

Samarth Annual Report

2022- 2023

List of Members: 2022-2023

Governing Body

Dr. Saradha Suresh	Honorary President, Former Director, Institute of Child Health (ICH), Chennai
Dr. Rani Mohanraj	Secretary, Psychologist, Samarth, Chennai
Dr. Shuba Kumar	Treasurer, Social Scientist, Samarth, Chennai
Dr. R. Thara	Chairperson- Research, Schizophrenia Research Foundation, (SCARF), Chennai
Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar	Psychiatrist, Founder Member Sneha, Chennai
Dr. Krishnakumar	Rtd. Principal, Elite School of Optometry, Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai
Dr. Suresh Kumar	Consultant Psychiatrist, Chennai

Members

Ms. K.V. Sripriya	Nutritionist, Research Coordinator, Samarth, Chennai
Ms. AarthiKandasamy	Psychologist, ISHA Foundation, Coimbatore
Ms. Basilea Watson	Technical Assistant (Research), National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), Chennai
Dr. B.R Desikachari	Senior Public Health Consultant, Chennai
Dr. Keerthi Prabhu	Consultant Psychologist, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai
Ms. C.D. Nandini	Nutritionist, Chennai
Ms. Premalatha	Data Manager, Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF), Chennai
Ms. Sylvia Jayakumar	Biostatistician, Proprietor, Statshub, Chennai
Mr. Veerapandian	Assistant Professor, The Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM), Chennai

Advisory Body

Dr. Lisa Manhart	Associate Prof. Epidemiology, Adjunct Associate Prof. Global Health, University of Washington, Center for AIDS & STD, Seattle, USA
Dr. Usha Ramakrishnan	Associate Professor, Hubert Department of Global Health, Emory University – USA

Scientific Review Committee Members

Dr. R. Thara	Chairperson - Research, Schizophrenia Research Foundation, (SCARF), Chennai
Dr. Shaheed Jawahar	Former Scientist "G" National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), Chennai
Dr. L. Jeyaseelan	Prof. of Biostatistics, Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine and Health (MBRU), Dubai

Accounts Officer Mr. J.S Dinesh, B.S Associates, Chennai

Auditors Parameswaran & Associates Chartered Accountants.

Bankers Canara Bank, St. Mary's Road, Chennai

State Bank of India – FCRA account

SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

Greetings from Samarth!

During 2022–23, we continued several ongoing projects and initiated new ones. This year marked the beginning of the Randomized Control Trial (RCT) phase of the 'Cleft Lip and Palate (CLP) project. We held a series of discussions and meetings with Dr. Badri Thiruvenkatachari to share insights from the pilot interviews. The pilot study yielded valuable learnings about parents' understanding of CLP and their key concerns. These findings will support Dr. Badri and his team in developing effective communication materials and discussion points when recruiting children with CLP for the RCT. We are also in the process of preparing a manuscript based on these findings for publication.

Drs. Shuba Kumar and Rani Mohanraj undertook extensive field visits across several districts in Tamil Nadu as part of our collaborative project with SAATHI on the impact of COVID-19 on the incidence of tuberculosis (TB) in Tamil Nadu. The analysis of data from six districts and multiple stakeholder categories across both public and private health systems was a significant undertaking, given the large volume of information collected. We analyzed data from 132 interviews with healthcare providers, 20 interviews with programme managers, and 12 focus group discussions. The findings revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic substantially disrupted TB-related services, including community-level detection, notification, testing, and diagnosis. These insights are critical and can help address existing gaps in India's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of eradicating TB by 2030. We are proud to have contributed to this important study.

Our collaborative project with Dr. Gregory Armstrong on the validation of scales related to attitudes toward suicide, suicide literacy, and suicide-related stigma has been successfully completed. The cultural validation demonstrated good reliability and validity, supporting their applicability in the Tamil Nadu context. We are currently preparing a manuscript detailing the cultural validation process for journal submission.

We are also pleased to report that we received both Ethics Committee and Health Ministry Screening Committee (HMSC) approvals for our collaborative project with the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, titled "Potential for Brown Rice in Improving Health Among Persons Diagnosed with Diabetes." This mixed-methods study includes quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with individuals living with diabetes, and data collection is currently underway. In addition, we continued to conduct our virtual training workshops on social science research methods and analysis. We are proud to share that we successfully held training programs during this period. Despite being conducted online, participants showed great enthusiasm and eagerness to learn.

As we look back on 2022–23, I am delighted to share these achievements and deeply grateful for the dedication of our team and collaborators. We look forward to continuing meaningful work that brings both professional fulfillment and social impact.

ABOUT SAMARTH

We are a group of epidemiologists, social scientists, psychologists and biostatisticians who share a common vision in advocating for health research. We have extensive research experience in using both qualitative and quantitative methods in several national and international multi-centric health projects. These have ranged from projects on domestic violence, adolescent mental health, community mental health to, care and support programmes for HIV positive persons.

Samarth was set up in January 2007 and is registered as a society under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975 on 24th May 2007 and is also permitted to receive foreign funding on account of having obtained FCRA (Foreign Contributions Regulation Act) approval. Members of Samarth have been involved in conducting various research projects and social science training programmes.

OUR OBJECTIVES

- Conducting research to inform policy
- Building capacity in epidemiology, social science and biostatistics
- Building partnerships with government and private sectors in health promotion

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Samarth is committed to creating healthier lives of communities through credible research and sustainable interventions

Research and Training Activities

ONGOING RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. A care and support model for families of children with CLP: A grounded theory approach (2022 – 2027)

This project was carried out by Dr. Badri Thiruvenkatachari who is the PI based at Balaji Dental College and Hospital, (Constituent College of Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research) Chennai. Drs. Shuba Kumar and Rani Mohanraj were the Qualitative Consultants on this study. As the aim was to develop a framework describing parental needs for caring for a child with CLP, the Grounded Theory approach was used. Following coding and analysis of the data we identified 5 core categories that best explained the phenomenon of parental needs. These were; learning about CLP—when and how, reactions and attributions to CLP, learning about and expectations from treatment, caring for a child with CLP and support systems. These findings were written up and have been submitted to the Cleft Palate Craniofacial Journal for favour of publication. The decision is awaited.

In continuation, we will also be doing interviews with parents of children with newly diagnosed CLP (children aged < or = 1 month) as part of a larger RCT that will test the effectiveness of NAM (Nasoalveolur molding) in improving child surgical outcomes. Participating centres are from across different regions in India, namely, Punjab, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. We have identified social scientists who are fluent in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada to assist with the interviews. As an eligible child is recruited for the RCT from each of these centres, their consent will be obtained for participating in an interview. We will purposively select parents from both the intervention and control arm to explore their perceptions on the challenges of caring for a child with CLP, how they cope, treatment challenges and costs and later on their perceptions on the NAM procedure, any perceived benefits/ barriers, difficulties in complying with treatment procedures etc. A total of 40-45 interviews with parents are planned and this data collection process is underway.

2. Effect of COVID-19 on the Incidence of TB in Tamil Nadu in Collaboration with SAATHI (Solidarity and Action Against HIV Infection in India)(1st May 2022 to 30 Sept 2022)

SAATHI implemented an operational research study titled, "Study on Effect of COVID-19 on the Incidence of Tuberculosis in Tamil Nadu" under the Operational Research Programme-Tamil Nadu Health System Reform Programme (ORP-TNHSRP) with IIT-Madras as a nodal agency for implementation. This OR project involved secondary data from across the state while the primary data collection was undertaken in six districts, namely, Kancheepuram, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, Villupuram, Madurai and Dharmpuri. Samarth team were engaged as the Qualitative Research Consultants, assisted with data collection, review of interview transcripts and analysis of data. Using qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews, a range of different cadres of health care providers from the primary, secondary and tertiary level government medical hospitals were interviewed in each of the selected districts as also a sample of patients with TB and presumptive TB. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, translated into English and loaded into NVIVO for analysis. In addition to detailed district level reports a final consolidated report was compiled and submitted to SAATHI. In summary, patients were mostly satisfied with govt care services, reported no shortfalls in receiving drugs, their health was monitored over phone and during home visits. Some difficulties in accessing govt hospitals owing to lack of public transport were reported. The sum of Rs. 500 received via DBT was reported by all, although a few reported not receiving it every month, nutritional support provided by some NGOs but on very rare occasions. Some recommendations made were regarding improving awareness about TB & need for early treatment, organizing more TB screening camps, improving access to health facilities, providing tests results for TB on the same day as when tested and payment of financial support may be done based on patient need.

3. The potential of brown rice for improving health: Investigating the bio-accessibility of its key constituents, and barriers and drivers to consumption

This was a collaborative study between three centers, namely the University of Sheffield, the Department of Diabetes Food Technology, a Unit of Department of Foods Nutrition and Dietetics Research, MDRF and Samarth. The objectives were to determine rice type preferences, perceptions, barriers and drivers to consumption among adults with type 2 diabetes living in Chennai, India. The process of obtaining ethical approvals and HMSC clearances were completed. This mixed method study involved a quantitative survey and a qualitative semi-structured interviews to understand rice cooking and eating practices as well as individual's willingness to adopt brown rice. The data collection was carried out at the MDRF hospital and entails a sample of 213 persons with diabetes for the quantitative survey and 10 for the qualitative interviews. The data collection is ongoing.

4. Determining the effects of protective suicide content in the print media in India

Continuing our work with suicides and media, Samarth in collaboration with Dr. Gregory Armstrong of the University of Melbourne and Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar, Founder- Sneha, will be involved in a multiple group randomised controlled trial (RCT) to assess the protective effects on youth aged between 18-29 years, of exposure to educative suicide content in the print media in India on beliefs about refraining from suicide as well as a range of important knowledge, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. The study comprises a three-group RCT. One group will be the control group and the other two groups will receive variants of the experimental manipulation, with measurement at immediate pre/post exposure and two-week follow-up. Our primary hypothesis concerns a comparison between the control group and the first experimental group and our secondary hypothesis concerns a comparison between the two experimental groups. The experiment will be complemented by qualitative interviews with a sub-group of participants in experimental groups. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the SCARF-IEC and approval was also obtained from HMSC. Participants will be recruited online and preparations are underway to finalise the study instruments and qualitative guides, identify and train two research assistants and develop the intervention educative materials on suicide. Data collection is expected to commence in a couple of months.

COMPLETED RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Channels and Actors Project: How do young people in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) connect with mental health science? (1st Sept 2021-February 2022; 1st February 2022- 31st May 2022)

The Schizophrenia Research Foundation partnered with CitiesRise (a global platform committed to transforming the state of mental health policy and practice in cities and beyond to meet the mental health needs of populations across the world) to undertake a multi country research study that looked at youth mental health and well-being. In addition to the Chennai site from India, other participating countries were Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa. Funded by the Wellcome Trust, Dr. R. Thara (SCARF) and Dr. Suresh Kumar (consultant psychiatrist) were the principal investigators for the India site. Samarth was sub-contracted by SCARF to oversee the conduct and analysis of the qualitative component which included; training and mentoring of the field teams across the 4 countries to carry out interviews; developing the study guides and analysis of the India site data (Period- Sept 2021 – Feb 2022). A second component which involved undertaking cross country comparisons of the qualitative data and helping develop a generic model along the lines of the Consumer Decision Journey (CDJ-a model originally developed by a management consulting company which reflects the customer buying process) was directly sub-contracted by CitiesRise to Samarth (Feb. 2022- May 2022).

Key findings were that, understanding of mental health was largely poor; depression, stress, feeling anxious and fearful were commonly reported, the triggers for which usually were, romantic break-ups, family conflicts, academic pressures, societal and family expectations;

coping strategies commonly used ranged from trying to self-manage their distress by listening to music, engaging in games to seeking support from, family and friends; seeking mental health related information was particularly seen among those who had a problem for which they began to look for solutions; the decision to seek mental health care was long and arduous with individuals having to first overcome both intrinsic (stigma, guilt, fear) and extrinsic (cost of care, availability and accessibility issues) barriers. The final report was approved and paper preparations are underway.

PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE

1. Innovative mHealth Intervention providing Sustained Anticipatory Guidance (Zero Cavity): Design, Validation, User Perception, & Effectiveness (Funded by NIH) (Jan 2024- 2028)

This is an NIH funded study with Dr. Muthu, Prof and head of the Department of Paediatric Dentistry, SRMCI as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Rani Mohanraj and Dr. Shuba are the qualitative research consultants. The study aims to design, develop and validate a mobile app (Zero Cavity) for prevention of Early Childhood Caries (ECC) in children less than 3 years of age. Using the model of determinants of child oral health and the theory of behaviour change the qualitative component of the study will explore age-appropriate information regarding four domains of the sustained anticipatory guidance (SAG).

2. Addressing intergenerational conflicts to reduce suicidal ideation and behaviour among young people in urban Chennai (Integrity Study)

This study will be carried out by the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF) with Dr. R Padmavathi as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Shuba Kumar and Dr. Rani Mohanraj are the qualitative consultants. The study will seek to explore the influence of intergenerational conflict on suicidal behaviour among young people in Chennai and to develop a framework that best describes the phenomena

3. Mental health and well-being of young people across different developmental stages and ecological settings using theatre and arts-based interventions (MARCH Study)

This study will be conducted by the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF) with Dr. R Thara as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Shuba Kumar and Dr. Rani Mohanraj are the qualitative consultants. The study aims to explore (i) youth mental health problems; major areas of concern; use of arts and theatre-based intervention to deliver theme areas on mental health; feasibility of establishing safe space in colleges and communities

SOCIAL SCIENCE TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Social Science training Programmes organized by Samarth for which Samarth faculty have been resource persons during the period 2022 – 2023 are listed below:

1. Foundation Course on Qualitative Research Methods 16th – 19th May 2022, SRMC, Porur, Chennai, TN
2. Analysis of Qualitative Data - Thematic Analysis 6th June to 7th June 2022 & 13th June to 14th June 2022, SRMC, Porur, Chennai, TN
3. Online workshop on Qualitative Research Methods, 21st to 24 th November 2022, Conducted by Samarth, Chennai & Clinical Epidemiology Unit (CEU), Vellore)

4. Online workshop on Analysis of Qualitative Data - Thematic Analysis Approach 28th - 29th November 2022 &5th - 6th December 2022, Conducted by Samarth, Chennai & Clinical Epidemiology Unit (CEU), Vellore)

5. Workshop on Advanced Qualitative Research Methods, 19th –23rd December 2022, Madras School of Social work, Chennai

PUBLICATIONS

Mohanraj R, Kumar S, Agarwal M, Dhingra B, Suresh S (2022) Exploring the challenges in the management of childhood pneumonia-qualitative findings from health care providers from two high prevalence states in India. PLOS Glob Public Health 2(8): e0000632. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000632>

Rajiv Raman, Shuba Kumar Patient-centered perspectives in diabetic retinopathy care: phenomenology and practice -Commentary. Evid Based Nurs Month 2023

Shankar V, Ramkumar V, Kumar S. Understanding the implementation of telepractice in speech and language services using a mixed-methods approach. Wellcome Open Res. 2022 May 26;7:46. doi: 10.12688/wellcomeopenres.17622.2. PMID: 36158869; PMCID: PMC9490278.

Joy M, Mani T, Jeyaseelan L, Babu M, S M, Kumar S, Mohanraj R, Viswanathan S, Bangdiwala SI. Reduction in prevalence of spousal physical violence against women in India: evidence from three national surveys. Int J Inj Contr Saf Promot. 2023 Sep;30 (3):352-361. doi: 10.1080/17457300.2023.2188468.

Profile of FOUNDER MEMBERS

L. Jeyaseelan has a doctorate in Biostatistics. He served as Professor at Department of Biostatistics at Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore and following retirement has taken up the position of Prof. of Biostatistics at the Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine and Health (MBRU) in Dubai. He was trained in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of Newcastle, Australia under the INCLEN (International Clinical Epidemiology Network). He had established the Biostatistics Research and Training Centre (BRTC) and a Clinical Data Management Centre (CDMC) at CMC, Vellore for high quality data analyses and management.

Shuba Kumar is a Social Scientist and holds a doctorate in Medical and Social Psychiatry from the Tamil Nady Dr. MGR Medical University, Chennai. She received her training in Social Science and Epidemiology from the University of Newcastle, Australia under the INCLEN (International Clinical Epidemiology Network) programme. She has been a lead investigator on research projects on women's reproductive health, domestic violence, mental health and HIV care and support programmes. She is sitting member of ethical committees in institutions such as, the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF), the ICMRCentral Ethics Committee on Human Research (CECHR) and Zifo Genomics Research Institute (ZGRI) Private Limited, Chennai

Rani Mohanraj completed her doctorate in Psychology from the University of Madras and was trained under the Fogarty Fellowship Programme in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of Washington, USA. She has been involved in research studies on mental health concerns, specifically depression in primary care and school mental health. She has also worked with HIV affected children and has consulted on the development of tools for counsellors in HIV care. She is also the sitting member of ethical committee in Voluntary Health Services (VHS), Adyar, Chennai.

Saradha Suresh is the Former Director of the Institute of Child Health (ICH), Chennai. She underwent training in Clinical Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Health Economics at the University of Pennsylvania, USA under the INCLEN programme. She has been the lead researcher on several neonatal and child health projects. She is currently Honorary President of Samarth.

Veerapandian was trained in Psychology from the Presidency College, Chennai and completed M.Phil from University of Madras. He is a visiting faculty in Psychology at various educational institutions. He is Associate Professor at the Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health (BALM), Chennai

Financial Statement