

MENTAL HEALTH OF SOUTH ASIAN ARTISTS

REIMAGINING THE ARTS FOR
GOOD MENTAL HEALTH



tongues on fire

**UK ASIAN
FILM FESTIVAL**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tongues on Fire - UKAFF wishes to acknowledge and gratefully thank the volunteer therapists and counsellors for their valuable time and expertise for helping with Talking Therapy Helpline. In particular, TOF/UKAFF appreciates Prof. Dinesh Bhugra's expertise and insights on the construct of mental illness in Bollywood films. TOF is also grateful to Aman Dhillon for managing the events and coordinating the project. TOF also thanks Dr Toyeba Mushtaq for compiling this report. We would also like to thank The National Lottery Community Fund for their contribution.

FOREWORD



Rakhee Joshi
Chairperson
UK Asian Film Festival

We have all faced many challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic over the last two years. Globally, we've faced personal, emotional, financial and professional difficulties like no other time in our modern history. It has caused all of us to re-examine and re-evaluate what is truly important and valued.

In March 2020, for the first time in its inception, the UK Asian Film Festival (UKAFF) had to postpone its cinematic screenings. The festival team worked creatively and swiftly to re-programme certain screenings to an online format, in a bid to satisfy our commitments to filmmakers and audiences.

However, the devastating impact of the pandemic was poised to impact us even deeper. Individuals were on the verge of losing (or had already lost) their jobs, future contracts were being put on hold and financial uncertainty was taking a firm grip. More importantly, the personal costs of the pandemic were just about to become apparent: anxiety and depression were setting-in, particularly for those experiencing bereavement or needing to care for loved ones whilst battling their own turmoil and suffering.

In particular, Dr Pushpinder Chowdhry MBE, Founder and Festival Director of the UKAFF, recognised the hardships faced by those in the arts industry and was spurred into taking immediate action to support them. As a trained Psychotherapist, Pushpinder has dedicated over 25 years to assisting the neediest members of our communities. At the start of the nationwide lockdown, she initiated the organisation's Talking Therapy helpline, where individuals could call-in for counselling sessions run by herself and a small team of trained and dedicated volunteers. In addition, UKAFF also organized year round 'feel-good' arts activities ranging from singing, dancing, poetry recital, film screenings, and a month-long campaign on mental health awareness.

This Report on the Mental Health of South Asian Artists looks at the impact of Coronavirus on the mental health of South Asians in the creative arts industry. Specifically:

- We'll learn more about the ground-breaking initiatives, events and activities spearheaded by the UKAFF, operating through Tongues on Fire Limited, in its efforts to partner with and support our artists;
- Our findings from our events, activities and hours of dedicated counselling sessions will tell us more about the specific difficulties faced by industry participants;
- We'll understand how our work in this area has helped us to draw informed conclusions and recommendations on how we can better support them going forward; and
- We'll appreciate how the arts have helped us to promote and embody good mental health and wellbeing practices.

In launching this Report, we very much hope to be a catalyst of change to take positive steps back to the good mental health and wellbeing of our friends and colleagues in the creative arts. We are delighted to share our insights with you and are very grateful for your interest in exploring these critical issues together with us.

Special thanks to all of our willing and generous contributors, sponsors and partners, without whom this Report would not have been possible.

Stay safe and well,

Rakhee Joshi
Chairperson of the UKAFF Advisory Board

TONGUES ON FIRE LIMITED – UKAFF

tongues on fire



Tongues on Fire is a not-for-profit, self-funding organisation in 1998 providing a platform for independent film and arts with a link to South Asia. It celebrates South Asian culture, its vibrancy and many dimensions through storytelling, live events, masterclasses and cinema screenings. The company provides a platform for emerging talent to showcase their work, offers networking occasions with industry leaders and provides wider learning opportunities for the filmmaking community. Tongues on Fire is also the producer of the UK Asian Film Festival (UKAFF), previously The London Asian Film Festival, which aims to entertain, inform and educate. The festival provides a unique platform for South Asians working in film and media around the world. The screenings and events include feature films, documentaries, short films, panel discussions and educational and community screenings. This annual film festival has been going strong for 23 years and champions the arts and cinema, intertwining political and social messages with entertainment.

The annual UKAFF celebrates the richness and vibrancy of South Asian culture, history, arts, storytelling, and self-expression by:

- Opening doors and providing a platform for emerging talent, independent film and arts with a link to South Asia;
- Bridging art, culture, health, and technology to herald the challenges of a world in motion;
- Dismantling inequalities in the creative industries to readdress the balance;
- Breaking barriers, taboos in South Asian communities and encouraging open discussion;
- Empowering the next generation through masterclasses and showcases; and
- Pioneering networking occasions to develop leaders and provide wider learning opportunities.

Post the onset of Covid-19, taking care of your mental health has been more important than ever. Industries across the world have been impacted by this pandemic and subsequently, there has been a sharp increase in people who suffer from depression and anxiety. The organisation is very much aware of

the impact on artists, where many work on a freelance basis and recognised there was no specific counselling service for South Asian artists based in the UK. In addition, there has been a lot of media coverage in recent times of suicides and mental health problems in the South Asian film industry. It is important to encourage open discussions about mental health, which can often be considered a taboo in South Asian communities, especially amongst men. Throughout the pandemic, the UKAFF organised lots of events and activities to create mental health awareness among South Asian artists.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the festival was cancelled for the first time in its 22-year history. Although the UKAFF was due to start on the 25th March 2020, unfortunately the lockdown was announced two days prior to the festival on the 23rd March 2020.

Coronavirus caused havoc across the world and for us specifically, it impacted everyone involved with the festival. This included our staff, volunteers, filmmakers, artists and many more. We quickly realised that the arts sector and the South Asian creative industry were severely under supported.

We realised the severity of the situation and acted promptly. It was challenging, but we worked together as a team to overcome the impact of the festival cancellation and the lockdown on staff, volunteers, artists and filmmakers. We implemented the free “Talking Therapy” phone line and organised various online arts events throughout the year. All the participants who used our services identified as a people with large support networks made up of family and friends. However, in most cases they also lived on their own or in their nuclear families.

The government and scientists were trying to make sense of, control and contain the pandemic. Before the vaccine became available, the seemingly endless lockdowns and rules were taking a toll on our mental health. Virtual socialising and working from home online became the new norm and we were all learning to adjust to a new way of life.

To create a sense of community we were clapping for healthcare workers, donating time at testing centres and eventually aiding in the vaccine roll-out too. Those who were vulnerable were met with enthusiastic volunteers to help with daily tasks such as grocery shopping. Although there was amazing community spirit to help, the constant negative news cycle which displayed rising infection and death rates was depressing. As these numbers were rising it was clear the BAME community was the most hard hit with the virus. Along with this, underfunded areas and poorer communities were struggling to cope with being confined indoors. Schools transitioned to teaching online but not everyone had the privilege of the space, WIFI and laptops to aid this move.

The government was offering generous packages of loans and grants to many businesses. However, most of the people in the creative arts industry were not eligible for these resources to help them cope with the pandemic crisis. There were various grants and loans available for many businesses however many people in the creative arts industry were not eligible for these due to the temporary nature of their work as freelancers. Specifically, the film

industry includes many more people than just actors and directors - there are show runners, make-up artists, hair stylists etc., all of whom were unable to make an income.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on people especially in the BAME communities. Those who were fortunate enough had access to virtual activities and were able to continue working throughout the pandemic. However, we saw a large number of people working in film and arts industry that were out of work, ineligible for furlough and physically isolated. Amongst the fear of when they would work again, ***the infamous “Rethink, Reskill, Reboot” campaign suggesting Fatima - a ballet dancer retrain for a career in IT (Fury over Government campaign suggesting ballet dancer could retrain in cyber security | London Evening Standard | Evening Standard)*** added to their anxiety. It sent out a clear message that their jobs were not worth saving.

‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being of an individual and not just the absence of any disease or infirmity. It is clear by the definition that mental health is way more than just lack of mental disorders. The general perception of mental health includes subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, independence, proficiency, integrity and ability to recognise one’s intellectual, physical and emotional potential. Mental health impacts upon the functional and working capacity of an individuals in so many levels especially about reduced productivity, cardio-vascular and musculoskeletal disorders or worse suicide and death. Attitudinal and social exclusion are the hardest obstacles to overcome for an individual suffering from any mental health issue because they may feel ashamed and fear rejection because of their behaviour and condition.’

‘The stigma attached to mental health issues makes the recovery process slower. This stigmatization has also been shown to negatively impact the efforts of the individual. The episode, such as depression, may also experience difficulties maintaining a stigma-free relationships’

- World Health Organization

[Mental health: strengthening our response \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/mental-health/prevention/promotion/mental-health-strengthening-our-response)

WHY MENTAL HEALTH

‘Mental health and its awareness have to be a concern for all of us because it’s not a small or isolates segment that affects an individual but also for society at large. It won’t be wrong to say that mental health awareness plays a pivotal role in global development. No individual or group is immune to mental health issues, but it has been identified that the risks of developing psychiatric disorders is higher among vulnerable populations such as women, LGBT individuals, children, older adult, unemployed and poor groups as well as migrants and refugees.’

- World Health Organization
[Promoting mental health \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int)

VISION OF ARTS COUNCIL

‘We champion, develop and invest in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people’s lives. We support activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.’

‘We believe that creativity and culture are deeply connected, but different. Creativity is the process by which, either individually or with others, we make something new: a work of art, or a reimagining of an existing work. Culture is the result of that creative process’

‘We believe that great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better.’

- Arts Council
[Our Vision | Arts Council England](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

This **Report on the Mental Health of South Asian Artists** looks at the impact of Coronavirus on the mental health of South Asian people in the creative arts industry and how the arts have helped us to promote and embody good mental health and wellbeing practices.

Aims

- Our aim is to give those in the creative industries a platform from which to share their opinions on mental health.
- We also aim to form recommendations to help support South Asian artists' mental health in the film and arts industry, based on our analysis of statistics gathered from our year-long events on mental health awareness such as our free **“Talking Therapy” helpline, dance workshops, group sing-along sessions, poetry recitals and various film screenings.**
- Looking to change the societal attitudes towards mental health and the stigma attached to it.
- Providing a platform for peer support through networking and participating in arts activities like dance, singing and films clubs.
- We aim to disseminate all the data, facts and findings from this report to policy makers, practitioners in mental health, arts organisation and the wider audience interested in mental wellbeing.
- To provide resources and creative tools to help various organisations to start a conversation interested in promoting the mental wellbeing of their staff and employees.

YEAR-ROUND EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND WELLBEING

Poetry Recital with Prof. Minu Bakshi

We hosted an afternoon of poetry recital, Mushaira, with Prof. Minu Bakshi, UKAFF's patron and former chairperson based in Delhi. The theme of Mushaira was 'pandemic and hope' and the poems were recited in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Assamese and English. We had 52 submissions for our poetry recital competition, out of which 5 worldwide participants: Ritu Soni, Mayapee Chowdhry, Sumeet Kaur, Jafira Naqvi and Imtiaz Ali, won the competition. Most of the poetry recitals highlighted the challenges and experiences faced as a result of the pandemic crisis. All of the poems evoked different emotions, experiences and perspectives on these unprecedented times. The event acted as a platform to voice the artists' own issues but also brought people closer to share their emotions in a safe environment. The event further accelerated the feeling of mutual support and lessen feelings of isolation.

Following the Mushaira, we had informal networking events online (discussions and recitals) with the artists themselves and others who wanted to join. Successful collaborative works have resulted from these networking events and the group still has regular, ongoing meetings.

Link, <https://youtu.be/9F6TqxGFnaI>

Antakshari with Samir Bhamra and Leylah Rumi

Antakshari is a Bollywood singing game where two or more people or a group sing popular songs. The first singer has to sing at least two complete lines and then the last letter of the song is then used by the next singer to sing another song, starting with the same letter. The winner or winning team is decided by a process of elimination. It is a very fun and popular game all over South Asia.

We organised weekly sessions where approximately 27 people attended the first session. While giving a twist to the decades-old game and to encourage more people to sing, the sessions usually lasted 2 hours with first half following the rules of the game and the second half dedicated to singing songs to different themes such as 'love', 'rain', 'bangles', 'marriage' etc. The game was fun and was an attempt to go back to appreciating the simplicity of the game in itself and while doing so, connecting with other participants and revisiting some old memories. It was nostalgic for everyone in one way or another. It would often happen that one person would start singing and the rest would join in, evoking the feeling of comfort and joy between the participants. People still come together and play the game.

Following the success of Antakshari sessions and a desire to improve their singing, we were requested to run a singing workshop for the participants. **The Ray of Hope themed sing-along** with singing sensation **Dr Gargi Banerjee** was organised by the UKAFF and hosted by Gurvinder Singh. Dr Banerjee has more than 10 years of experience as a vocal singing trainer. A runner-up in Zee TV's SaReGaMaPa she heads the department of Performing Arts at ICG college Jaipur, India. Each participant prepared a piece of song and got individual feedback from Dr Banerjee. She highlighted the importance of breathing, proper enunciation, vocals and notes to sing a song.

Link, https://youtu.be/sSI8uI3_3W8

Bollywood Dance School, Led by Rohan and Shruti Shah

During the pandemic, the UKAFF teamed up with Imperial College London's Indian Society and Bollywood Dance School to '**Get the Nation Dancing**' as part of the festival's on-going ***Bollywood Dance Workshop***. The workshop was conducted by Shruti and Rohan Shah. They have been in the Entertainment Industry for over 20 years and have contributed in a big way to the growth of Bollywood dance.

The aim of the workshop was to lift spirits and create a sense of fun amongst the artists. The workshop provided a platform for people to fight their inhibitions to dance. Since dance is a great way to reduce stress and anxiety, a lot of people joined in. 53 people registered to join the workshop but we noticed that multiple people joined from the same family hence impacting more than 53 people. Apart from improving flexibility and boost memory, the dance also helped the participants to make new contacts. The workshop acting as a taster gave the participants the courage to participate in various online dance classes.

Short film Priya's Mask Screening and discussion with cast and crew



A special screening of the animated short film, **“Priya’s Mask”** featuring India’s first female superhero – Priya was held on Zoom. A symbol of strength and a force for change for girls around the world, Priya tackles the COVID-19 pandemic that has challenged the health and well-being of the world.

Priya befriended a little girl named Meena to show her the sacrifices made by frontline healthcare workers and instil the power of courage and compassion during this difficult time. An international array of actors and feminist leaders loaned their voices to this important film including **Vidya Balan, Mrunal Thakur, Sairah Khan** and **Rosanna Arquette**.

A discussion and Q&A session with the creative team behind the innovative film and augmented reality comic book which was named by UN Women as a “gender equality champion” followed the film screening, led by Vaani Kaur. Joining us were founder, documentary filmmaker, and technologist Ram Devineni, producer Tanvi Gandhi, Indrani Ray, and Monika Samtani, writer Shubhra Prakash, with illustrator and animator Syd Fini, Hamid Bahrami and Neda Kazemifar.

The pathbreaking film is historic and of utmost importance to understand the emotional toll the pandemic has on young people while shattering the false information about the pandemic. Basking in the exceptional legacy of being the one of the very few comic books specifically constructed to generate awareness on social perils amongst the youth community – the comic book series is available as a free download.

Link, <https://youtu.be/XJwM8vtwoeo> and www.priyashakti.com

Men's Mental Health Awareness Campaign and collaboration with the Shahid Afridi Foundation

Three times as many men as women die by suicide. Men aged 40-49 have the highest suicide rates. Men report lower levels of life satisfaction than women. Men are less likely to access psychological therapies than women (Men and mental health | Mental Health Foundation). It is particularly difficult for South Asian men to express their feelings because of their cultural and social norms, racism and discrimination. The stigma attached to mental health inhibits them to talk about it and seek help. All this leads to depression, in some cases pushes them to suicidal thoughts and in extreme cases, to commit suicide.

We were aware that South Asian men needed to hear other men talk about mental health in order to acknowledge the need to seek help and break down the stigma attached to it. A month-long campaign was held in September with South Asian artists to promote a message to encourage men not to suffer in silence but instead, to seek help.

Namit Das (Actor), Jahangir Khan (President Hope - Not Out), Aditiya Kripalani (Filmmaker and producer), Anjelo Leeson (Founder of Tale Media Ltd and Singer), Yanick Ghanty (Actor and Stage Combat Graduate), and Raaghav Ranganathan (Actor) to name a few delivered their thoughts on importance of mental health in their native languages like English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujrati and Tamil for a wider reach. The videos were recorded, edited, and shared on social media. The campaign was a success as a lot of people came out seeking help on our mental health helpline. It is pertinent to mention that our volunteers, staff, and friends started a dialogue about the importance of mental health awareness.

Links, <https://youtu.be/sNzEd85byJM>, <https://youtu.be/ZXYsUTvikZQ>, <https://youtu.be/dQG5lzuS7xo>, <https://youtu.be/4CeZS8QJOaQ>, https://www.instagram.com/tv/CIGCCannikl/?utm_medium=copy_link, and https://www.instagram.com/tv/CID3NN_nMkm/?utm_medium=copy_link

UK Asian Film Wallahs

To create a sense of community and belonging **UK Asian Film Wallahs** club was setup. The club is free to join and we have 34 registered members. The club meets once a month to discuss an entertaining and socially relevant film on Zoom, which is free on OTT platforms to members of the club. The members discuss new titles and then choose a film to watch online. The discussion is hosted by film journalist Anuj Radia. The club usually ends up discussing important social and political issues in context of the film they had watched like women in films, Black Lives Matter, Me Too movement, LGBTQIA+ portrayal and various contemporary political issues.

In addition to regular monthly meetings during the covid times, the UKAFF organised special online screenings events followed by the Q&A session with the filmmakers to help them connect with audiences and to form a network of creative fraternity to help promote mental wellbeing. UKAFF screened **15 Park Ave** with special insights into Bollywood and its depiction of mental health by Professor Dinesh Bhugra CBE.

We also did a special screening of **Death in Bollywood, a BBC 3-part documentary** which detailed the alleged suicide of Jiah Khan (British Asian actress), the documentary was crucial as another death in suspicious circumstances of the infamous, young and popular Bollywood actor, Sushant Singh had also happened. The film opened dialogues about the lack of emotional and institutional support for artists in the industry.

Kathaa@8 was also screened online; which is the world's first feature film in eight Indian languages – Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu. It is the first anthology of its kind to be written, produced and directed by a single filmmaker – Shilpa Krishnan Shukla. What followed the screening was an online discussion, with all the cast and crew, on the insights and process of shooting the film during the Covid lockdown.

The UKAFF partnered with **The Bollywood Company** for live, audience interactions during lockdown over four **Drive-in Screenings** of contemporary classic and feel-good Indian cinema, **Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara** and **Ram Leela**. Sold out screenings took place at

Ponsbourne Park, The Drive, Newgate Street Village, Hertford SG13 8QT to enjoy the unique, outdoor cinematic experience.

Audiences had a chance to enjoy the modern, cult classic on the outdoor, big screen. The innovative, drive-in cinematic project, conceptualised met all social distancing requirements, with a venue capacity of 60 cars per day. Parking spaces were allocated on arrival at the venue. Soft drinks, cocktails, and snacks were served to the audiences. The evening commenced with a live DJ Welcome Set by **DJ Shraii**, BBC Asian Network presenter and Tour DJ for Arjun Artist and others.

During Covid times it was an entertaining and feel-good event where people came out to watch films while giving them a sense of normalcy returning around them.

Links, <https://youtu.be/r2uZ3Rnbz3E>, <https://youtu.be/dD4DsuAVUWM>, and <https://youtu.be/aR4I7bw26a4>

Online Mental Health Round Table Discussion

The event was organised to ***create an uplifting, safe space*** within which artists, particularly those who had suffered from mental health, can relate to the issues being discussed and feel safe to share their experiences. The discussion focused on ***highlighting the issues, pressures and challenges*** faced by South Asian artists and filmmakers, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact it has had on their creativity and mental health. The discussion also identified ***gaps in support structures*** in the industry for South Asian artists. We also explored through discussion with the health professionals what we and our communities can do to support the South Asian artists and filmmakers.

This round table discussion sparked and encouraged a constructive dialogue on the sensitive topic of shame and negative connotations attached to mental health issues. The discussion further stressed on the fact that no one size fits all, each individual is different and needs a different strategy to fight mental ill-health and be responsible for one's own mental wellbeing. The family and wider community network plays a crucial role in the physical and emotional support. It was emphasised how the mind and the body are interlinked, and its impact on each other.

The conference was hosted by UK Asian Film Festival Chairperson Rakhee Joshi. The panellists were **Dr Pushpinder Chowdhry MBE** (psychiatrist and Festival Director UKAFF), **Professor Dinesh Bhugra CBE** (psychiatrist, film enthusiast and writer of a book titled 'Mad Tales from Bollywood'), **Anuj Radia** (film journalist), **Dr Saman Khan** and **Dr Sadia Mohammed** (psychiatrists, jointly running a YouTube channel to discuss mental health issues in Pakistan television), **Mrunal Thakur** (Bollywood Actor and voiceover of Priya's Mask), **Nileeka Bose** (Bollywood Dancer and Choreographer), and **Aanika Bhalla** (Mathematics teacher).

Link, <https://youtu.be/vWyukd5arcl>

Talking Therapy

The UKAFF launched an initiative called ***Talking Therapy***, where therapists provided support service online. To access the therapy, the participants contacted the service by leaving a message with their contact details and their preferred time to be contacted. The therapists called the participants back within 24 hours. The service provided emotional support, signposting problems, advice and information with details of organisations and support available to individuals. The therapy further enabled the participants with a safe place to talk with therapists, while providing realistic options and offered help available to them.

Methodology

The UKAFF held 6 free confidential phone therapy sessions from Sept-Oct-Nov 2020 with trained and qualified counsellors. The support line helped all individuals suffering from various issues like bereavement, depression, anxiety, stress, worry, loneliness, domestic abuse, harassment etc.

The Talking Therapy counselling service worked in accordance with the ethical framework of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and offered time-limited counselling up to a maximum of 6 free sessions. Counsellors made brief notes, which do not contain names to maintain confidentiality, after each counselling session. These records would be retained securely for 7 years after the client's last appointment and then disposed of confidentially. Clients have a right of access to records containing personal data and requests received under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts are managed by Tongues on Fire Limited.

It was important for us to build an atmosphere of trust and safety for those seeking therapy or sharing their experiences so they were able to communicate in an honest and open way. The sessions were informal, flexible and non-directive in order to allow the participant to feel as comfortable as possible. We facilitated a 'way in' to the sessions by collecting personal data first, then proceeding with their personal matters. Most participants talked about what coronavirus meant for them and how it was affecting their mental health. The sessions were largely participant-directed although they were

encouraged to share their feelings towards their overall wellbeing.

We were exploring mental health by examining cultural and contemporary viewpoints. This was from Western and Asian perspectives as well as coping during the pandemic times. This included what life changes were imposed by the pandemic on society and especially the effects on the South Asian community.

Analysis

The Talking Therapy Helpline was carried out for 3 months. All the Participants who used our services identified as a people with large support networks made-up of family and friends. However, in most cases they lived on their own and with their nuclear families. They felt the pandemic highlighted feelings of isolation and loneliness. All the participants talked about depression at some point in their sessions. Even clients with a dysfunctional family or difficult friend dynamic, their physical separation was causing extreme depression. Almost all of them discussed depressive feelings, a small margin had suicidal thoughts.

They were all suffering from some degree of financial hardship ranging from unable to pay rent missing therapy sessions due to low credit on their mobile telephones which resulted in increased stress and anxiety. Participants were anxious about online job interviews, whilst one of the participants was depressed because of job loss. All these reasons drove some of the participants towards a nervous breakdown. Describing their sense of depression one participant said “the longer this pandemic goes on it increases a sense of closed in, a fear sets in as I see there is no end in sight and that’s when panic sets in and I feel very depressed.” We also managed to refer some serious cases to NHS for long term therapy. It was also seen that a lot of participants talked about wanting to start to practice and believe in their religion more than ever before, in order to help them cope and gain some sense of control, which was interesting.

It felt good to know they all appreciated this free, friendly and open therapy sessions. They enjoyed participating in the events offered to them as it provided them space to think through their issues.

Apart from anxiety and depression, anger was another common feeling that appeared. Some expressed anger towards their deprived

childhood and their parents neglects towards them. One participant felt angry at being isolated as they were unable to perform the traditional death rituals after their grandmother died in a care home during the pandemic. As a photographer, another participant talked about losing all their work including wedding, party and corporate contracts. All of their income was lost and there were no prospects for future bookings. The participant appreciated the much-needed support to talk through their anger.

The theme of grief had a strong presence, it was particularly difficult to identify these exact feelings as there was not one sole object of grief. Many were grieving loved ones and some were finding the uncertainty of the situation hard. There was no one single clear coping strategy as participants were mourning multiple losses simultaneously.

There was feeling of threat and fear expressed about the unknown. Some even talked about the metaphysical influence of all things evil, while others pointed fingers at China and blaming others for deliberately inflicting chaos on the world. They were all struggling to find inner strength to complete daily routine tasks.

In addition to enjoying the financial independence that comes with having a job, participants found working also improved their self-esteem and enjoyed being successful. The absence of this gave credence to an acute sense of failure. It stopped their natural progression and left them surrounded by all the negative emotions of unfulfilled future. There was an element of guilt and shame which gave rise to depression and despair. The lack of control over their work and social life with the restrictions made them feel abnormal. While in lockdown the confusion between the inner psyche and the physical restrictions for safety made them feel as if their body and mind are not in harmony. The continuous thoughts of being stuck and useless impacts their day-to-day functioning, leading to mental health concerns. The endless statistics of deaths, illness and spread of virus, the ever-changing rules and restrictions gives a continual sense of existing in a limbo.

During the pandemic social distancing became the norm to keep ourselves and others safe. For most of the participants space was a crucial divided between their personal inner space and the danger of the outdoors. Their inner space was filled with secrets, pain isolation

and sorrow while the constant threat of coronavirus plagued the outdoors. For some there was often a confusion between the inner world, the psyche and the functioning of their bodies presenting their issues as psychosomatic pains. Participants discussed their feelings of overwhelming with the ordinary house hold tasks having constant fear and the inability to be creative. All participants reported feeling vulnerable and unsafe throughout.

Conclusions

This report is aimed mainly at the South Asian participants in the arts, film and media. Although it is not a fully comprehensive overview but is a starting point of looking at the mental health issues in the creative community so we can address some of their needs.

The research has addressed and explored a number of issues of interest which are crucial to support good mental health. All the free events organised fed into **Talking Therapy sessions**. In addition, we had focused open-ended interviews with the participants and the staff members to get their views on their mental health and support they might need.

Subconsciously conditioned by religious mythology, culture and social practices the young South Asian participants have grown up with mainly western values. In these our understanding in assessing our findings made it clear there were common feelings of loss, isolation, anger, guilt and grief amongst the participants Almost all of them were in a state of shock and expressed total disbelief. Some were surprised to find life was spinning out of their control and felt all life decisions were not theirs to make.

‘Having the time and tools to develop personal creative potential can be profoundly fulfilling, while engaging in culture is often a route to inspiration and delight. Taken together, they can help us make sense of ourselves and of each other: they provoke and uplift us; they unite communities; and they bring us joy. If access to either creativity or culture is limited by where people come from or what they do, the whole of society loses out.’

- Arts Council

[Our Vision | Arts Council England](#)

Our study agrees with the WHO definition which continuously states ‘Unfortunately, the burden of mental health will continue to increase because of the pandemic, violence, conflict and natural disasters but other factors too. Therefore, there is an urgent need to take steps to prevent problems arising from mental ill-health and to respond effectively to them through proper interventions through primary care and mental health care services.’

- World Health Organization

[Promoting mental health](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

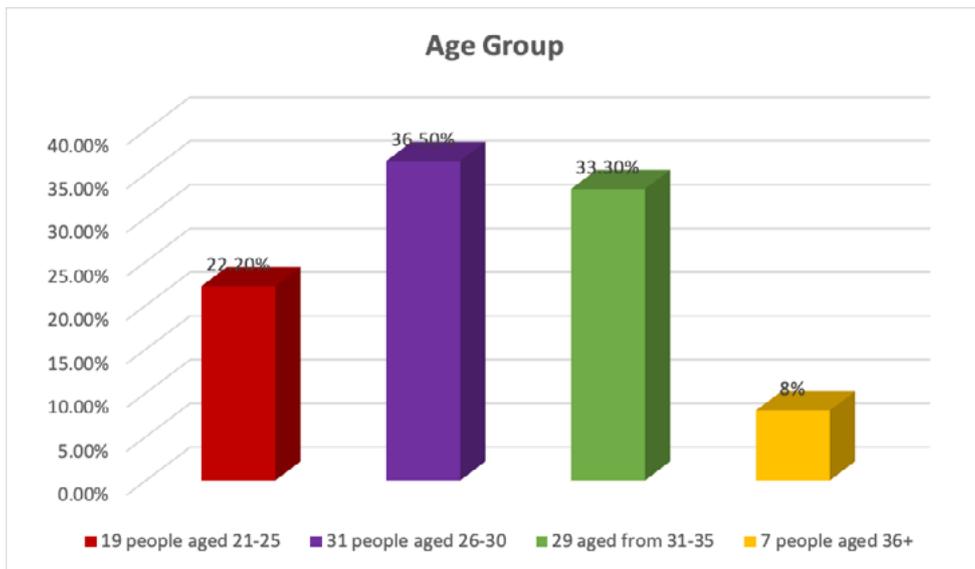
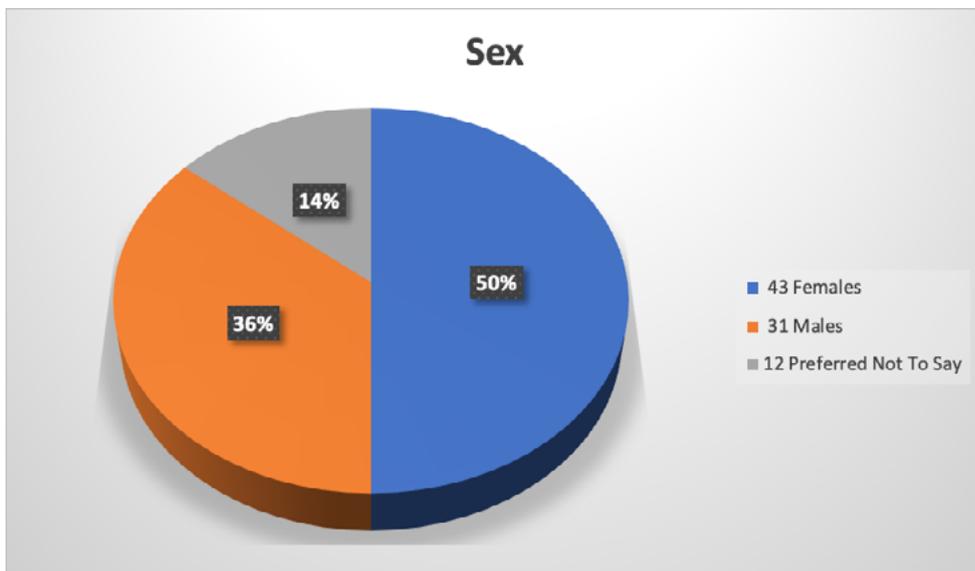
‘Investing in mental health should be a priority. The activities and projects needed are clear and possible. It is our responsibility to turn these possibilities into realities’

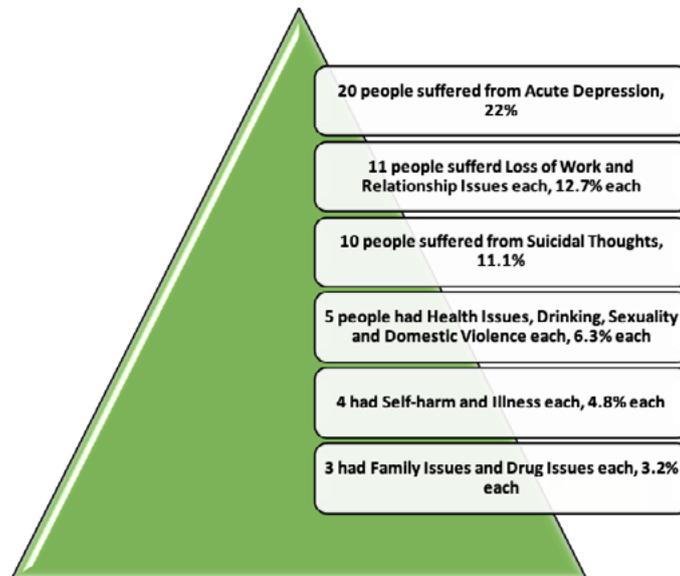
1. There is a special need for a support framework for South Asian artists in place to underpin their psychological well-being like Talking Therapy Helpline service, multi-lingual and culturally sensitive, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
2. We recommend having a culturally-focused, free support structure in place for South Asian artists as a ‘first point of contact’ service to talk safely in confidence about any issues and challenges regarding mental health. It is crucial to have a support service that is sensitive to cultural diversity of the client in order to understand and comprehend the situation and respond appropriately to their emotional needs.
3. The initiative of ‘social prescribing’ helps people to connect to community services and local groups to support their mental health, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/how-arts-can-help-improve-your-mental-health> . However, these activities need to be culturally relevant e.g., Hindi/Urdu poetry recitals, sing a longs, film screenings, Bollywood dance workshops that UKAFF organised, need to be part of wider well-being of support offered under social prescribing. These events create a space for social connection and interaction. We hope to work with local GPs and other health and social care professionals to offer the UKAFF’s festival events and other cultural activities for their South Asians referrals.
4. The mental health awareness should be a continuous process not just for Mental Health Awareness Day. Campaigns through films and arts activities, that are culturally relevant, can start a dialogue about mental health which can help in de-stigmatisation of mental health. These creative activities can explain mental well-being through audio-visuals without having to use words making it a powerful medium to spread the message.
5. There is an urgent need for more resources for culturally specific services and financially support already existing arts organisation who are recognising and addressing mental well-being through their work.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Total numbers of call:	86
Months:	Sept-Oct-Nov 2020
Total number of people reached out:	63
Total number of sessions offered:	378hrs
86 people had one assessment session:	86hrs
Total hrs of therapy hours offered including assessments offered:	401hrs
9 people were offered assessments not attended:	9 hrs





COMMON ISSUES AND EFFECTS



Appendix 2:

Practising art can be used to build capacity for managing mental and emotional well-being, writes Brittany Harker Martin, Werklund School of Education, in Conversation Canada.

Link: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/news/brain-research-shows-arts-promote-mental-health>

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TONGUES ON FIRE

Westbury House, 23-25 Bridge Street, Pinner, HA5 3HR

Tel: +44 20 8961 8908

info@tonguesonfire.com

www.tonguesonfire.com

Twitter: [@cometoukaff](https://twitter.com/cometoukaff)

Facebook/Instagram: [ukasianfilmfestival](#)

YouTube: [tonguesonfire](#)