



## De-Stigmatizing Mental Health

This editorial is based on [“Mental health and children: It's time to face the NextGen challenge”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 12/10/2022. It talks about the status of mental health among children in India and related issues.

**For Prelims:** National Mental Health Program (NMHP), Kiran Helpline, Mental HealthCare Act 2017, Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System, National Family Health Survey of 2019-2021, Climate Change and Mental Health.

**For Mains:** Status of Mental Healthcare in India, Challenges Related to Mental Health in India, De-Stigmatizing Mental Health.

Good [mental health](#) is indispensable for the holistic well-being of people. **Mental illnesses contribute 18.5% of the global disease burden** including **depression, anxiety and neuro-psychiatric disorders**.

[Covid-19 pandemic](#) has highlighted that **poor mental health incapacitates communities** and **erodes productivity of the nation** besides imposing huge economic costs. The absence of **adequate infrastructure, accessibility, and awareness** is a major roadblock in the development of [Mental Healthcare in India](#), that requires serious attention.

### What is the Status of Mental Healthcare in India?

- **Mental health** encompasses **emotional, psychological, and social well-being**. It influences **cognition, perception, and behaviour**. It also determines how an individual **handles stress, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making**.
  - Any disturbance in mental health affects the cognition, perception, and behaviour of a person to a greater extent.
  - In India, **according to National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences data**, more than **80% of people do not have access to mental healthcare services** for a multitude of reasons.
- **Initiatives by Government of India:**
  - **National Mental Health Program (NMHP):** The [National Mental Health Program \(NMHP\)](#) was adopted by the government in **1982** in response to the large number of mental disorders and shortage of mental health professionals.
    - **District Mental Health Programme (DMHP), 1996** was also launched to provide community mental health services at the primary health care level.
  - **Mental Health Act:** As part of the [Mental Health Care Act 2017](#), every affected person has **access to mental healthcare and treatment from government institutions**.
    - It has significantly reduced the significance of [Section 309 IPC](#) and **attempts to commit suicide are punishable only as exceptions**.

- **Kiran Helpline:** In 2020, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched a **24/7 toll-free helpline 'Kiran'** to provide mental health support.
- **Manodarpan Initiative:** It aimed at providing **psychosocial support** to students, teachers, and family members during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **MANAS Mobile App:** To **promote mental wellbeing across age groups**, the Government of India launched [MANAS \(Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System\)](#) in 2021.

## What are the Challenges Related to Mental Health in India?

- **Poverty Adding Vulnerability:** Most strongly associated factors with mental disorders are **deprivation and poverty**. Individuals with **lower levels of education, low household income, lack of access to basic amenities** are at high risk of mental disorder.
- **Women at Spotlight:** Due to a **variety of social stigma** and **gender disparity**, lack of access to education, **limited mobility**, added household responsibilities for working women, conditioning them into honed caregivers make them vulnerable to a variety of mental health issues.
  - Also, the [National Family Health Survey of 2019-2021](#) showed that an **overall 30% of women in India face gender based violence putting a third of all women in India at higher risk of developing anxiety disorders and depression**.
- **Disaster, Climate Change and Mental Health:** Disasters are potentially traumatic events which affect **millions of people around the globe every year**.
  - Many studies reported there were **increased short term and long-term mental health consequences**, such as **depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, anxiety and suicide among disaster survivors.
  - The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) revealed that rapidly increasing climate change is also posing a serious threat to mental health and psychosocial well-being, **by amplifying disaster events**.
- **Education System and Mental Health:** Due to **lack of stress on personalised and holistic educational structure in India**, a large % of students show signs of mental disorders. Shockingly, every 1 hour a student commits suicide in India.
  - **Children and young adults have complicated emotional eco-systems** that are easily affected by surroundings, **including parental pressure for good grades, social media engagements and relationship issues**, which affect their mental health to a great extent.
- **Discrimination and Negligence: Mentally ill patients** are vulnerable to **discrimination, physical and sexual abuse, wrongful confinement, even at homes** which is a cause of concern and a gross human right violation.
  - Specially, [people with disabilities](#) face a variety of structural and ideological challenges that have little to do with their actual limitations.
    - They experience abuse and neglect more often than the general population that **further limits their participation in everyday life**.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Most of the mental health patients are not aware that it is actually a disease of concern and remain untreated. Poor awareness about **symptoms of mental illness, myths & stigma related to it, lack of knowledge on the treatment availability** & potential benefits of seeking treatment, makes a large number of patients deprived of care.
- **Lack of Mental Health Resources:** Also, **lack of low-cost diagnostic tests and lack of easily available treatment** are the main hurdles in combating the problem of mental health in India.
  - There is a considerably low proportion of the mental health workforce in India (per 100,000 population) including **psychiatrists (0.3), nurses (0.12), psychologists (0.07) and social workers (0.07)**.
  - In addition, **beliefs in supernatural powers** for treatment in community delays diagnosis and treatment.

## What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Inclusive and Resilient Healthcare Infrastructure:** There is a need to build more inclusive and resilient healthcare infrastructure **incorporating mental health aspects with** emphasis on **collective social health, access to affordable and quality care** based on human rights and

with **psycho-social approach** rather than following the traditional biomedical paradigm.

- There is also a need to **upgrade physical infrastructure** and **strengthen human resources** by training **more mental health professionals** and skilled health workers especially for rural areas.
- **Mental Health Awareness:** It is **crucial to deconstruct the stigma related to mental disorder**, through **targeted awareness-raising** and outreach through campaigns, **utilising celebrities and social influencers**.
  - There is also a need **to mobilise support of [NGOs to rural areas](#)** and deeper engagement of local communities and local governments.
- **Expansion of Yoga and Meditation Centres:** Expansion of [yoga](#) and [meditation](#) would also provide enormous relief.
  - Their capacities can be **built by civil society in collaboration with community-based organisations**, but **these initiatives have to be strongly supported by the Government**.
- **Concerted Suicide Prevention Strategy:** India needs a '**Concerted Suicide Prevention Strategy**' at the national, state and local level.
  - **At school level, Mentor-mentee programmes** can be introduced to allow students to express themselves freely to their mentors and **prevent them from falling into mental disorder pitfalls**.
- **De-Stigmatizing Mental Health:** This apathy can be mitigated if the focus shifts from viewing mental health as a negative concept to a **social responsibility** of improving health literacy, setting up **self-help groups**, and providing emotional support to the concerned.

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Discuss major roadblock in the efficiency and development of Mental Healthcare in India, and also suggest innovative solutions to deal with mental health issues.