



## Mental Health in India

**For Prelims:** [National Medical Commission, Tobacco](#), [National Council of Educational Research and Training](#), [Human Immunodeficiency Virus](#), NIMHANS, [Mental health](#), [Kiran Helpline](#), [Manodarpan](#)

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

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

- The recent report by the **National Task Force on Mental Health and Well-being of Medical Students-2024**, released by the [National Medical Commission \(NMC\)](#), highlights troubling statistics about the [mental health](#) of medical students in India.

### What are the Key Highlights of the Report on Mental Health of Medical Students?

- **High Levels of Stress:** 84% of postgraduate (PG) students experience moderate to very high levels of stress. 64% report that the workload significantly affects their mental health.
  - 27.8% of undergraduate medical students and 15.3% of postgraduate students have a **diagnosed mental health disorder**, indicating a widespread mental health crisis requiring immediate intervention.
  - 16.2% of undergraduate (UG) students and 31.2% of PG students have had suicidal thoughts, indicating severe mental health challenges.
- **Major Stressors:**
  - Medical students, particularly postgraduates, face **extended working hours daily**, often exceeding 60 hours a week. This leads to inadequate rest and exhaustion.
  - The **need for constant availability on duty**, often with insufficient breaks, significantly contributes to stress and burnout among medical students.
  - The **lack of adequate mental health support systems and infrastructure** within medical institutions leaves students without proper resources to manage their stress and mental well-being.
    - Around **19% of PG students expressed that they turn to substances such as tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs to alleviate stress. This is indicative of the **lack of adequate mental health support systems** and the need for education on healthier coping mechanisms.**
  - **High expenses of medical education** and insufficient stipends exacerbate financial stress for students, especially those with financially dependent families or student loans.
    - **33.9% of UG students face extreme financial stress**, with 27.2% holding educational loans and struggling with repayment pressures.
    - **72.2% of PG students find their stipend insufficient**, highlighting the need for a critical review of stipend policies.
  - The intense competition, **fear of failure, and high academic expectations** in medical

training place students under immense pressure, leading to procrastination, perfectionism, and, in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts.

- Experiences of [discrimination](#) based on gender, caste, ethnicity and geography, along with instances of **ragging and harassment** by seniors and faculty, contribute to the psychological distress of students.

## National Medical Commission

- It is the **apex regulatory body for medical education and practice in India**, established in 2020 to replace the **Medical Council of India (MCI)**.
  - It consists of four autonomous boards and a **Medical Advisory Council**, responsible for overseeing major screening tests (such as [NEET-UG](#)) regulating **medical education and training**, registration and ethics of practitioners, and assessment and rating of institutions.
- NMC has achieved the prestigious [World Federation for Medical Education \(WFME\)](#) recognition, ensuring global recognition of its medical degrees.

## What does India's Broader Mental Health Landscape Look Like?

- **High prevalence Rates:** According to the **National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) 2015-16**, 10.6% of adults in India suffer from mental health issues.
  - The treatment gap for mental disorders varies between **70% and 92%, depending on the disorder**.
  - Urban areas exhibit higher prevalence of mental health issues (13.5%) compared to rural areas (6.9%) and urban non-metro regions (4.3%).
  - The [National Council of Educational Research and Training \(NCERT\)](#) Mental Health and Well-being of School Students Survey found that during the pandemic, **11% of students reported feeling anxious, 14% experienced extreme emotions, and 43% experienced mood swings**.
- **Economic Impact:** Mental health disorders contribute to significant productivity **losses due to absenteeism, reduced productivity, disability, and increased healthcare costs**.
  - [Poverty](#) is shown to exacerbate mental health risks, leading to heightened psychological distress due to stressful living conditions and financial instability.

## What are the Policy Challenges in Addressing Mental Health?

- **Policy Neglect:** Mental health remains a **low priority for policymakers**, partly due to a lack of political will and knowledge gaps in interventions.
- **Lack of Core Indicators:** Mental health issues are often marginalized due to the absence or minimal inclusion of **visible core indicators in international/national health metrics**.
  - This absence prevents the effective allocation of resources and investment in mental health infrastructure, research, and services.
- **Budget Constraints:** Against an estimated need of over Rs 93,000 crore, the mental **health budget was only Rs 1,000 crore in 2023**, with most funds directed to tertiary institutions, leaving **little for community-based initiatives**.
- **Legislation Shortcomings:** Despite the **National Mental Health Policy of 2014** and the [Mental Health Act of 2017](#), there are significant challenges in implementation and resource allocation.
- **Human Resource Planning:** In India, there is a **critical shortage of mental health professionals**. The reliance on a few specialists, such as psychiatrists, reinforces the notion of **mental health services as a luxury** rather than an integral part of primary health care.
- **Strategic Intervention Needed:** Policymaking requires a nuanced understanding of mental health challenges, similar to the approach taken during **India's fight against [Human Immunodeficiency Virus \(HIV\)](#)- [Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome \(AIDS\)](#)**.

## Lessons from India's HIV-AIDS Strategy

- India's **HIV-AIDS programme was based on real-time data and surveillance**. Strategies were tailored for different regions and groups based on local needs.
  - A **significant portion of the budget was allocated to engaging communities and addressing stigma**, a crucial step that mental health strategies must replicate.
- Involvement of parliamentarians, the media, judiciary, and other key sectors helped create widespread awareness and support.

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

- [National Mental Health Programme \(NMHP\)](#)
- [Mental Healthcare Act 2017](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences \(NIMHANS\)](#)
- [National Tele Mental Health Programme](#)
- [NIMHANS and iGOT-Diksha Collaboration](#)
- [Ayushman Bharat – HWC Scheme](#)
- [Kiran Helpline](#)
- [Manodarpan](#)
- [MANAS Mobile App](#)

### Note:

- [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) Target 3.4](#), set by the [United Nations](#), aims to reduce premature mortality from **non-communicable diseases** by one-third by 2030, with a particular focus on **promoting mental health and well-being**.

## Way Forward

- **Community-Based models:** Evidence-based strategies like peer-led interventions and emergency care centres should be scaled up.
  - Emulate successful models like **Banyan's Home Again program in Tamil Nadu**, which combines treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration for mentally ill, homeless women.
- **Support Systems:** Establish dedicated **counselling centres in colleges**, implement mental health awareness programs, and **facilitate peer support groups** to support students, who are significantly affected by mental health issues.
- **Increasing Mental Health Professionals:** Expanding training programs and incentives to address the shortage of mental health professionals.
  - Provide professional development and culturally sensitive training for mental health professionals.
- **Establish an Autonomous Agency:** Like [National AIDS Control Organisation \(NACO\)](#) for **HIV-AIDS**, an independent body for mental health could help coordinate resources, involve community stakeholders, and bridge the gaps in care and support for mental health patients.
- **Decentralizing Services:** Establish mental health facilities in rural and remote areas to improve accessibility. Leverage collaborations and technology to enhance resource allocation and service delivery

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

**Q.** Despite various initiatives to improve mental health in India, significant challenges persist. Identify the key policy challenges in addressing mental health issues and propose strategies to overcome these challenges.

## **Mains**

**Q.** In order to enhance the prospects of social development, sound and adequate health care policies are needed particularly in the fields of geriatric and maternal health care. Discuss. **(2020)**

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