

Milkar, Aao Baat Karein

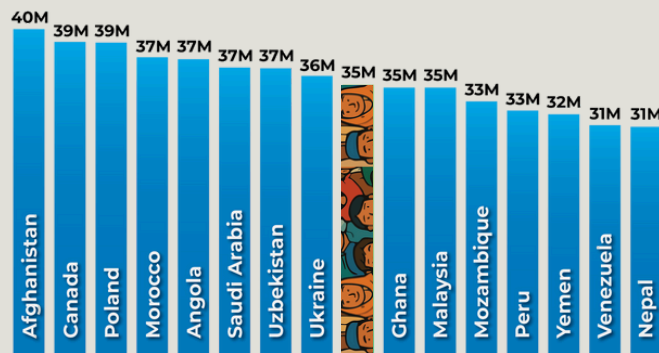
Driving change in mental health across Pakistan



BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organisation, one in four Pakistani adults will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime.

This means that the number of Pakistani adults with mental health issues is comparable to the entire population of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, Malaysia and Yemen.



As per the American Psychiatric Association, there should be one psychiatrist per 10,000 people, whereas in Pakistan, it stands at one per 270,000 people



A staggering 90% of Pakistanis with mental health issues are unable to get the support they need

Launched in October 2024, Milkar is Pakistan's first national mass media campaign for mental health awareness by the British Asian Trust in partnership with the Mir Khalil ur Rahman Foundation (MKRF). The campaign is being disseminated through the largest media network in Pakistan, the Geo/Jang group and supported by the Pakistan Mental Health Coalition (PMHC).

CAMPAIGN OUTCOMES

The Milkar campaign seeks the following outcomes in the general population of Pakistan

- Improved mental health awareness and literacy (Knowledge)
- Improved empathy and attitudes demonstrated towards mental health (Attitude)
- Increased uptake of practices for sustainable wellbeing and mental health (Behaviour)

OUR APPROACH TO MEASURING RESULTS

Milkar is built on the belief that powerful, targeted media can shift mindsets, reduce stigma and promote mental wellbeing. To test this, Gallup Pakistan is leading nationwide data collection throughout the campaign to measure its reach, relevance and effectiveness. A baseline, midline and endline survey is planned to enable us to measure and track results throughout the year.

A culturally adapted survey, utilising global tools was developed and 1,353 adults (weighted for gender, age, income, education and region using the 2023 Census and Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement data) were surveyed using Random Digit Dialling (RDD) across Pakistan.

This summary presents key insights from the Baseline Evaluation, which assessed public knowledge, attitudes and behaviours before the campaign launch.

Total sample size at baseline: 1,353

Gender: 49% women, 51% men

Location: 64% rural, 36% urban




Provinces: Punjab (53%), Sindh (22%), KP (17%), Balochistan (6%), AJK (2%), GB (1%)

Income: 31% households earning under Rs. 22,000/month

KNOWLEDGE

Overall, the survey found low levels of knowledge about mental health, causes, signs, symptoms and services.

Understanding of mental health

- 24%  Correctly identified mental health
- 25%  Related mental health to financial stability
- 41%  Didn't know which professionals can prescribe medication

Despite growing conversations, basic understanding of mental health remains low across Pakistan.

Indicators

- 59%  Emotional symptoms (sadness, anxiety, crying, etc.)






People mostly identify emotional signs but fewer were aware of physical signs like changes in sleep, appetite, or energy.

What else can affect mental health

- 14%  Recognised relationships or support networks as determinants

Cultural and social influences on mental health are often overlooked despite their known impact.

Causes of mental health issues

- 37%  Behavioural causes (e.g. habits)
- 36%  Environmental factors (e.g. poverty)
- 11%  Biological/genetic causes
- 21%  Early life experiences
- 17%  Don't know

Most people associate mental health with external or behavioural factors, overlooking biological roots.

Getting support

- 26%  Mental health helplines
- 40%  Visiting psychiatrists
- 47%  Hospital-based services

People do not know how to access mental health services—especially in rural areas and among less literate populations.

ATTITUDES

Mental health perceptions in Pakistan reveal a mix of stigma, empathy and gaps in professional understanding—shaped by gender, education and culture.

Stigma related to mental health issues runs deep in Pakistan

Public perspective of people with mental health issues

42%

Think they can't lead a functional life

70%

Associate it with weakness or danger

Lived experience of mental health issues

63%

Felt judgement from others

59%

Told they were 'overreacting'

Gender matters

- Women report less comfort seeking professional help
- Cultural stigma, societal roles and limited access create gender-specific barriers



Education shapes attitudes

- Higher education correlates with more positive perceptions
- Educational interventions, such as school programmes and community awareness sessions, can play a powerful role in shifting mindsets in rural areas

Despite the stigma, there are positive attitudes towards mental health too.



92% Pakistanis agree we need to adopt a more tolerant attitude towards people with mental health issues

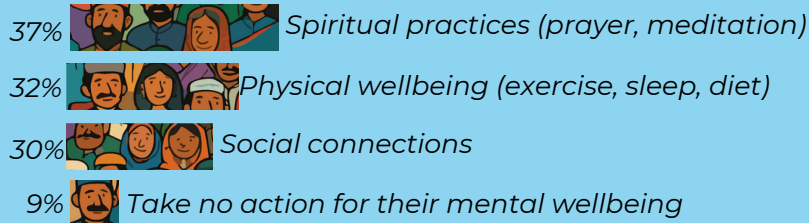


59% believe in the effectiveness of therapy and self-care

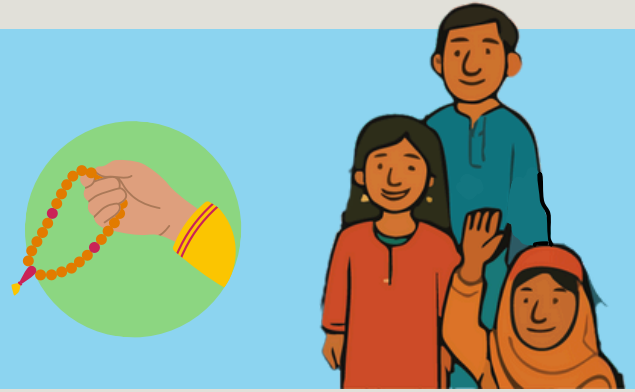
BEHAVIOURS

Pakistanis are open to mental wellbeing, yet few turn to formal care - spirituality and self-help take precedence over clinical support.

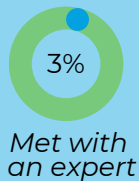
Informal coping strategies dominate



Due to various reasons, people do not seek out expert support

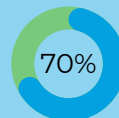


Getting help

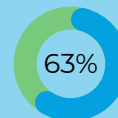


Only 3% had sought professional help in the last six months. Everyone else had relied on informal coping strategies

Public's positive intentions for the future



Would live with a family member with a mental health issue



Open to relationships with individuals facing mental health issues



Would work with someone with mental health issues

There are encouraging signs of acceptance with no major gender gaps, but higher education consistently boosts positive attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Mental health awareness is growing in Pakistan, but critical gaps remain and stigma and misunderstandings persist. People in Pakistan are turning to positive coping strategies to manage their mental health, however only a few are seeking professional support.

Milkar, our awareness raising media campaign, will reach its midway point in June 2025 and finish in February 2026.



If you or someone you know is struggling, help is available:

- Sindh Integrated Emergency & Health Services: 1123
- Taskeen Pakistan: 03168275336

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