



Prioritizing Mental Well-being

For Prelims: National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences, National Mental Health Program (NMHP), Mental Health Care Act 2017, Kiran Helpline, MANAS (Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System), Poverty, Ayushman Bharat.

For Mains: Status of Mental Healthcare in India, Issues Associated with Mental Health, Initiatives by Government of India Related to Mental Health.

Why in News?

According to [World Health Organisation](#), India's suicide rate in 2019, at **12.9/1,00,000**, was higher than the regional average of **10.2** and the global average of 9.0.

- Suicide has become the **leading cause of death among those aged 15-29 in India**. While every precious life lost through suicide is one too many, **it represents only the tip of the [mental health iceberg](#)** in the country, particularly among young adults. Women tend to suffer more.

What is the Status of Mental Healthcare in India?

- **About:**
 - 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.
 - 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 Related to Mental Health:**
 - **National Mental Health Program (NMHP):** The [NMHP](#) was adopted by the government in 1982 in response to a **large number of mental disorders** and shortage of mental health professionals.
 - **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.
 - **Kiran Helpline:** In 2020, the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** launched a 24/7 toll-free helpline '[Kiran](#)' to provide mental health support.
 - **MANAS Mobile App:** To promote mental wellbeing across age groups, the Government of India launched [MANAS \(Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System\)](#) in 2021.
- **Issues Associated with Mental Health:**
 - **Social Media:** Increased use of certain kinds of [social media](#) is exacerbating stress and mental ill health for young people.
 - Social media detracts from **face-to-face relationships**, which are healthier, and reduces investment in meaningful activities.
 - More importantly, it erodes **self-esteem through unfavourable social comparison**.

- **Covid-19 Pandemic:** The [Covid-19 pandemic](#) has further exacerbated the problem. Globally, it might have increased the prevalence of **depression by 28% and anxiety by 26%** in just one year between 2020 and 2021, according to a study published in **Lancet**.
 - Again, the large increases have been noted among younger age groups, **stemming from uncertainty, financial and job losses, grief, increased childcare burdens**, in addition to school closures and social isolation.
- **Poverty:** Mental health is closely linked to poverty in a vicious cycle of disadvantage. People living in [poverty](#) are at greater risk of experiencing mental health conditions.
 - On the other hand, **people experiencing severe mental health conditions are more likely to fall into poverty** through loss of employment and increased health expenditure.
- **Lack of Mental Health Infrastructure:** Currently, only **20-30% of people with mental illnesses receive adequate treatment**.
 - One major reason for such a wide treatment gap is the problem of inadequate resources. Less than 2% of the government health budget is devoted to mental health issues.
 - Also, the [list of essential medicines](#) includes only a limited number of **WHO-prescribed mental health medications**.

How India can Reimagine Mental Health?

- There is a need for an **urgent and well-resourced “whole-of-society” approach** to **protecting, promoting and caring for the mental health** of our people. This should be based on the following four pillars:
 - **Destigmatizing Mental Health: Killing the deep stigma surrounding mental health issues** which prevents patients from seeking timely treatment and makes them feel shameful, isolated and weak.
 - **Including Mental Health in Public Health Programme: Making mental health an integral part of the [public health programme](#)** to reduce stress, promote a healthy lifestyle, screen and identify high-risk groups and strengthen mental health interventions like counselling services.
 - **Special emphasis will need to be given to schools.**
 - In addition, we should pay **special attention to groups that are highly vulnerable to mental health issues** such as **victims of domestic or sexual violence**, unemployed youth, marginal farmers, armed forces personnel and personnel working under difficult conditions.
 - **Mental Health Infrastructure:** Creating a **strong infrastructure for mental health care and treatment**. Substantial investments will be needed to address the gaps in the mental health infrastructure and human resources.
 - **Working on Affordability Aspects:** Mental health services should be made affordable for all. Improved coverage without corresponding **financial protection** will lead to inequitable service uptake and outcomes.
 - All government health assurance schemes, including [Ayushman Bharat](#), should cover the widest possible range of mental health conditions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

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

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