

## DESIRABLE TO BE UNDESIRABLE: IS ROMANTICIZATION A NEW FORM OF MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA?

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### Abstract

Mental health is rapidly dwindling after Covid-19 in reference to depression and anxiety disorders. The stigmatized perspectives of mental illness restrain people with mental illnesses from expressing their sufferings, as they are treated differently from others (violent, terrible and crazy). Recently, with the help of social media, people have spoken up about mental illness, thus it has become a normal phenomenon. This improved normalization, perhaps not for the better, paves the way for a new stigma, romanticization. The romanticization of mental illness becomes alarming when young adults desire to have a mental illness with the perception that it is attractive and surreal. 151 voluntary young adults between the age group of 15-25 from India, completed an online survey about mental health stigma and romanticization. This study's findings suggest that the romanticization of mental illness in social media (57%, N=88) surges mental illness rates and negatively impacts young adults' mental health. The qualitative survey's findings also signify that the evolution of romanticization does not completely eradicate the stigma, as 82% (N=124) of the respondents of this sample agreed that the stigma is still prevalent in their localities. Thus the study concludes that romanticization is a new form of stigma along with the existing stigma which is alarming in affecting the mental health of the young generation, who are the pillars of future India.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Mental Illness, Depression, Anxiety, Covid-19, Romanticization.

### INTRODUCTION - MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is an intrinsic part of human health and important to everyone, everywhere. Mental health is not obviously perceptible like physical health, thus people ignore and fail to observe the decline in mental health in the beginning. Adversely millions of people around the globe suffer in silence and mental illness impacts their daily lives skeptically. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), before 2020, one in five adolescents in the world was battling with mental illness (WHO, 2023). With the effect of Covid-19, an unforeseen decline has occurred in people's mental health, particularly among young adults. Due to curfew and loneliness, depression and stress is triggered massively by 25%. Hence one in eight people in the world live with mental disorders, and anxiety and depressive disorders are high (WHO, 2023) among various disorders like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, substance use disorders, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). People rely on virtual reality during and post-pandemic, and prefer to express themselves on social media. Such reliance on social media has a significant effect on people's physical and mental health. An Individual's emotion is influenced by other people's feelings posted on social media. When positive

posts were lessened, people produced fewer positive posts, and while negative posts were lessened the reverse pattern occurred. Thus, emotional contagion occurs significantly on social media (Kramer et.al., 2014). Several posts talking about mental health have been seen on Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and other social media networks (SMN) almost every day. These posts are sporting everyone on what to do and what not to do, to live a contemporary life without the fear of missing out (FoMO). FoMO is a concept that creates anxiety in people about their inactivity in the social sphere, particularly in digital media (Hetz et.al., 2015). To avoid FoMO and to attain social relatedness, people desire to stay connected in SMN (Gupta & Sharma, 2021) which satisfies their personal and social needs in their community (Altuwairiqi, Jiang, & Ali, 2019). Such reliance on SMN affects the physical and mental (psychological) health of people in multifarious (such as lack of sleep, lower self-esteem and anxiety) (Gupta & Sharma, 2021).

In this study, mental health is defined as, 'mental health is consisting of the physical, psychological and social well-being of an individual that helps to realize one's ability to cope with the stresses of every day, and learn and work well, to contribute to their communities. In addition, mental health is the absence of mental disorders (Karim et.al., 2020; WHO, 2022; Dogra & Cooper, 2016). Further, mental illness is defined as clinically significant changes in an individual's cognition, social and emotional behaviors that are socially unaccepted. It is associated with impairment in everyday activities or sometimes the risk of self-harm (WHO, 2023). The decline in mental health does not affect individuals alone, it also affects the country's economy. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reported the world economy loses costs \$1 trillion each year due to depression and anxiety disorders (NAMI, 2020). Mental illness accounts for 15% of global diseases, yet on average, countries spend less than 2% of their healthcare budgets on mental health (WHO, 2023). WHO forecasted, between 2012 and 2030, India will lose \$1.03 trillion in economic value due to mental health issues. The National Mental Health Survey reports 14% of Indians required active therapeutic interventions (NIMHANS, 2016). Due to personal shame, prejudice, and embarrassment, 80% of people in India do not seek professional psychiatric assistance. Beyond the alarming statistics, India has the highest number of depressed individuals, it is imperative to admit that our society does not adequately treat mental health issues. Due to a lack of knowledge about the topic, the stigma surrounding it, a lack of competent experts, inadequate funding, and a minor share in the national budget, people with mental health illnesses do not receive proper treatment (WHO, 2023).

To promote awareness of the importance of mental health among people, anti-stigma awareness programs are propagated through the media, particularly social media. Paradoxically, the efforts to create awareness about mental health resulted in a surge in mental health problems recently. This surge is happening due to two factors, (i) improved recognition and (ii) over-interpretation (Foulkes & Andrews, 2022). Constant campaigns and awareness programs help us to eradicate the stigma around mental illness. Hence with the improved recognition, people speak up about mental illness and seek assistance to improve their mental health. Over-interpretation goes against the first factor, where mental illness is desired by some young adults who perceived that it has social value. Thus romanticization begins when the individuals aspire to have a mental illness. Over-interpretation is caused by misconception and little knowledge which is disseminated by social media, websites and newspaper articles

through its aesthetical representation. With this digital information, people determine that they are having a sort of mental illness. Medical practitioners report that patients visit doctors with the perceived internet ideas of the disease. People do not rely on medical practitioners for diagnosing their mental illness rather their hypothesized diagnosis leads to misinterpreting mental illness. For instance, with milder symptoms, people nowadays intensify themselves having anxiety (anxious person) and avoid parties and social gatherings (Foulkes & Andrews, 2022). There have been continuous efforts to eliminate the stigma and misunderstandings of mental illness. Initially, media is used to decrease the stigma of mental illness and promote mental health. But on the flip side, rather than eliminating it, the media starts to glamourize it by portraying the characters as extraordinarily desirable, which attracts young adults. Hence, romanticizing mental illness becomes a threat to the mental health of humankind than stigmatizing it. Nonetheless, a plethora of research has been carried out on the stigmatization of mental health, there is still room for the romanticization of mental health research. This study integrates the stigma and romanticism of mental illness which is to be addressed immediately. The introduction intends to provide a brief knowledge of the significance of mental health, and the stereotypes and prejudices associated with the stigmatization of mental illness. Subsequently, it explores the evolution of mental health from stigma to romanticism in which the media plays a significant role. Media harnessing mental illness in a desirable way to attract the audience, which is to be addressed at the earliest as the younger generation is falling (perceiving) into the trap. Further, the study analyses the stigmatization and romanticization of mental health by circulating google forms to 151 participants to figure out the prevalence of stigmatization in their locality and the evolution of stigma into romanticization. Finally, the study highlights the risk of romanticizing mental illness which is more dangerous than the stigma.

## **STIGMATIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

Stigma is an unfair social attitude attributed to an individual or group to “expose the unusual behavior of the moral status of the signifier” (Goffman, 1963, p.11) and a mark of disgrace to impose negative impacts on the lives of its bearers (Goffman, 1963, p.11; Thornicroft et.al., 2007). Stigma is an unfair treatment that counters opportunities for mental sufferers to equal participation in society (Miconi et.al., 2021). The perceived stigma and stereotypes affect many aspects of the customary lives of people, causing “intense distress, systematic disadvantages, economic loss, and social exclusion” (Corrigan et.al., 2011; Makhmud et.al., 2022). Mental illness is one of the most stigmatized and biased conditions of human behaviors with numerous negative impacts on a person’s life experiences (Arnaez et.al, 2020; Makhmud et.al, 2022), and people who are suffering from some sort of mental illness are the most vulnerable and stigmatized group in society (Overton, 2008). Stigmatization is defined as a process of diminishing the self-esteem of a person who has deeply discrediting behaviors (Goffman, 1693, p.3). The stereotypical attribution and stigmatization of mental illness label people with mental illness as undesirable persons (Gray, 2002). Thus they are systematically outcasted from social contact and interaction which makes them believe they violate society’s accepted behaviors and norms (Fan et.al, 2021). The stigmatization hurts and differentiates people with the language associated to address them (Manutscheri, 2021). Historically the word ‘mental’ is used to refer to a person with abnormal behavior and we tag them as ‘psycho, patient, lunatic, mad, unworthy, dirty, insincere, unintelligent, quirky, crazy, life-threatening, aggressive,

criminal and violent' (Elmoudden, 2019; Gray, 2002; Pathak & Biswal, 2021; Hwang & Hollingshead, 2016).

People are hesitant to come forward to address their mental illness due to a great deal of stigma integrated into it. This stigmatization attitude towards mental illness steered them doubly challenged. On the one hand, they suffer from the symptoms and effects of the disease, and on the other hand, the stigma about mental illness excludes them from public life. Thus people with mental illness are denied to have a quality normal life. Generally, the stigma is carried out in two folds: public stigma and self-stigma (Figueroa, 2018). Public (external) stigma is endorsed by the general stereotypical attitude of the public that the mentally ill individual is different and socially undesirable (Latalova et.al., 2014). This public stigma is also carried out by well-trained professionals sometimes, due to their stereotypical attitudes toward mental illness (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). Self-stigma (internal stigma) is carried out by an individual with perceived public stereotypes and prejudices. It is an internal process of diminishing individuals' self-esteem. It imposes the individuals to develop negative feelings and leads them to believe that they are dehumanized for their psychological disorders. Thus, self-stigma in an individual increases depression and decreases self-esteem. Stigma has been identified as a major deterrent to the treatment of depression, schizophrenia, panic disorder, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (Latalova et.al., 2014).

## **VULNERABILITY OF MEDIA IN MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA**

One cannot counter the fact that media and literature have an integral part in shaping human minds and thoughts. Unfortunately, the media and literature distort persons with mental disorders by presenting them with violent and unpredictable behaviors which are utterly deceptive from real life. Further media portrays that people with mental illnesses are not ready to disclose their sufferings publicly. The depiction of mental illness as an individual problem also contributes to the denial of mental illness as a societal problem. These inaccurate misrepresentations prone people to think that these representations are true and influence individuals on how to see themselves if they have a mental illness. The media have played an intentional (monetary gain, TRP, political influence) and unintentional (entertainment) part in creating and spreading myths and misconceptions about mental health and illness (Srivastava et.al., 2018). Overton and Medina (2008) in the study figured out the various facts that cause stigma on mentally disordered people like cues, stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice and avoidance. Corrigan (2014) study concluded that stigmatization, fear of social rejection and decreased self-esteem prevent people from seeking professional help. The misrepresentation of mental health practitioners prohibits the sufferers to seek professional help. Rather than eliminating the stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and taboo integrated with mental illness, there are a great number of thriller and horror movies that propagate stigma for sensationalism to attract large audiences (Haider, 2018; Corrigan, 2004). Lawson and Fouts (2004) examined 34 Disney animated movies that have mental health references and discovered that 85% of the movies had verbal allusions to mental illness and 21% of the main characters are portrayed with mental disorders. A few terms such as, 'crazy', 'mad', 'madness' and 'nut' were frequently used to make fun of mentally ill people. The use of such derogatory verbal references was much more than the incidences in the real world. The misconception is fed to the kids and they start to believe that the screened information is true. So it

will be a challenge to contradict the beliefs of the young minds. Smith (2015) concluded that all the media (news media, Disney movies, Children's television shows, television (entertainment) shows, movies and web series) propagated that people with mental disorders were unpredictable, dangerous and undesirable in society, and medical practitioners were unconventional and unethical. The perceived stigma limits people to speak up on mental illness, thus, people rely on media especially social media to acquire knowledge on mental health and mental illness. But the media fails to portray the struggle of people with mental illness, rather it propagates stigma about people with mental illness as violent, strong-headed, and crazy and sometimes romanticizes them as strong, unique and creative, which is completely different from real-life experience (Srivastava et.al., 2018).

As media is consumed by everyone in a different form, information spread by media is having an impact on people's lives. Thus, the government and many other organizations seek media patrons to provide mental health awareness programs, advertisements and toll-free numbers to help people with mental disorders. Substantial support from the government helps to eradicate the stigma and increase the utilization of professional services. The anti-stigma programs also assist to create a great impact on mental health awareness. Media especially, social media is the easiest platform to reach people from everywhere. WHO also shares mental health content through its Instagram and YouTube sites. With these continuous efforts, we stamp out the stigmatization of mental health. And nowadays people discuss mental disorders and give importance to mental health like physical fitness. Brittany Snow (American actress) opened up about her struggles with anorexia, depression and self-harm as 'awful' in 2007 and took a break from social life. In 2019 she stated that people nowadays are coming forward to talk about mental health and she felt happy for initiating it when people were not honest about their mental sufferings. Celebrities are serving a great part in eradicating the stigma related to mental illness (Yagodha, 2022). Thus, the media takes the subject of mental health as a premier subject in every form (songs, ads. movies, web series and series). As media patrons for mental health, it seeks its commercialization by romanticizing mental illness, which is to be addressed as life-threatening. Figure 1 renders the evolution of mental illness from stigma to romanticism.

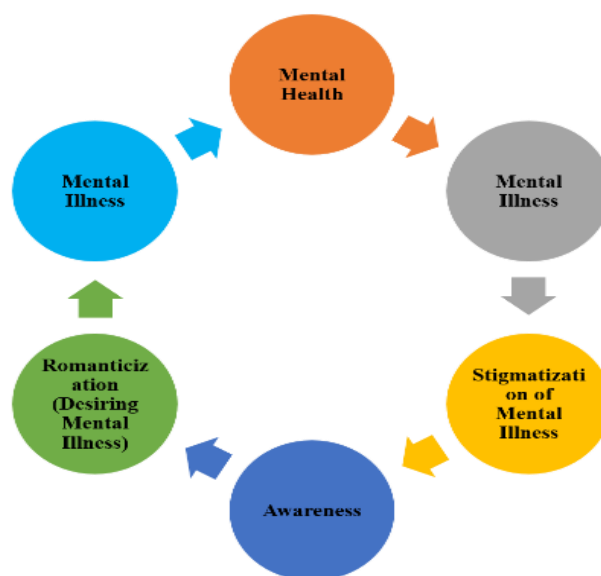


Fig 1: Evolution of Mental Health



## THE ROMANTICIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH

A decade ago, the stigmatization of mental illness and the taboo around psychopathology leads to discrimination and human right violation. On the flip side, perhaps the media begins to romanticize or glamourize mental illness (Manutscheri, 2021) and social media is the hub for romanticizing mental health (NAMI, 2019). With attractive posts and captions, social media has glamorized mental illness into something that is fashionable, appealing and attractive. Everyone is convinced that they have depression and anxiety disorders with mild symptoms and portraying them as strong and beautiful like a rose with thorns. But in reality, pain is not pretty. People with mental disorders are struggling to win the battle between living and dying.

Most likely, the notion that mental illness and creativity are positively correlated is what gives rise to the romanticization of mental disease. Undoubtedly, individuals with mental illnesses have been known to produce amazing things, and the same with every normal individual (people without mental disorders). The integration between creativity and psychopathology starts back from Aristotle's words "No great mind has ever existed without a touch of madness" (Degmecic, 2018).

The perspective of the mad genius hypothesis (Simonton, 2014) tends people to aspire mental illnesses in various domains such as writers, poets and scientists (Simonton & Song, 2009). People are desired to be sad, mysterious and broody, and believe that, that helps them to create beautiful poems and aesthetic paintings. Thus, mental illness is romanticized and equated to beautiful strength. One cannot deny the history the strength and beauty of people with mental illnesses, but sadness and self-harming should not be promoted in anyone. They are able to display scars that are nothing but downright horrible. Mental illness and sufferings are not as attractive as they screened. One cannot turn down the fact that some famous people with mental illness have achieved phenomenally, as follows: Abraham Lincoln, a former US president (PTSD, Clinical Depression), Jim Carrey, an American artist (depression), J. K. Rowling, a British novelist (depression), author of the Harry Potter series, Mike Wallace, an American journalist and actor (depression), Oprah Winfrey, a media icon (PTSD, Anxiety) and Virginia Woolf, a British writer (depression), and Sylvia Plath, an American poet (depression) (Yagodha, 2022).

As mentioned above people were exceptionally great in their field along with their mental illness, the present youngsters aspire to have mental illness by binding the words 'tragic' and 'beautiful'. Suffering from mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but this does not mean that anyone should aspire to have it. People from everywhere, without any boundaries or limits, desire to have any kind of mental illness. They seek aesthetics in tragic mental disorders due to the success of famous people and the aesthetical media's portrayal of depression, anorexia nervosa, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and OCD. For instance, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) is a young adult novel adapted into the Netflix series in 2017 that pronounced depression, self-harm and suicide in a pessimistic way. Also, it portrays suicide as the final way to reach peace for strongly depressed people (vulnerable) as they are unaware of the signs of depression. Thus, this kind of series influences young minds negatively (Mueller, 2019), which results in a rise in the suicide rate. Globally, every hundred deaths have more than one suicide and there are 20 attempts for one suicide (WHO, 2022).

## METHODS

### Participants and Procedure

The present study was conducted among 151 individuals in August 2022. The questionnaire was circulated to participants through Google Forms. The questionnaire included demographic details, existing knowledge of mental health, the prevalence of the stigma of mental illness, platforms for disseminating information, and romanticization of mental health. All the participants (151) were voluntary and anonymous from all over India. Of all the participants (N=151), 56.9% were male (N=86), 41.7% were female (N=63) and 1.3% were not revealed their gender (N=2). There were responses from all over India from, Andhra Pradesh to West Bengal, and the majority of the respondents were from Kerala N=61 (40.4%). The focus group was adolescents from India, as they are using social media the most, 86.6% (N=130) of the respondents were from the 15-20 age group. Detailed information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Details of Participants**

Participants	N	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	86	56.90%
Female	63	41.70%
Prefer not to reveal	2	1.30%
<b>Age Group</b>		
15-20	130	86.60%
20-25	16	10.60%
30-50	4	2.60%
50-70	1	0.60%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
School Education	62	41%
UG	84	55.60%
PG	2	1.30%
PhD	3	1.90%

## MEASURES

### Existing Knowledge of Mental Health

To test the existing knowledge and the importance of mental health among respondents, they were asked to rate their existing knowledge of mental health. 90.8% (N=137) of respondents were aware of mental health, and the remaining 9.2% (N=14) were unaware of the terms mental health and mental illness. The results determined that people were aware of mental health. In addition, the respondents declared that they gained knowledge of mental health through social media which was validated by the additional question about the sources of information on mental health. 43% (N=65) marked social media as their source of information among other options family>friends>websites>books. To observe empathy for mental illness, respondents rated their experience of mental illness as their own or from others. 48.3% (N=73) were experiencing a form of mental illness sometimes. Whereas, 8.6% (N=13) never have had the experience of any kind of mental illness on their own as well from their surroundings.

## Prevalence of Mental Health Stigma

To measure the prevalence of stigma in the locality of the respondents, they were asked to rate on the four-point Likert scale to avoid the neutrality of responses. 58.2% (N=88) of the respondents agreed at some level that stigmatization existed in their locality and 23.8% (N=36) strongly agreed that stigmatization is exist nowadays. Respondents were instructed to think about their own struggle and their known people with mental illness using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). Even though 91.4% of the respondents agreed that they experienced a form of mental illness on their own or surroundings, only 25.1% (N=38) of the respondents strongly agreed to accept their mental illness due to the existing stigma. 39% (N=59) were marked on the linear scale 3, which showed the neutrality of their acceptance of mental illness. Even after having enough knowledge of mental health and illness, the existing stigma stands as a barrier to accept that they are suffering from mental illness. Respondents were asked to mark their choice while having a mental illness. Among other options, 35% (N=53) of the respondents chose to be silent while facing mental illness. After silence, 24.5% (37) of the respondents chose music as their choice of expression.

## The Romanticization of Mental Health

The existing stigma hinders people to accept their mental illness in public spaces, where the glamorizing nature of mental illness begins. Respondents were asked to name the medium where the content of romanticizing mental illness unfurled. 57.6% (N=88) of the respondents answered social media is propagating a new way of romanticization of mental illness. We cannot counter the result that social media is playing a significant role in giving information on mental health among young adults, but it has its own negative impacts. As many celebrities are sharing that they are suffering from anxiety and depression, their followers aspire to do the same. It is understood that the age group which romanticizes mental illness the most is 15-25, wherein 85.4% of the respondents fall under. It is alarming for mental health. It also proclaims the social media influence among young adults. To identify the gender representation in mental illness romanticization, the results were not gender-biased. 63.5% (N=96) of the responses opted for equal representation in romanticizing, whereas men were in the least of 8% (N=12).

## Mental Health Awareness

To test the reach of mental health awareness among the respondents they were asked to rate the frequency of mental health content access on a five-point Likert scale from 1=all the time to 5=never. Only 3.3% (N=5) of the respondents answered they had never accessed the mental health content and 38% (N=58) of the respondents answered most of the time they were accessing the mental health content. Further, they were asked to rate the acceptance of unhealthy content of mental health on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree). 29% (N=36) of the respondents strongly disagreed and 38.4% (N=58) of the respondents somewhat disagreed with the unhealthy content about mental health. The results showed that respondents do not entertain unhealthy content as it impacts them negatively. To serve society and individual well-being, respondents were tested on their earlier attempts in creating content on mental health awareness. 41% (N=62) of the respondents contributed sometime in their lifetime to create mental health content.



## DISCUSSIONS

This research explored the perceptions and experiences of 151 voluntary respondents regarding mental illness stigmatization and mental health romanticization. The themes identified are as the followings: existing knowledge of mental health, the prevalence of stigma, romanticization of mental illness and mental health awareness. The study found that the stigma of mental illness is prevalent in a high percentage. The result supports the existing research findings of Elmoudden (2019). Though public literacy on mental health is increased, the prevalence of stigma also remains high. With the continuous efforts to eliminate the stigma, it remains stagnant. The unhealthy content about mental illness in social media is the prime factor as it reaches people rapidly. Social media is an echo chamber where emotions are contagious. According to psychoanalytical theory, an individual has many personalities rather than unitary ones. Society's stigmatized view limits individuals from expressing their different personalities but on the flip side, social media allows them to express different personalities. Thus people seek social media to explore different personalities. Social media trivializes the real struggles of mental illness with superficial identity. People pretending mental illness for attention may change their identity but those who suffer really cannot do the same. Their pain is true, and their struggle is true. Thus romanticization causes more stigma than real stigma (Shrestha, 2018). In this study, 46% of the respondents pretend to have a mental illness for getting views on their social media sites which is pathetic. The FoMO forced them to pretend to have a mental illness on social media to gain attention and to avoid FoMO. This result goes along with the findings of Swift (2021) that it is challenging to identify the people who are really calling for help to overcome a mental illness. The rise in romanticization invigorates youngsters to glamourize mental illness (Swift, 2021). Humans have the tendency to replicate the emotions of their surroundings without the realization of their emotional contagion. Thus people tend to catch emotions, such as facial expressions, body language, postures and behaviors. It impacts consumers negatively when people on social media sites fake their mental illnesses without realizing its effects. It surges mental illness in public health (Kramer et.al., 2014).

Another important contribution this study makes to the literature is the observation of music and mental illness. Music is the best therapy to improve mental health. Music is the first choice for expressing mental illness among the respondents. To deal with their own mental illness, listening to music helps them to sympathize and reduce feelings of isolation and symptoms (Kresovich, 2022). But nowadays pop music has more depressive lyrics in the songs. There are 77, 50, 000 results in 0.60 sec for the google search "songs about depression and anxiety 2022" (11/12/2022) and these depressive lyrics increase depressive emotion among the listeners. When a sad song is listened to, depression and stress are triggered rather than easing depression. The representation of suicidal and depressing lyrics in the songs attracts and reaches young teens rapidly. Billie Eilish, an artist who has 49 million followers on YouTube uses depressive lyrics 'I wanna end me... staple your tongue...gotta sell my soul' and visuals in her song 'bury a friend' reached 449 million views on 23 Nov 2022 (YouTube). Rather than solacing depression, it encourages to desire for mental illness.

With the increased romanticization of mental illness, it has been challenging to determine whether people share their mental distress on SMN for a genuine cry or for attention. It is not so glamorous when someone is battling with depression and anxiety disorders. The young adults are using phrases such as 'I feel depressed', 'I feel

anxious' and 'I'm gonna kill myself' with pride in social media (Swift, 2021). Having and suffering from mental illness is quite common but denying the treatment and posing to the normalization is more dangerous than the actual illness. Depression was normalized and romanticized during Covid-19. People were locked in rooms and affected mostly by anxiety and depression due to curfew. Social media is created for connectivity, and during Covid-19, people connected digitally through social media sites to avoid loneliness. They seek information and emotional support through online peer support (OPS). Due to their unidentified identity, they feel less stigmatized and more connected. People find that there are more people with mental illness so they start to accept it as common and neglect the serious symptoms sometimes. Humorously, through the Tik-Tok videos hashtagged 'depression caves', people shared and posted videos of turning their homes into depressed caves. (Swift, 2021). They start to accept their mental illness, and to the extent, they start to romanticize it which is riskier. (Prescott, J., Rathbone, A. L., & Brown, 2020). Later it seems that social media disconnected people from the real world and people started to live virtually, and loneliness (silent plague) is the sad reality of virtual connection (Elmoudden, 2019). Loneliness is the prime factor for depression and anxiety. The government of the UK appointed its first minister for loneliness in 2018, as many university students feel dejected for not fitting in, isolate themselves from others, and locked up in their rooms. And this loneliness turns into depression, where it gets dangerous (The New York Times, 2018). Thus, the increased romanticization undermines to identify people who are really suffering from mental disorders. At present, mental illness and disorders are so romanticized and idealized, that people with mental disorders seem to be desirable. We must stop romanticizing self-harm and mental illness. Having a mental illness doesn't make anyone desirable, it lowers one's self-esteem.

## CONCLUSION

The stigma around mental illness creates a taboo on mental health a decade ago. But with the help of social media people started to normalize mental illness and seek professional help for their sufferings. With this normalization, mental illness ventures into a new room - romanticization, where people desire to have a mental illness for its misrepresentation on social media. Desiring to have a mental illness surges the rate of mental health suffering among people. Along with this evolution, the stigma is still existing. It is evinced from the findings of the survey that stigmatization of mental illness is still prevalent extensively in India and social media disseminate mental illness content that is contagious. In addition, the study finds that people romanticize mental illness to get attention and views on social media. Romanticization obviously helps people to normalize mental illness and eliminate the taboo attached to it. But desiring mental illness exceeds the rates of mental illness, and no way helps people to achieve mental health by romanticizing it. Thus this study concludes, romanticization is a newer form of stigma along with the existing stigma. Hence people should change their perspective on mental illness as attractive and creative because, on the flip side, people with mental illness are striving to become normal which is completely opposite to the hypocrites who romanticize mental illness for social attention. Promotion of mental health well-being and prevention of stigma requires individual as well as public support. Therefore, self-realization and public support are needed to balance the physical and mental health that sports people to achieve excellence in their life.

## Abbreviations

- 1) FoMO – Fear of Missing Out
- 2) SMN – Social Media Networks
- 3) WHO – World Health Organization

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