



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** “Sustained ethical behaviour in public service demands not just conviction, but also psychological resilience.” Discuss the phenomenon of ‘ethical fatigue’ and how to address it in the civil services. (150 words)

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### Approach:

- Introduce the answer by briefing about the statement of the question and linking it with ethical fatigue
- Give in brief about Ethical Fatigue
- Delve into the Causes of Ethical Fatigue in Civil Services and Consequences
- Highlight Measures to Address Ethical Fatigue in Civil Services
- Conclude suitably.

### Introduction:

**Aristotle** asserted that “**Moral excellence is a result of habit.**” However, in public service, this habit must often survive in an ecosystem riddled with **ethical contradictions, political interference, and institutional inertia.**

- While **ethical conviction** provides the moral compass, **psychological resilience** is the inner strength that sustains this compass in turbulent conditions.
  - In its absence, civil servants may experience what is termed as ‘**ethical fatigue.**’

### Phenomena of Ethical Fatigue:

**Ethical fatigue** is the mental, emotional, and moral exhaustion experienced by individuals repeatedly exposed to ethically conflicting situations, with little institutional or social reinforcement for doing the right thing.

### Causes of Ethical Fatigue in Civil Services:

- **Systemic Corruption and Normalization of Wrongdoing:** Constant exposure to corrupt practices normalizes compromise.
  - **Example:** A junior officer pressured to approve inflated project files may initially resist but eventually yield due to systemic rot.
- **Lack of Reward or Recognition for Ethical Conduct:** Ethical decisions are often invisible, unrewarded, or even penalized.
  - Example: Honest officers sidelined for refusing to bend rules—resulting in demoralization.
- **Moral Isolation and Peer Pressure:** Ethical officers may feel alienated from colleagues following the “chalta hai” attitude.
  - Peer conformity subtly discourages dissent from unethical norms.
- **Emotional Burnout Due to Continuous Resistance:** Repeated confrontation with unethical orders or environments leads to stress, cynicism, and withdrawal.

# Consequences of Ethical Fatigue



## Addressing Ethical Fatigue in Civil Services:

- **Integrate Ethics into Performance Appraisals:** Performance evaluations should go beyond efficiency and include ethical behavior under challenging circumstances.
  - Adding **moral courage, transparency, and rule-adherence as ACR indicators will motivate ethical consistency**. It will also normalize ethics as part of professional success.
- **Provide Psychological and Emotional Support:** Civil services must offer access to counselors, peer-support groups, and emotional wellness programs.
  - **Ethical decisions often come with mental strain**, especially when officers stand against powerful interests. Support systems can help prevent burnout and ethical disengagement.
- **Make Ethics Training Continuous and Practical:** Ethics training should move beyond theory and focus on real-life case studies, dilemmas, and peer discussions.
  - Regular modules on **moral reasoning, decision-making under pressure, and value conflicts** will build long-term ethical stamina. Repetition builds reflexive ethical responses.
- **Strengthen Whistleblower Protection Mechanisms:** Ethical officers must feel safe when exposing wrongdoing.
  - **Robust implementation of the Whistleblower Protection Act** and creation of anonymous reporting platforms are crucial. It reassures officers that the system stands behind them when they act rightly.
- **Foster Ethical Leadership at the Top:** Senior bureaucrats must lead by example, showing that it is possible to deliver outcomes without compromising values.
  - Leaders like **E. Sreedharan (Metro Man)** and **Kiran Bedi** led by example, showing that integrity and outcomes can co-exist.

## Conclusion:

The **Bhagavad Gita** emphasizes “**Yogah karmasu kaushalam**” — **excellence in action is a form of yoga. Ethical excellence, in civil service, is not a one-time act but a sustained practice under pressure.** Conviction must be coupled with resilience to withstand systemic opposition.