fit, provide ourselves space for peace and prosperity and live in harmonious and unified community. The association shall reach out to the community intellectuals and active volunteers to chart out plans for more social interactions and gathering that will address the problems of social isolations and cultural shocks.

The association, in conjunction with the member-organisations, shall encourage the joint family living, care for elderly members of the community and provide support for people with disabilities. The association shall make every effort to find support and organise programs to solace the mental health of the torture victims who have been living with trauma for such a long time. The association shall coordinate with the Bhutanese and other community organisations

who provide these services to run them more effectively and affectionately.

5. *Mental health issue*

The community members face a lot of mental health issue arising from the disjoint family structure, reversed family role, longing for the place we were born and the torturous life in the refugee camps for more than two decades. The isolation and cultural shock are other factors causing mental health problem in the community. The participants at the discussion forum also raise the issue of caste based discrimination that could have contributed partly to the mental problem in the community.

The association shall join with other expert and professional bodies dealing with mental health problems and invite them to the Bhutanese community to address the problem we have been facing. Recognising the programs run in South Australian in collaboration with STTARS, similar programs could be replicated in other states as well.