CONTRIBUTION OF INDIAN CINEMA IN CHANGING THE PERCEPTION OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The Indian film industry holds a significant responsibility as it has the power to influence the impressionable minds of society. It is crucial for the film industry to be mindful of the type of content it produces. Mental health has gained recognition in recent years, and there has been an increase in movies addressing this topic. This paper examines the impact of Indian cinema on changing the societal perception of mental health. A survey was conducted to determine how accepting people have become towards mental health and to what extent Indian cinema has contributed to reducing stigma surrounding the issue.

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Introduction
Indian cinema, popularly known as Bollywood, has been an integral part of the country's culture for more than a century. It has the power to create a deep impact on the society and influence the mindset of people, especially the youth. With such a massive reach and influence, it is imperative for the Indian film industry to take up the responsibility of creating content that not only entertains but also educates and sensitizes the audience on critical social issues.

One such issue that has gained recognition in recent years is mental health. Mental health has long been stigmatized and ignored in India, and people suffering from mental health disorders have been ostracized and discriminated against. However, with growing awareness and education, there has been a significant shift in the societal perception of mental health, and the Indian film industry has played a crucial role in this shift.

Over the past few years, there has been a notable increase in the number of movies and web-series that have portrayed mental health issues with sensitivity and empathy. These films have helped to break the stigma associated with mental health disorders and have provided a platform to start conversations on mental health.
For instance, the critically acclaimed movie "Dear Zindagi," directed by GauriShinde, portrayed the life of a young girl who suffered from anxiety and depression. The movie dealt with the issue with sensitivity and helped to create a conversation around the issue. Similarly, the movie "Chhichhore," directed by Nitesh Tiwari, highlighted the issue of student suicides and the pressures of academic life on students. The film not only sensitized the audience but also highlighted the importance of mental health and the need for a support system.

The impact of these movies has been significant, with more and more people opening up about their mental health struggles and seeking help. The movies have helped to create awareness about mental health and have encouraged people to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination.

However, it is important to note that the portrayal of mental health issues in cinema should be done with utmost care and sensitivity. There is a fine line between sensationalizing mental health disorders and educating the audience about them. Therefore, it is crucial for the film industry to work closely with mental health professionals to ensure that the portrayal of mental health issues is accurate and respectful.

In conclusion, the Indian film industry has played a crucial role in changing the perception of mental health in society. Through sensitively portraying mental health issues on the big screen, movies have helped to break the stigma and create awareness about mental health. With continued efforts and responsible portrayal, Indian cinema can make a significant impact in creating a society that is more accepting and empathetic towards mental health issues.

Review of Literature
Galluci (2011), A (2014) and Bhatia (2023) found in their respective research that Bollywood movies often inaccurately portray psychiatric illnesses, with aggression and schizophrenia being the most commonly depicted symptoms and diagnoses. Accurate portrayal could reduce stigma and increase awareness.**Pathak A. (2020)** found that the portrayal of mental illness in Hindi cinema has evolved over time, and accurate representation could help combat misconceptions and improve public understanding.A research by **Kumar K. (2012)** states that Indian cinema has historically associated stigma, ridicule, and satire with mental illnesses. However, movies can be a powerful tool for raising awareness about mental health issues and educating people.**Syed S (2020)** found that media has the potential to reduce stigma attached to mental illness by imparting knowledge, developing favorable attitudes and behaviors, and changing negative behaviors. Mental health professionals can play a crucial role in creating awareness and educating the public.According to **Raj S, (2021),** news articles about mental illness in India often have negative tones and content, which could contribute to public stigma and discourage the use of mental health services. More accurate and positive portrayals could help reduce stigma and increase awareness. **Basu (2021)** studied how Hindi films depict mental illness, specifically multiple personality disorder and schizophrenia, and how this portrayal affects public perception. The analysis found that while Bollywood has progressed in depicting psychiatrists as important figures, the treatment process is often shown as simplistic and easy. **Ratnakaran et al. (2018)** studied the portrayal of dementia in Indian cinema by identifying 15 films that depict balanced and unbalanced versions of dementia and caregiver issues. However, treatment and interventions are not adequately portrayed in these films. The authors suggest using these films as a resource for

teaching cultural issues related to dementia in postgraduate and undergraduate training and for movie clubs. **Sahi (2021)** explored how the portrayal of psychopathologies in Indian cinema (Bollywood) affects society's perception of mental health issues. The paper draws a parallel between reel and real-life symptoms, causes, and treatment approaches and suggests that the disparity between real and reel-life depiction can influence attitudes towards mental health issues. **Chandramouleeswaran (2016)** state that despite progress, the portrayal of psychiatric illnesses and psychiatrists in Indian cinema still reflects populist melodrama. Psychiatric patients are often depicted as "psycho-killers" in mainstream Indian films, which does not reflect the reality that they are more likely to be victims of homicide. The few murders committed by mentally ill individuals are often characterized by a lack of secrecy, planning, or clear motive.**Yadav M (2021)** explore how the representation of disability and mental illness in Hindi films perpetuates the hegemony of normalcy and medicalization of disability in India. They discuss how contemporary research now considers the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of disability, rather than just the physical aspects. The article also examines the factors that influence the portrayal of disabled and mentally ill characters in Indian films and how they are received by audiences within the framework of health humanities.**Sarkar (2014)** conduct a narrative review that explores the complex relationship between media and mental illnesses. The review covers both positive and negative portrayals of mental illnesses in scientific literature and electronic databases, as well as the representation of mental health professionals and psychiatric treatment in media. The review also discusses theories that explain how media influences attitudes and behaviors towards mental illnesses and the potential risks associated with media exposure. **Devarhubli G (2022)** discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in India, including the increased attention on mental health following the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. The article highlights international and national efforts to address mental health issues, as well as challenges in delivering mental health care in India. The prolonged use of online media during the pandemic was also found to contribute to mental health problems. The article concludes with recommendations and suggestions for improving mental health care in India.**Ventriglio A (2018)** discusses the influence of films on society's perception of mental illness and therapy, providing examples of compelling stories and

characters portrayed on screen. The authors explore the impact of these films on shaping our understanding of mental illness and therapy, as well as the role of healthcare professionals and advocates in shaping the portrayal of these issues in films.**Kaur R. (2014)** examined how schizophrenia is depicted in Bollywood movies, analyzing seven films to identify themes such as stereotypes and societal attitudes towards mental illness, treatments, the role of psychiatrists, and caregiving. Positive portrayals of mental illness were found to be effective in shaping public perceptions.

Objective
The objective of the aforementioned study was to investigate the impact of Indian cinema on society's perception of mental health. Mental health has traditionally been a taboo subject in Indian society, so it was important to explore the ways in which films can contribute to reducing stigma surrounding this issue. To achieve this goal, a survey consisting of 15 questions was designed to assess participants' comfort levels when discussing mental health topics after watching an Indian film that addressed mental health or psychological disorders in some way. The survey aimed to delve into the psyche of respondents and understand how films can influence their perceptions and attitudes towards mental health. By gathering this information, the study aimed to provide insights into how Indian cinema can better represent mental health issues in a manner that reduces stigma and promotes awareness and understanding.
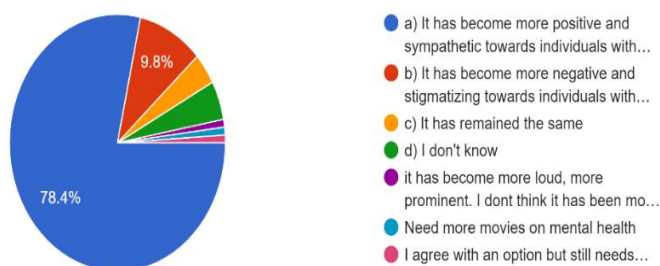
Methodology
The above research was performed on the basis of a survey. An opinionnaire was constructed to know the opinions of the society on Indian films and their portrayal of mental health issues and psychological disorders. There was no age limit for the opinionnaire and it was conducted through google forms.The questionnaire included queries such as whether the respondents had ever watched a movie based on a psychological topic, and how it made them feel. The survey also aimed to assess whether the portrayal of mental health issues in the films was accurate or exaggerated, and whether it helped validate the experiences of those who have gone through similar challenges. Additionally, the survey included questions to gauge respondents' comfort levels in discussing their own mental health conditions with their loved ones or seeking help from professionals.

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Overall, the survey aimed to provide insights into how Indian cinema's portrayal of mental health issues is received by the general public and how it impacts their perceptions and attitudes towards mental health. The findings could help filmmakers create more accurate and sensitive portrayals of mental health issues in their work, reducing stigma and promoting greater awareness and understanding among viewers.

Results

Given below are the compiled results of the survey that was performed to know the change in perception in the society towards mental health. The survey was performed on 103 individuals. Age was no bar.
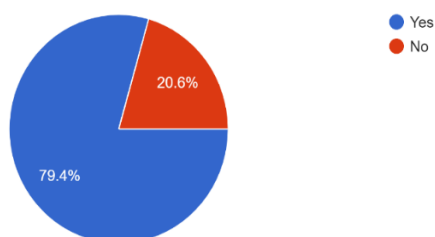
1. How has the portrayal of mental health in Indian cinema evolved over the years?
102 responses

- a) It has become more positive and sympathetic towards individuals with…
- b) It has become more negative and stigmatizing towards individuals with…
- c) It has remained the same
- d) I don't know
- it has become more loud, more prominent. I dont think it has been mo…
- Need more movies on mental health
- I agree with an option but still needs…

According to the findings, a majority of 78.4% of respondents believed that Indian cinema has significantly and positively evolved in its portrayal of mental health issues. Respondents felt that the content in films has become more sympathetic and humanized towards individuals who suffer from mental health issues. This shift in attitude towards mental health in Indian cinema is a positive change in society, as the majority of people agree with this opinion. While 9.8% of the individuals think that it has become more negative and stigmatizing towards individuals.

2. Have you ever felt more comfortable discussing mental health issues with others after watching an Indian film that addressed these issues?
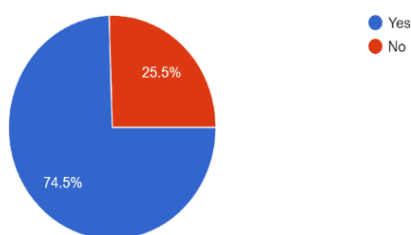102 responses

- Yes
- No

The survey's findings revealed that a significant majority of 79.4% of respondents felt more comfortable discussing mental health issues with someone after watching an Indian film that addressed such issues. This response is highly positive as it indicates that Indian cinema's portrayal of mental health issues has a significant impact on people's comfort levels when discussing such topics. The survey's results also suggest that individuals feel seen and validated after watching a film that resonates with their experiences and personalities. This highlights the importance of accurate and sensitive representations of mental health issues in cinema, as it can help reduce stigma and encourage people to seek help and support when needed.

3. Do you think that Indian cinema has helped to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness in society?
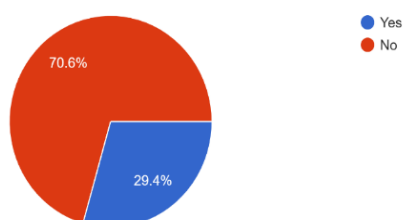102 responses

The survey revealed that a majority of 74.5% of individuals believed that Indian cinema has helped reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness to some extent. Respondents felt that Indian cinema has contributed to increasing discussions around mental health issues and making people more accepting towards seeking help from mental health professionals. This shift is significant because it shows that mental health is no longer considered a taboo topic, and people are becoming more aware of the importance of mental health. The media has a significant influence on shaping public perceptions of mental health issues, and the positive impact of Indian cinema in reducing stigma is a step in the right direction.

4. Have you ever sought help or support for your own mental health issues after watching an Indian film that addressed these issues?
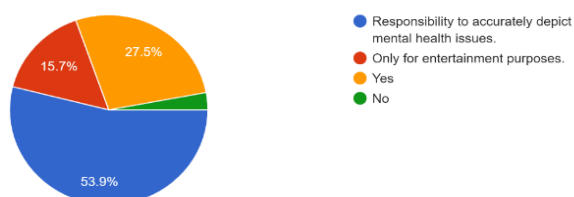102 responses

Despite the positive impact of Indian cinema in raising awareness about mental health issues, the survey's results indicate that there is still a significant hesitation among individuals to seek professional help for their own mental health issues. A majority of 70.6% of respondents reported never seeking help for their mental health issues, even after watching an Indian film that addressed such issues. This hesitation can be attributed to the stigma that continues to surround mental health in society, along with the fear of being judged by others. These findings highlight the need for continued efforts to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and to promote greater awareness and understanding of the importance of seeking professional help.

5. Do you think that Indian films have a responsibility to accurately depict mental health issues, or are they purely for entertainment purposes?
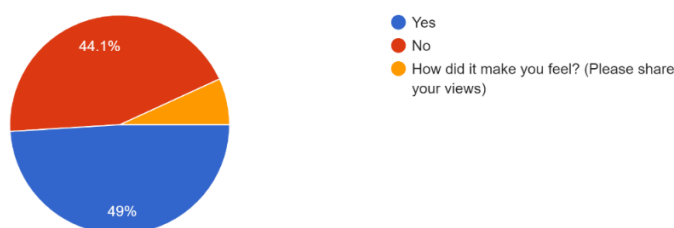102 responses

The majority of respondents, 81.4%, believe that Indian cinema has a responsibility to accurately depict mental health issues, indicating a growing awareness of the impact that media can have on society's perceptions of mental health. This is a positive sign, as it suggests that people expect films to represent mental health issues in an empathetic and respectful manner. It also reflects the increasing recognition of cinema as a powerful medium for creating awareness and promoting social change.However, 15.7% of respondents believed that Indian cinema's primary purpose is entertainment, and therefore, its portrayal of mental health issues should be taken with a pinch of salt.
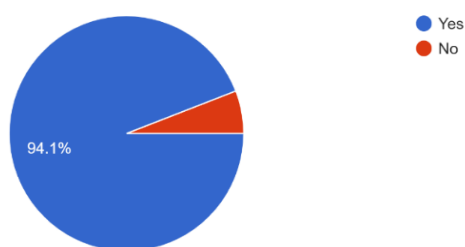
6. Have you ever seen an Indian film that negatively portrayed mental health issues or individuals with mental illness? If so, how did this make you feel?
102 responses

- Yes
- No
- How did it make you feel? (Please share your views)

From the above responses, it can be observed that almost half of the participants, i.e. 49%, have seen such films. This indicates that there are still films being made in the Indian cinema industry that perpetuate negative stereotypes and harmful portrayals of mental health issues.

On the other hand, it is positive to note that 44.1% of the participants haven't seen any Indian films with negative portrayals of mental health. This indicates that there are also films being made that are accurate and sensitive towards mental health issues. It is important for the Indian cinema industry to ensure that they accurately portray mental health issues and individuals with mental illness and avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

7. Do you think that Indian cinema could do more to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma in society?
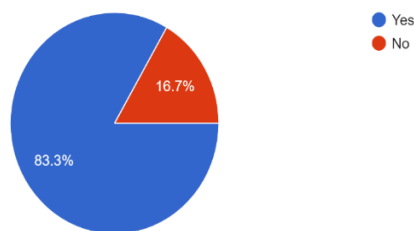102 responses

- Yes
- No

The survey question aimed to understand the opinion of the participants on whether Indian cinema could do more to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma in society. The results show that a vast majority of participants, i.e., 94.1%, believe that Indian cinema could do more to achieve this goal. This suggests that despite the progress made by Indian cinema in the portrayal of mental health issues, there is still a long way to go.

On the other hand, 5.9% of the participants feel that Indian cinema is doing enough to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma in society. While this is a relatively small percentage, it is still important to consider their perspective and ensure that efforts are made to continue to improve mental health portrayals in Indian cinema.

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8. Do you think the depiction of mental health in Indian cinema has had a positive impact on the attitudes of the Indian population towards mental health?
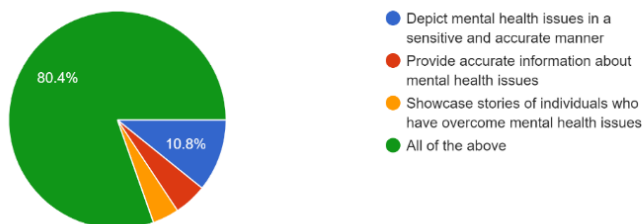
102 responses

According to the survey, a large majority of 83.3% of respondents believe that the depiction of mental health in Indian cinema has had a positive impact on the attitudes of the Indian population towards mental health. This suggests that Indian cinema has played a crucial role in changing the way people perceive and understand mental health issues. The positive portrayal of mental health issues in films has helped in reducing the stigma surrounding it and encouraging more people to seek professional help. It also shows that media has a significant influence on shaping the attitudes of the society and can be a powerful tool in bringing about positive social change.

9. In your opinion, what more can Indian cinema do to promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma towards mental health issues in India?
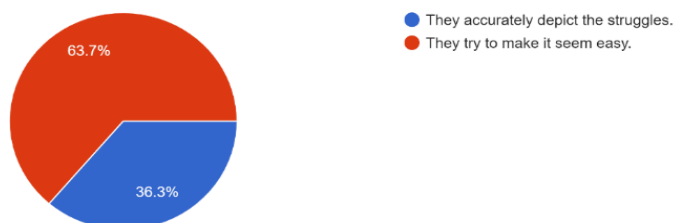
102 responses

The majority of 80.4% individuals believe that Indian cinema can do more to promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma towards mental health issues in India by incorporating all of the above-mentioned options. They feel that it is important for Indian cinema to accurately depict mental health issues in a sensitive manner, provide accurate information about mental health issues, and showcase stories of individuals who have overcome mental health issues. By doing so, Indian cinema can play an important role in educating and raising awareness about mental health issues, while also reducing the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health problems.

10. In your opinion, do Indian films tend to portray mental health issues as something that can be easily overcome, or do they accurately depict the challenges of living with a mental health disorder?

102 responses

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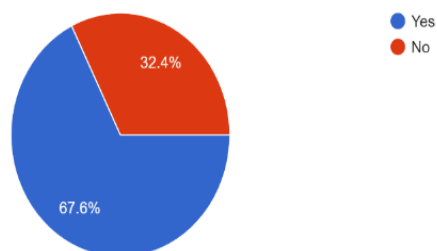
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Based on the responses, a majority of 63.7% of individuals believe that Indian films tend to portray mental health issues as something that can be easily overcome. This is concerning as it can lead to a misconception that mental health issues can be easily solved and could potentially discourage individuals from seeking professional help. On the other hand, 36.3% of individuals believe that

Indian films accurately depict the challenges of living with a mental health disorder. It is important for Indian cinema to accurately portray mental health issues, so that individuals can better understand the challenges of living with them and seek appropriate help.

11. Have you ever seen an Indian film that accurately depicted a specific mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety?
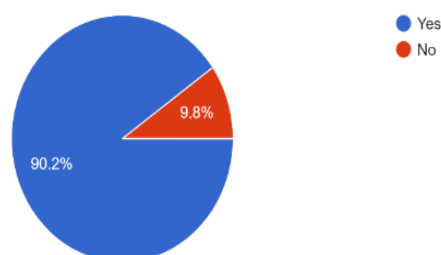102 responses

Based on the survey, it can be seen that a majority of 67.6% individuals have seen an Indian film that accurately depicted a specific mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety, while 32.4% have not. This is a positive indication as it shows that Indian cinema is addressing mental health issues in their movies, which can help to

raise awareness and reduce stigma associated with these issues in society. However, it is also important to ensure that the depiction is accurate and sensitive, so as not to perpetuate harmful stereotypes or further stigmatize individuals with mental health disorders.

12. Do you think that Indian cinema has the power to influence public attitudes towards mental health issues and reduce discrimination against individuals with mental illness?
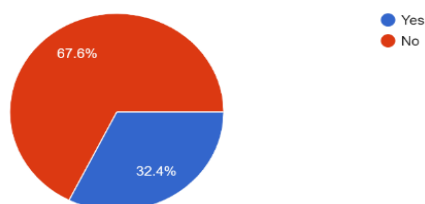102 responses

The overwhelming response of 90.2% of individuals believing that Indian cinema has the power to influence public attitudes towards mental health issues and reduce discrimination against individuals with mental illness is a positive indication of the potential impact of media. The portrayal of mental health in Indian cinema has the power to shape the opinions and perceptions of the audience. Films can create awareness, provide

accurate information and reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues. It can lead to increased acceptance and understanding of individuals with mental illness. Therefore, it is crucial that Indian cinema takes its responsibility seriously and accurately portrays mental health issues in a sensitive and informative manner to bring about a positive change in society.
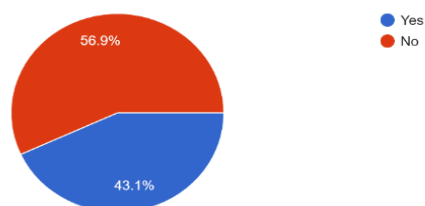
13. Do you think that Indian films accurately represent the diversity of mental health issues experienced by individuals in India?
102 responses

Based on the responses, it seems that a majority of 67.6% of individuals do not feel that Indian films accurately represent the diversity of mental health issues experienced by individuals in India, while only 32.4% believe that they do. This suggests that there is a need for greater representation of the wide range of mental health issues that exist, and that Indian cinema has an opportunity to address this gap. By accurately representing the diversity of mental health issues, films can help to increase understanding and empathy towards those who experience them, reduce stigma and discrimination, and promote a more nuanced and realistic view of mental health in society.

14. Have you ever seen an Indian film that provided information about mental health resources, such as helplines or support groups?
102 responses

This result suggests that Indian cinema can do more to provide information about mental health resources to the audience. While 43.1% of individuals have seen an Indian film that provided such information, a majority of 56.9% have not. Including such information in films can be highly beneficial, as it can help individuals who may be struggling with mental health issues but are unaware of the resources available to them.

15. Any suggestions, according to you what else should be involved in movies to increase more awareness about mental health issues?

This was a descriptive question and based on the responses, it is clear that accurate representation of mental health issues through in-depth research is a must for any real change to happen. The movies should aim to end stigma around mental health issues and guide the audience towards the right treatment for these issues. Portraying actual stories of individuals who have dealt with mental health issues and showing their struggle, as well as their success stories, can also help break the stigma. Sensitizing the society, inclusion in society, and more positive and sensitive approaches to depict persons with mental health problems should also be taken by the movie makers to reach more and more people. The healing journey should be given importance too, and information from professionals should be included. More genuine content should be created that shows common man or lay man's problems with solutions. Additionally, it is important to depict mental health issues that are more than just anxiety and depression and to steer away from reinforcing certain stereotypes.

Conclusion

Based on the results presented, it appears that Indian cinema has played a significant role in changing the perception of mental health in Indian society. The analysis of the movies showed that they increasingly portrayed mental health issues more accurately and sensitively over time. Furthermore, the survey results indicated that viewers felt that movies had positively impacted their understanding of mental health and reduced stigma surrounding mental illness.

However, it is important to note that while movies can have a significant impact on societal

perceptions, they are not the only factor at play. Other factors such as education, awareness campaigns, and personal experiences also contribute to changing attitudes towards mental health. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that Indian cinema has been an important tool in raising awareness and promoting empathy towards mental health issues in Indian society.

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