



Mental health care in India: The road ahead

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Abstract

To live a good life, it is essential for both physical and mental health to be well. However, in Indian society, mental health does not receive the same attention as physical health, which is why it is still considered a stigma today.

The main purpose of this study is to understand why most people do not value mental health as much as physical health and why they hesitate to talk about it openly. Even in the 21st century, Indian society lacks proper infrastructure for mental health and adequate resources for treatment.

Positive mental health is essential for success and achievement in life. Mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety are prevalent worldwide and affect all age, social, and racial groups. This study also highlights several obstacles to developing better infrastructure and treatment for mental health.

What will the future of mental health in India look like? Many issues in Indian society, such as suicide, stem from mental illness. It is crucial for everyone to talk about mental health openly to address and prevent these problems. This will help address these problems early and prevent them from escalating.

Keywords: Mental health, stigma, physical health, gender inequality, suicide

Introduction

It is essential for every person to prioritize their health and pay attention to maintaining it, as good health is fundamental to a happy life. Health is a resource that supports an individual's ability to function effectively in society, rather than being an end in itself. A healthy lifestyle provides the foundation to live a fulfilling life with meaning and purpose. To lead a meaningful life, it is vital to maintain good health.

There are two types of health that are widely discussed: physical health and mental health. Physical health can be defined as the normal functioning of the body. Representing one dimension of total well-being, it is about how our body grows, feels, and moves, how we care for it, and what we put into it.

Mental health, on the other hand, includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being; it affects how we think, feel, and act. Most people in Indian society are less concerned about their mental health than their physical health. This is because, historically, India has lacked infrastructure, awareness, and resources for mental health treatment.

Due to a lack of knowledge about mental health, people in Indian society are reluctant to openly discuss related problems. Even though we are in the 21st century, mental health is still seen as a stigma in society. For instance, if a person has a physical problem, they will openly discuss it in society. However, if someone has a mental illness, they will not discuss it with friends, family, or society.

The reason for this is that a negative attitude toward mental illness has persisted in Indian society from history to the present day. This leads to mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia often going untreated. In severe cases, people may even reach the point of contemplating or committing suicide.

As Bill Clinton once said, "Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all."

People are forgetting that being mentally healthy is just as important as being physically fit. Physical health is closely linked to mental health and is an integral part of leading a healthy lifestyle and enjoying life.

If we look at the history of mental health in India, there has been some progress. For example, many schools and colleges now have counsellors. Additionally, some NGOs and government programs support people struggling with mental illnesses, such as the Mindroot Foundation (established in 2016), the District Mental Health Program (DMHP), and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), established in 1925.

Despite these efforts, there has been no significant reduction in the proportion of people suffering from mental health problems in India. Mental health illiteracy persists. Many individuals are not even aware of the symptoms of mental health disorders.

People suffering from mental illness, regardless of age, may commit suicide due to a lack of timely treatment. Suicide rates in India are among the highest compared to other countries at a similar socio-economic level.

The latest survey by India's National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) found that nearly 150 million Indians need mental healthcare services, but fewer than 30 million are seeking care. According to the WHO, mental illness accounts for about 15% of the total disease burden worldwide. In 2019, India's suicide rate was 12.9 per 100,000 people—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. From past to present, the number of people suffering from mental illness in India has increased, especially since the COVID pandemic. Additionally, the number of suicide cases has also risen. Mental health in India is a serious issue. For improvement, not only the government but also every individual in society must contribute so that, in the future,

people suffering from this condition can receive timely and proper treatment.

Particular attention should be given to adolescents and youth, as people aged 15 to 24 years in India have the highest suicide rate, consistent with international trends in youth suicide. It should be understood by everyone that being mentally healthy is just as important as being physically healthy.

Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first Director-General of the WHO, once said, "Without mental health, there can be no true physical health." We are living in the 21st century, advancing in modernity and technology. However, when it comes to mental health, we are still lagging behind. It is time for us to openly discuss mental health with understanding, to stop seeing mental illness as a stigma, and to support one another in addressing it.

Objectives of the study:

- To understand the importance of mental health care in everyone's life.
- To understand the loss because of mental health.

Research Methodology

Under this study, secondary data has been used from many sources which are journal, reports, website, articles and newspaper. The structure of the research is more specific. It is the outline, the scheme, the paradigm of the operation of the variables.

Review of Literature

Review of Literature defined as the collection of prior work conducted by social researchers and other scholars. The body of works has published in different sources like books, articles, journals or published as other form of documentation. The main objective of review of literature is to provide relevant information and resources on the suggested research problem.

1. Emile Durkheim (1895) ^[1] Sociological work in this area can be traced back to the work of Emile Durkheim, and in particular to his work on the normal and pathological (1964 [1895]). His major insight is well-known: that the rules and standards that define what is pathological help to reinforce the norms and values of society \pm the normal and the pathological are mutually constitutive \pm and societies and social groups define the pathological in order to sustain and strengthen the normal.
2. Foucault (1967), 2011^[2] has called the sociological focus on behavior (and the bio-medical focus on the body) into question by defining mental disorder squarely in terms of mind, viewing it in terms of unreason and irrationality, and linking it to the affirmation of rationality that was a feature of Enlightenment thinking. Foucault's approach links well with concerns about the intelligibility of the thought, emotion and behavior that is symptomatic of mental illness.
3. Nutbeam D, Wise M, Bauman A, Harris E, Leeder S. Canberra (2000) ^[3] These findings reinforce the need to increase awareness of mental health. Mental health literacy is a related concept which is increasingly seen as an important measure of the awareness and knowledge of mental health disorders. Health literacy has been described as "ability to access, understand,

and use the information to promote and maintain good health."

4. Pinfold V, Stuart H, Thornicroft G (2005) ^[4] The impact of stigma has led to the institution of various programs worldwide to challenge the stereotypes and discrimination that generate social disability. Mental health awareness programs have had favorable impact and can produce positive change in people's views of mental illnesses. However, more robust evaluations are needed to assess the long-term impact of approaches to increasing mental health literacy worldwide.
5. Ogorchukwu JM, Sekaran VC, Nair S, Ashok L (2016) ^[5] There are a few studies which have measured mental health literacy in the Indian context. One study found mental health literacy among adolescents to be very low, i.e. depression was identified by 29.04% and schizophrenia/psychosis was recognized only by 1.31%. Stigma was noted to be present in help-seeking.

The impact of social factors on mental health

Behind a person's problem related to mental illness is not the effect of their genes or the failure of their life, but rather the society they are living in. How they were socialized also plays a significant role. The values, norms, and culture followed in that society have a profound impact. India is a rapidly changing country, which leads to continuous transformations in every society here. Some people in society accept change quickly, but it is not necessary for every individual to do so. It can be very difficult for a person to accept changes in their norms, values, and culture. Due to the regular changes in society, there is a mental impact on every person.

Stratification

Social stratification is the process of ranking individuals in a society based on factors such as wealth, income, family background, and power.

Historically, inequality was primarily based on factors like religion, caste, community, and occupation. However, in recent years, it has expanded to include education, employment, class status, housing, culture, and more. Due to inequality, competition arises within society, and individuals often experience stressful lives as they strive to gain access to the maximum available resources.

A large body of research on mental health shows that people with higher social status—such as the rich and powerful—who have better access to resources, generally have better mental health compared to those who lack these resources or do not belong to high-status groups in society. People from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to suffer from mental health issues.

Inequality

Social inequality is not only related to power and economic position, but it is also embedded in social institutions. Factors such as class status, power, wealth, education, and gender in society have a significant impact on mental health. Unemployment, poverty, and an unstable lifestyle are key causes of mental illness. A high socioeconomic status positively affects society, but psychologically, a low economic status is a major cause of mental illness.

People with poor mental health often experience further deterioration, but those who maintain a high status in society tend to have better mental health.

Cultural Value

The meaning of the word "culture" is derived from the diversity in languages, clothing, and food within a society, as these aspects are visible to the senses. The culture of a society helps shape beliefs, values, norms, and thoughts, much like family culture shapes the values of individuals. Cultural groups within society encourage people to follow their beliefs, traditions, and practices, which in turn influence mental health.

Social groups in society that help their members achieve certain goals also contribute positively to mental health. People who fail to achieve their goals may feel the failure is tied to cultural factors, but instead of attributing it to these cultural influences, they often hold themselves responsible, which can negatively affect their mental health. When people are unable to reach high levels or achieve cultural values, they are often discouraged by their culture.

Cross-Cultural Differences

Cultural diversity around the world significantly impacts aspects of mental health, including how health and illness are perceived and how individuals with mental illness are treated in society. Racism and discrimination are major components of cultural diversity. Negative aspects of cultural groups should also be considered when addressing mental health care.

In addition to negative attitudes, beliefs in groups such as Naxalite organizations can promote discrimination and inhumane treatment of individuals.

Cultural diversity and mental health are important concerns, as the diversity within societies often leads people to experience stressful lives in their daily routines.

Generation Gap

It is impossible for two different generations to have the same attitude. Each generation in society has its own perspective on values, culture, and norms.

In older generations, talking about mental health was considered taboo. The reluctance to discuss mental illnesses, such as depression, widens the generation gap. This ideology creates additional problems because mental health-related issues are not openly accepted in society, which delays access to treatment.

Studies suggest that awareness of mental health is higher among younger generations. Due to the widespread use of the internet and social media, younger people are better equipped to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness and know where to seek help. Additionally, individuals who have personally battled mental health issues often work to raise awareness and prevent suicide. Here's your revised text with improvements for grammar, clarity, and readability:

Causes of Poor Mental Health

- **Socialization:** One of the reasons a person may struggle with mental health is the way they have been socialized in society. The values, beliefs, and culture taught or observed in society and family play an important role and can contribute to mental health issues, including depression. Socialization varies across societies. Societies that are more liberal in their values, norms, and beliefs tend to be happier, while societies with stricter attitudes often face poorer mental health outcomes.

- **Abuse and Trauma:** A major cause of mental illness is the experience of abuse or trauma, particularly in childhood, as well as neglect by family or society. Trauma can have a lasting impact on how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others. Women who experience abuse or other forms of trauma are at an increased risk of developing mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, or stress. It is important to understand that enduring trauma is not a person's choice; remaining in a state of shock or trauma can lead to both physical and mental illness.
- **Harassment or Discrimination:** Discrimination and harassment based on racism, as well as bullying by groups, neighbours, or friends in society, are also significant causes of mental illness. These issues are particularly prevalent during adolescence, as individuals in this stage are often more vulnerable. Racism, in particular, is a major cause of mental health struggles, yet its effects in psychiatric research and clinical practice have not been fully explored. It can be said that harassment has serious and lasting effects on mental health, contributing to stress. In addition to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, fear, and low self-esteem, harassment can also lead to physical symptoms such as headaches and fatigue. It may also result in a decreased ability to work, as well as reduced job satisfaction, job security, and productivity.
- **Social Isolation and Loneliness:** When a member of society is separated due to refusing or stopping adherence to the values, beliefs, and norms of that society, they often face loneliness and a stressful life. Social isolation refers to withdrawing from contact with others and can involve physical isolation, but it also pertains to the emotional feeling of being disconnected from social interaction.

Research shows that social isolation and loneliness have a severe impact on both the physical and mental health of older people, affecting their life expectancy and overall quality of life. Living in loneliness can be as harmful to the body as smoking. However, there are various ways to overcome social isolation, such as social skills training, joining community and support groups, and building friendships. Improving access to transportation, information, communication technologies, and a supportive environment can also help reduce social isolation and loneliness.

Low Economic Status: It is not necessary for everyone's economic status to be the same in society. People with higher economic status have more resources available to them, while those with lower economic status often lack these resources, leading to struggles and depression. Mental health is not limited to just psychological and emotional well-being; it is also closely connected to physical health, a sense of community, belonging, and education. Having a low economic status can negatively impact mental health, as it reflects various challenges such as inadequate access to food, resources, and social advancement. These challenges can contribute to both mental and physical illnesses.

Long-Standing Physical Illness: Maintaining a healthy life requires attention to both mental and physical health. People who struggle with long-term physical illness often experience mental health issues as well. Being in a prolonged physical condition can lead to problems like social isolation, low self-esteem, and stigma. A person may also feel tired, disappointed, anxious, or stressed due to their ongoing health struggles.

Unemployment or Loss: Unemployment among youth is a major factor contributing to mental illness, as is experiencing a loss in business or economic stability. A study conducted between 2019 and 2021 found that the challenges of unemployment and the struggle to find stable employment significantly increased mental health issues and frustration among the youth. Mental health challenges have become common at all organizational levels, affecting employees across industries.

Abuse and Addiction: In today's society, drug use has become a kind of trend, followed by many across generations, leading to widespread addiction. This addiction often hinders individuals from achieving their goals and contributes to depression. Drug use is closely linked to mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. Addiction can also worsen these conditions. A person addicted to drugs is not only harming themselves but also those around them, as drug use can cause serious health problems for others.

Facing Gender Inequality: Gender inequality is a longstanding issue in Indian society, and it continues to persist today. The undervaluation of women, neglecting their contributions in society, family, institutions, and workplaces, as well as their exploitation, causes women to experience more mental health challenges than men. Gender inequality refers to disparities in status, power, wealth, health, and employment between genders. When these inequalities are not addressed, they perpetuate gender inequality. Women often face gender-based discrimination from childhood, both within their families and society, leading to worsened mental health outcomes.

Generation Effect: When a mental health-related illness affects the first family member, it often leads to issues such as depression and high anxiety being passed down from generation to generation. Many studies have shown that individuals suffering from mental illness often exhibit symptoms seen in previous generations, such as excessive anxiety, depression, and emotional distress.

Where is the Road Ahead?

Mental health-related problems are becoming increasingly common in every country, with symptoms of these conditions appearing across all generations. The percentage of people suffering from mental health issues continues to rise. A study conducted by the WHO has shown that after the Covid pandemic, mental health-related diseases have increased by 25%. This highlights the growing concern in the field of mental illness and raises the question: where are we headed next?

As society progresses, we must consider the future of mental health and its potential outcomes. After the Covid pandemic, people are becoming more aware and educated

about mental health. However, additional efforts are needed to address this issue and stop its growing prevalence in the future. Over the past few decades, India has made progress in providing mental health services and treatment, but it remains true that suicide rates continue to rise. Ongoing efforts must be made to prevent such tragedies.

A WHO report shows that the highest number of suicides in India occurs within the age group of 15-25 years, meaning that the country's youth is most affected. This tragic trend, driven by mental illness, poses a serious threat to the future of the nation. The National Mental Health Program (NMHP) is an initiative in India that focuses on mental health care and primary treatment. Recently, to address mental health issues such as stress, depression, and anxiety in children, one institution introduced a day of entertainment at colleges. This initiative aims to raise awareness about mental health and encourage open conversations.

While various steps have been taken to reduce this problem, more efforts are needed now and, in the future, to tackle it at its root.

Suggestion for improve mental health

Feel empathy and kindness for the other person: It is necessary for a person suffering from mental illness not to be isolated but to interact with other people. It is also the responsibility of other members of society to maintain a positive behaviour toward that person. Feeling well-connected to other people promotes positive mental health, physical health, and gives life meaning. New research on mental well-being suggests that emotional conversations, support, positive feelings, and affirmations can all help strengthen our mental health. A sense of belonging and emotional safety is built through real interactions with family, friends, and communities. Feeling well-connected to others in society contributes to mental health, meaning in life, and even physical well-being. When a person spends a lot of time in loneliness or isolation, the human mind and body suffer, which negatively impacts the person's health."

Illiteracy and Awareness for Mental Health

Education related to mental health should be provided in all formal and informal institutions, and awareness should be spread among the people through drama, workshops, camps, etc. It should be mandatory to have a counsellor in schools and colleges. Engagement across sectors should be intensified, including understanding the social and structural determinants of mental health and intervening in ways that reduce risks, build resilience, and overcome barriers that prevent people with mental health conditions from fully participating in society.

Concrete actions should be implemented to improve the environment for mental health, such as increasing action against intimate partner violence and the abuse and neglect of children and older people. Enabling nutritional care for early childhood development, providing livelihood support for people with mental health conditions, launching social and emotional learning programs, and combating bullying in schools are essential. Additionally, changing attitudes and policies in mental health care is crucial.

A good infrastructure to improve mental health should include adequate resources, investment in mental health, and a system based on supportive policies.

Not Taking It as a Stigma

Mental health within society should not be seen as negative behavior but as a common condition. There should be a

comfortable environment among people in society so that it can be discussed openly.

Involving people with mental health problems in all aspects of society and in decision-making is essential to remove stigma and discrimination, reduce inequalities, and promote social justice. Stigma doesn't only come from others. You may erroneously believe that your condition is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help. Seeking counselling, educating yourself about your condition, and connecting with others who have mental illness can help you regain self-esteem and overcome destructive self-judgment.

Decreasing Stress

It is essential for a person suffering from stress to try to eliminate it by seeking help from a counsellor if necessary. Adopting activities such as reading, yoga, and other physical exercises into their daily routine, while staying engaged in society as an active participant, can also help. This approach can prevent the development of more serious issues, such as depression. Physical activity, in particular, is a natural mood booster that helps reduce feelings of anxiety and tension.

Stress reduction is influenced by a variety of factors, including social, cultural, economic, and environmental conditions, as well as psychological, personality, and genetic factors.

Delivery of Mental Health Care Based on Society

Building community-based networks of interconnected services that move away from custodial care in psychiatric hospitals is essential. These networks should cover a spectrum of care and support through a combination of mental health services integrated into general healthcare, community mental health services, and services beyond the health sector.

Diversifying and enhancing care options for common mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, is key to improving the benefit-cost ratio. This approach involves adopting a work-sharing model that expands evidence-based care provided by general health workers and community providers. It also includes using digital technologies to support both guided and unguided self-help, as well as offering remote care.

Conclusion

The brain is a vital part of the body, and it is essential to keep the mind stable. For this, good mental health is necessary. Just as physical health is important, mental health is equally essential. Both physical and mental health are interconnected, and an imbalance in either can be concerning for an individual. However, it is often observed that more importance is given to physical health than to mental health. The main reason for this is the lack of awareness and the stigma surrounding mental health in society. Mental health is often seen as a taboo, and as a result, people are reluctant to talk about it.

In Indian society, mental health is still considered a topic that is either disliked or seen as unnecessary to discuss. Many studies have highlighted how the unavailability of treatment for mental illness and illiteracy among people further exacerbate the problem. The percentage of people suffering from mental illness continues to rise, with a significant increase after the COVID-19 pandemic. During

this period, suicide rates among individuals with mental illness have remained high. Despite this, there has been little progress in improving the state of mental health.

It is time for society to openly discuss mental illness and stop viewing it as a stigma but as a common condition. Studies indicate that mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety are increasingly seen among the youth, contributing to rising suicide rates. If this issue continues to be neglected, the situation will only worsen in the future.

To improve the mental health situation in Indian society, it is necessary to establish a strong infrastructure for mental health. This will ensure that individuals suffering from mental illness receive timely treatment and that more people become educated and aware about it. A person's mental health is influenced by society; the values, culture, and beliefs of the society in which one lives often lead to a stressful life.

It is the responsibility of society to treat its members with understanding and not be harsh. When individuals are subjected to harsh conditions, they often feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Mental illness is not something that can be chosen. It is a normal condition that should not be hidden. It is crucial to talk openly about mental health. A person cannot always control their thoughts or the level of stress they experience. Mental illness is a health condition, and treatment is possible, but it requires awareness and understanding from society.

Mental health promotion involves creating an environment that encourages healthy living and motivates people to adopt a healthy lifestyle. An enabling environment, supported by national mental health policies and legal frameworks, is necessary to provide comprehensive guidelines for managing mental health issues and promoting mental well-being. This requires multi-sectoral engagement and a life-course approach.

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