

Travellers' diarrhoea among tourists in PakistanAbdul Thawwab Ishaque¹, Abdul Raheem Rizvie², Muhammed Ifham Imtiyas³**Madam,**

Travellers' diarrhoea (TD) emerges as a significant health concern, especially within the South Asian region, which reports the highest Reporting Rate Ratios (RRR)¹. Making things even worse, the prolonged summer season in the region amplifies the frequency of reported TD cases, exacerbating the overall scenario². Notably, travellers to low-income countries exhibit a RRR 150.9 times higher than travellers to high-income countries¹. Pakistan is no exception, experiencing many TD cases and potential complications among tourists. However, the recent surge in popularity witnessed over 960 million tourists engaging in international travel during 2022, which paves the path for a rise in TD incidence³.

Existing prevention and management approaches are constrained and primarily reliant on individual understanding and behaviours. Although travel advisories offer fundamental precautions, a dearth of all-encompassing guidance adapted to the distinct hurdles tourists encounter persists. Furthermore, Pakistan's scarcity of resources positions it as the 3rd ranked country worldwide facing water shortage and sanitation challenges. Consequently, numerous travellers find themselves inadequately prepared to confront these risks. It becomes apparent that a more methodical and precise strategy is imperative to educate and empower tourists, offering them pragmatic tactics to diminish their vulnerability to TD.

Governments, tourism boards, and international organisations should collaborate on culturally tailored education about TD and prevention methods. This can be delivered through workshops, online resources, and

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Submission complete: 19-09-2023 **Review began:** 22-10-2023

Acceptance: 28-03-2024 **Review end:** 09-03-2024

Authors' Contribution:

ATI: Collection, concept, drafting.

ARR: Revision, corrections, drafting.

campaigns, empowering travellers to make informed decisions. Secure dining areas with hygiene certifications adhering to food safety standards, which should be continuously monitored by the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) is required to reduce health risks and improve travel experiences. Using mobile apps to empower travellers with informed choices, preventing hazard navigation related to hygiene, quality, pathogens such as *Escherichia coli*, *Campylobacter jejuni* etc. and high-risk assessment will provide a safer environment for foreigners. Continuous research should be promoted to manage strategies for evolving challenges and to find cheap and sustainable alternatives. Providing arrival information will equip travellers with prevention and management strategies for self-care. Multimedia campaigns in various languages should be initiated to educate communities and tourists, fostering hygiene commitment for safer travels. Encouraging tourists to get travel vaccinations will reduce the risk of TD for visitors in Pakistan. In conclusion, by implementing these strategies, we strive to ensure the well-being of foreigners and contribute to the broader goal of a healthier and safer tourism environment in Pakistan.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.10830>

Disclaimer: None to declare.

Conflict of Interest: None to declare.

Source of Funding: None to declare.

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MII: Checked for plagiarism, revision, drafting, final approval.

Addressing the stigma of bipolar disorder in Pakistan: A matter of public health importance

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Madam,

Bipolar disorder is a serious psychiatric illness and affects about 2% of the world's population¹. The disease burden of bipolar disorder is particularly high in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where access to adequate mental health care is often limited. It is marked by recurring manic and depressive episodes, profoundly affecting an individual's mood, energy levels and overall functioning. This condition is linked to elevated rates of morbidity, mortality, disability and social stigma.

The undermining of bipolar disorder as a mental illness in Pakistan is a complex issue with a variety of contributing factors. Many people in Pakistan are unaware of this disorder or do not understand its symptoms and impact, which can lead to people with bipolar disorder being stigmatized and discriminated against. Stigmatization of mental illness in the broader context acts as a significant barrier, impeding individuals from actively seeking medical intervention, thereby preventing the timely diagnosis of these conditions. A widely held belief (85%) is that the individual should refrain from disclosing and discussing their condition². Moreover, greater negative attitudes were observed towards bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses (higher mean SDS scores) as compared to physical illnesses in Pakistan³. The stigma often extends to the individual's family/caretakers and can affect them at numerous levels as well⁴.

In nations such as Pakistan, the insufficiency of mental health accessibility, particularly in rural locales, constitutes a substantial impediment to individuals seeking assistance for bipolar disorder. The dearth of adequately trained healthcare personnel and suitable facilities represents a primary contributory factor in the underestimation of bipolar disorder as a serious mental health condition. For a group of 3,60,000 people, Pakistan

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Submission complete: 27-10-2023

Review began: 06-03-2024

Acceptance: 20-06-2024

Review end: 15-06-2024

has only 1 psychiatrist⁵. Neglecting Bipolar Disorder on national grounds can lead to a significant increment in its related complications as it contributes to higher estimated risks of completed and attempted suicides, migraine, sleep deprivation and increased risk of obstetric complications⁶.

It is essential to invest in public education for raising awareness and reducing stigma around bipolar disorder. Increasing workforce of mental health practitioners is also vital to lessen population burden. One way to achieve it is to introduce two-year programme to ensure feasibility for individuals to pursue a career in psychiatry. Substantial research in this aspect would exponentially improve the lives of people affected with the bipolar disorders and alleviate the burden of bipolar disorder in Pakistan.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.11155>

Disclaimer: None.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Source of Funding: None.

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Authors' Contribution:

MI: Research, design, drafting and editing.

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assembling the data and drafting.

AH: Supplementing the manuscript quality, editing, references and suggestions.