



## **Gender Differentials in Health Seeking Behaviour and Perceived Stigma among Leprosy Patients: A Study in West Bengal**

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**KEYWORDS** Anticipated-Stigma. Internalized-Stigma. Self-esteem. Social Participation. Socio-economic Status

**ABSTRACT** The present paper aimed to examine perceived stigma, internalised stigma, self-esteem and social participation of leprosy patients and impact of gender roles on their health seeking behaviour. It is a primary survey based study on 262 (55 women; 207 men) leprosy patients aged 18 - 75 years who visited School of Tropical Medicine and Leprosy Mission of Kolkata. Apart from descriptive statistics, multinomial regression analysis was conducted on collected data. Results show that stigma had an impact on the lives of leprosy patients. Age was positively correlated with stigma, self-esteem and participation restriction of leprosy patients. Odd ratios showed that women patients faced greater stigma, which further lowered their self-esteem and social participation. Further duration of illness and visible deformity impaired patients' self-esteem and social participation. Patients from lower income groups and lower caste experienced lower self-esteem and more participation-restrictions vis-à-vis the more privileged. Rural patients experienced greater stigma and social restrictions; and lower self-esteem than urban ones. Regular patient-counselling and raising public awareness about leprosy are recommended.