

Samarth Annual Report

2023- 2024

List of Members: 2023-2024

Governing Body

Dr. Saradha Suresh	Honorary President, Former Director, Institute of Child Health (ICH), Chennai
Dr. Shuba Kumar	Secretary, Social Scientist, Samarth, Chennai
Dr. Rani Mohanraj	Treasurer, Psychologist, 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. Aarthi Kandasamy	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

Samarth has completed 16 years as on January 2023 leaving us feeling both blessed and grateful for having had the opportunity to continue to contribute our skills and expertise to several very important areas of research. Notable among these has been our continued work on validating and refining the care and support model for children with cleft lip and palate and another study that aims to develop and validate a mobile app for prevention of Early Childhood Caries in children less than 3 years of age. Both studies have young children as the focus of interest and given the long- term benefits that the findings of these studies will bring about, it is indeed gratifying for us to be a part of such important and useful work. Additionally, we continue to follow our passion and interest in mental health and in this context, our work with SCARF focusing primarily on adolescent mental and behavioural health has also been very rewarding. Whether it be understanding the complexities of intergenerational conflict or appreciating the use of art- based therapies like theatre, painting, story-telling etc. as ways and means of improving mental health, these new and innovative methods are turning out to be effective in helping young people cope more effectively with their life situations.

What has also been particularly satisfying for us has been the demand for our qualitative research methodology workshops which we have been conducting since the inception of Samarth. Over the years we have refined and expanded the scope of these workshops so as to make them both interesting and relevant to participants. We have developed a foundation course on qualitative research methods which primarily addresses the principles, characteristics and methods of qualitative research. This course caters to beginners and provides them with a good understanding of qualitative research. A separate course on analytical approaches, focusing primarily on the thematic analytical approach is also conducted for those who wish to advance their knowledge and practice of qualitative research. These courses are conducted online. We also run face to face physical sessions which are usually based on requests from academic and medical institutions. Through the conduct of these workshops, we believe that we have been able to reach a wide cross section of young and mid-career researchers, scientists and medical professionals, many of whom have been able to use the training so imparted to design and execute qualitative research in their own settings. For a teacher, nothing can be more gratifying than this! We are currently working on designing courses specifically targeting other qualitative analytical approaches such as Grounded Theory approach and Rapid Qualitative Research approaches.

We remain deeply grateful to all our collaborators, members and well-wishers and look forward to their continued support and encouragement in all our future endeavours.

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 is being 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 are the Qualitative Consultants on this study.

With recruitment of infants to either the NAM arm or the control arm ongoing across different sites in India (Punjab, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu), selection of the infant's parents for the qualitative interviews is also ongoing. Depending on the site and the preferred language of the infant's parents, consent is first obtained and the interview scheduled on a convenient date and time over the zoom platform. Our team of social scientists (fluent in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Tamil) then carry out the interview which is audio recorded with parental consent. Over 30 interviews inclusive of both intervention and control arms have been completed so far. As interviews are completed, we arrange for them to be transcribed and translated into English following which they are loaded into Nivivo for analysis.

2. 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 Pediatric Dentistry, SRMCI as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Rani Mohanraj and Dr. Shuba Kumar 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). With all approvals through, the contract signed and the guides developed, work on this project has begun. Our task as qualitative consultant, involved carrying out a total of 24 semi structured interviews (SSIs) and two focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents of children with and without caries. A total of 15 SSIs with health care providers (dentists, pediatric dentists, pediatricians) will also be undertaken. All SSIs and FGDs with the parents have been completed. The audio recorded interviews have all been transcribed and translated and loaded into Nvivo. Interviews with the HCPs have also been completed. The coding of data has been completed and report preparation is ongoing

3. Addressing intergenerational conflicts to reduce suicidal ideation and behaviour among young people in urban Chennai (Integrity Study) (Feb 2023- June 2023)

This study is being 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 seeks 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. Our role entailed training the project staff at SCARF in conducting interviews, helping with the development of the study guides, coding and analysing the data, preparing the study report and the finalisation of a framework that best explains the phenomenon of IGC and suicidal behaviours. Training research assistants (RAs) on interview techniques and on transcription /translation has been completed. The RAs have started doing the data collection and mentoring meeting are being conducted with the RAs to help guide them. The guides too are being reviewed and refined. A total of 25 interviews with youth aged between 18-24 yrs are planned to be carried out which will be completed before the end of the year.

COMPLETED RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. 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 was conducted by the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF) with Dr. R Thara as the Principal Investigator. Dr. Shuba Kumar and Dr. Rani Mohanraj were the qualitative consultants. The study aimed 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 and feasibility of establishing safe space in colleges and communities. The agreement between SCARF and Samarth was valid for a 6 months period (May 2023 to November 2023). Our role entailed coding and analyzing interview transcripts and preparing a report of our findings. We analysed data from six in depth interviews (IDIs) with students, two with college professors, four with NGO staff members and three with community volunteers (Total of 15 IDIs). Data from three focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted, one each with students, college faculty and educationists respectively. Lastly, 14 data sets containing feedback from participants who had attended the intervention programme were reviewed towards understanding their perceptions about the programme and its perceived usefulness. The report was finalized and submitted in end October 2023 to SCARF.

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)

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. The study was carried out in six districts in Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore, Dharampuri, Kancheepuram, Madurai, Trichy and Villipuram. Between 35 to 45 interviews were carried out with a range of health care providers and TB/HIV patients in each district. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, translated into English. And analysed using Nvivo. In addition to a consolidated report, district wise individual reports were also prepared and submitted to SAATHI.

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 centres, 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 study aimed to determine rice type preferences, perceptions, barriers and drivers to its consumption among adult type 2 diabetes patients (PWD) living in Chennai, India. It was carried out in the out-patients setting of Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre (DMDSC). Using a mixed methods cross sectional design, a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews (SSI), were conducted with consenting adult PWD attending the DMDSC. A total of 213 PWD responded to the survey while SSIs were conducted with a sub-set of 10 PWD. The data were analysed and final report was submitted to the University of Sheffield and to MDRF. A manuscript has also been prepared and submitted for favour of publication.

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

Samarth in collaboration with Dr. Gregory Armstrong of the University of Melbourne and Dr. Lakshmi Vijayakumar, Founder- Sneha, carried out 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. A total number of 375 youth aged between 18-29 years were recruited and randomized to the three arms (two intervention and one control arm). In addition, 20 qualitative in-depth interviews

were carried out with a subset of youth who had participated in the RCT. The analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data were completed and manuscripts are being prepared

PROJECTS IN THE PIPELINE

YIPPEE

In collaboration with the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF), Samarth team members will be the qualitative research consultants on a study titled, Youth co- Production for sustainable Engagement and Empowerment in health (YiPEE). The study seeks to understand the drivers of change (context-mechanism-actors) that inform/ support the impact observed through outcome evaluation processes. Qualitative interviews will be carried out as process evaluation components with different stakeholder groups including school students, teachers, parents and school administrative staff. Samarth's role entails training the research staff in conducting interviews and FGDs and transcribing/ translating the interviews, guiding the research assistants with their qualitative research studies, coding and analyzing the data, developing a report on the findings, help with framework development with and facilitate workshops for synthesis and analysis of data.

JAMS

In continuation to JAMs 1 (Juveniles Accessing Mental Health Service), JAM 2 will seek to evaluate JAMs 1 and its scalability in order to better understand, how actually the different aspects of the intervention are working and whether any further adaptations are required before its scalability. This evaluation is proposed to be carried out using the Realist Framework (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) which aims to answer questions such as what works, for whom, in which circumstances, thereby helping to improve understanding about how actually, the intervention is working. Understanding this, will more effectively guide decision making about how the programme needs to be run and if any adaptations need to be brought in. The study sites will include two districts each from the states of TN and Orissa, for the purpose of the qualitative evaluation. From each selected district one government run Child Care Institute (CCI) will be included for the purpose of the qualitative evaluation. Samarth's role in this study includes training the research staff, development of guides, monitoring of data collection (online) and analysis and report writing.

SOCIAL SCIENCE TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Foundation Course on Qualitative Research Methods, (Online Course), 8th to 11th May 2023

Foundation Course on Qualitative Research Methods, (Online Course), 30th, 31st Jan, 1st&2nd Feb 2024)

Analysis of Qualitative Data—Thematic Analysis (Online Course), Feb. 22nd - 23rd and 7th – 8th March 2024,

PUBLICATIONS

Kumar S, Mohanraj R, Raman R, Kumar G, Luvies S, Machhi SS, et al. (2023) 'I don't need an eye check-up'. A qualitative study using a behavioural model to understand treatment-seeking behaviour of patients with sight threatening diabetic retinopathy (STDR) in India. PLoS ONE 18(6): e0270562. <https://doi.org/>

Ramkumar V, Shankar V, Kumar S. Implementation factors influencing the sustained provision of tele-audiology services: insights from a combined methodology of scoping review and qualitative semistructured interviews. *BMJ Open* 2023;13:e075430. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2023-075430

Kumar S, Mohanraj R, Vaidhyalingam T, Chakkaravarthi S, Thiruvenkatachari B. Parental Experiences on Learning About and Caring for Children with Cleft Lip and Palate: A Qualitative Study from South India. *Cleft Palate Craniofac J.* 2024 Dec 1:10556656241298217. doi: 10.1177/10556656241298217. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 39618062; PMCID: PMC7617679.

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 CMRCentral 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