



Uniformed Forces and Mental Health

For Mains: Mental Health Issues in the Uniformed Forces, Government Policies & Interventions

Why in News?

The **government needs to take immediate action** to address mental health issues in the uniformed services.

What are the Reasons for the Prevalence of Mental Health Issues in the Uniformed Forces?

- **Tightly Structured Hierarchy:**
 - Uniformed forces are **tightly structured** with a command-and-control hierarchy system.
 - A **senior officer is the reporting authority for his immediate junior** and this junior has to fulfil their tasks with manpower under his/her command.
 - The **hierarchy is rarely breached** and the system ensures discipline, clarity of roles and accountability.
 - However, **it tends to become inhuman**, especially to those who cannot communicate their personal issues in an appropriate forum.
- **Stress is not Addressed:**
 - Uniformed forces showing signs of **mental stress** are not given enough attention.
 - Those who **express the problem are termed as weak** and are seen as shying away from the rigours of life.
 - In a uniformed setup, **subordinate staff do not want to appear weak** as the “macho man” stereotype weighs them down.
- **Less Recognition for their Achievements:**
 - The **constabulary accounts for around 85% of state police** and CAPFs.
 - These **personnel perform their duties** as directed by their seniors.
 - They **mostly remain in the background of the organisation** with less recognition for their achievements and more frequent persecution for failure.
- **Tend towards Alcoholism:**
 - To cope with the difficulty of the types of setups, **personnel often resort to alcoholism and drug abuse**.
 - In the latter cases, **defaulters are punished as per the law** and suitable departmental action is also taken.

What can be the impact of the Rising Mental Health issues among the forces?

- **Discourage Younger Generation:**
 - Despite the good image that the armed forces have, and the fact that it is a very respectable job, **rising mental health issues among the forces can discourage the younger generations from joining**.
- **Demoralize the Forces:**

- Increasing mental health issues among the forces can discourage them and negatively impact their daily operations.

▪ **Rising cases of Suicides:**

- **Suicides, fratricides and untoward incidents are causing more Army personnel to lose their lives** than any enemy or terrorist activities, according to the findings of a study by United Service Institution of India (USI).

Way Forward

- **Good Working Conditions:** Working conditions, leave, allowances, and housing should be provided as entitlements.

▪ **Identify Underlying Issues:**

- **Bad apples should be eliminated** but those with underlying issues must be identified and a different approach adopted.
- This is where the role of the police leadership comes into the picture.
- The need is to **strive to create a working environment that provides personal fulfilment to personnel** and reduces the chances of mental stress and illness.

▪ **Proper Communication Mechanism:**

- As police leaders, the **need is to increase communication with all the ranks**. The **enforcement of discipline has to go hand-in-hand** with concern for staff well-being.
- Regular sampark sabhas need to be conducted where personnel can air their grievances and proper follow-up action must be taken on all possible issues.
- The senior's office should be open to all ranks 24/7.
- Additionally, **during random inspections on the field**, friendly communication with personnel on duty does not hurt discipline — it only increases his trust in the leadership and dedication to duty.

▪ **Reward and Recognition:**

- Reward and recognition act as big motivators. Often, the incentive system is at the whims and fancy of the head of the organisation.
- It **has to be formalised in every setup** and it has also been established that sports and cultural programmes increase bonhomie and create bonds between personnel, who support each other during crises.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. A positive attitude is considered to be an essential characteristic of a civil servant who is often required to function under extreme stress. What contributes to a positive attitude in a person? **(2020)**

Q. "We can never obtain peace in the outer world until and unless we obtain peace within ourselves." – Dalai Lama **(2021)**

Source: IE