

# Interdisciplinary research project on stigma of homeless women with mental illness in South India

## Introduction

Homeless, mentally ill women in India face **stigmatisation** from society and their families. Many are unable to return home and face **unemployment, violence and discrimination**. Accessing treatment is difficult for most, but the Banyan, a mental health NGO based in Chennai work to address this by providing long term support and **treatment** in a **holistic** community environment.

## Aims & Objectives

- Analyse the impact of stigma on homeless mentally ill women in India
- Test the hypothesis that industrialisation leads to worsening of stigma
- Contribute to policy change in public mental health in India
- Develop a research collaboration between partners at UCL and the Banyan-BALM, an NGO in Chennai, India
- Support local researchers in developing new skills in qualitative methods, including ethnographic fieldwork

## Activities

- Phase I: Conduct a brief clinical ethnography, including in depth interviews, with homeless women living in a 'Protected Community' setting at the Banyan, Chennai, South India. June 2011-December 2011
- Phase II: Interview stratified randomised sample of a matched rural and urban population in Tamil Nadu, South India, using newly developed 24 item Stigma Questionnaire (n=245) to test the industrialisation hypothesis. Analysis and results expected to be completed by October 2012



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★ Chennai, Study site



Protected community, Banyan, Chennai

## Outputs & Impacts

- Ethnographic paper submitted to 'Teaching Anthropology', a peer reviewed journal, Royal Anthropological Institute, UK. Quantitative findings to be submitted for publication by December 2012
- Results from the on going study have enhanced teaching content of the UCL/BALM short courses in social science and cultural psychiatry, with a planned course on **Stigma** in Nov 2013
- Poster & Talk at CALT symposium, UCL, 2011, on teaching & research collaboration
- Further successful research-teaching grant applications to develop a joint international teaching/research programme with UCL-TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences)-BALM partners

## Conclusions

- The language of stigma becomes transformed from local idioms into a psychologized or 'medicalised' terminology, & to a human rights/advocacy discourse learnt at the Banyan
- Priorities for these homeless women are located in security, support, access to families, if not full return
- Self-esteem and confidence came through useful employment - paid or voluntary, and opportunities for developing and integrating within new communities
- The ethnographic study generates important questions to further examine the stigma of homelessness as conceptually distinct yet overlapping with stigma of mental illness

