

Mental Health in Changing Scenario : Present Status and Future Direction

Mental Health Landscape has seen drastic changes over past decade with adoption of Mental Healthcare Act (2017). The National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) in India (2015-16) is a significant initiative aimed at assessing the mental health status of the population across the country. The NMHS was conducted to provide comprehensive data on the prevalence, patterns, and correlates of mental disorders in India. It aimed to gather information that could guide mental health policy and planning. The survey was conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore, in collaboration with various state health departments and other stakeholders. The survey covered a broad spectrum of mental health issues, including common mental disorders like depression and anxiety, severe mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and suicidal behaviors. Despite its significance, challenges such as stigma, limited awareness, and resource constraints continue to affect mental health care in India. Moving forward, there is a need for sustained efforts to strengthen mental health systems and integrate services into primary healthcare¹.

Common Mental Disorders (CMDs) refer to a group of mental health conditions that are relatively widespread in the general population. These disorders typically affect mood, thinking, and behavior, and they can impair daily functioning and Quality of Life².

- (1) **Depression** is characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, changes in appetite or sleep patterns, and feelings of worthlessness or guilt. Major depressive disorder is a common form of depression.
- (2) **Anxiety Disorders** : These include conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder (excessive worry about various aspects of life), panic disorder (recurring panic attacks), social anxiety disorder (intense fear of social situations) and specific phobias (irrational fears of specific objects or situations).
- (3) **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** : Develops after exposure to a traumatic event such as combat, assault, natural disaster, or other life-threatening events. Symptoms include intrusive memories, avoidance of reminders of the trauma, negative changes in mood and thinking, and increased arousal or reactivity.
- (4) **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** is characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviors or mental acts (compulsions). People with OCD may feel driven to perform rituals or routines to alleviate anxiety caused by obsessions.
- (5) **Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)** : Although categorized under personality disorders, BPD involves severe mood swings, unstable relationships, impulsivity,

and distorted self-image. It can lead to intense episodes of anger, depression, and anxiety.

(6) **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Severe):** While PTSD can vary in severity, severe cases involve debilitating symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and emotional numbness. It often follows exposure to traumatic events such as combat, assault, or natural disasters.

(7) **Eating Disorders :** These include conditions such as anorexia nervosa (persistent restriction of food intake leading to dangerously low body weight), bulimia nervosa (episodes of binge-eating followed by compensatory behaviors like vomiting or excessive exercise), and binge-eating disorder (frequent episodes of consuming large quantities of food followed by distress).

Severe Mental Disorders (SMDs) are a category of mental health conditions that significantly impact a person's ability to function in daily life. These disorders often involve severe disturbances in thinking, emotions, and behaviors. They can be chronic and require ongoing treatment and support. Some examples of severe mental disorders include :

(1) **Schizophrenia :** A complex and chronic mental disorder characterized by disruptions in thought processes, perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. People with schizophrenia may experience hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, and impaired social functioning.

(2) **Bipolar Disorder :** Also known as manic-depressive illness, bipolar disorder involves episodes of mania (extreme highs) and depression (extreme lows). These mood swings can be severe and disrupt relationships, work, and daily activities.

(3) **Schizoaffective Disorder :** A condition characterized by symptoms of schizophrenia, such as hallucinations or delusions, combined with mood disorder symptoms like mania or depression. Individuals with schizoaffective disorder may experience periods of psychosis and mood disturbances.

These disorders can vary in severity and may co-occur with each other or with other medical conditions. Early recognition, diagnosis, and treatment are crucial for managing these disorders effectively and improving outcomes for individuals affected by them. Treatment often includes a combination of psychotherapy, medication, and support services tailored to the specific needs of the individual.

The District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in India in 1996

with Bellary district model of Karnataka, to provide accessible and affordable mental health services at the district level³. In West Bengal, Bankura district had been taken as pilot to implement this program. Here are the key aspects and objectives of the District Mental Health Program :

(1) **Objectives :** The primary goal of the DMHP is to provide mental health care services to the population at the district level, focusing on early detection, treatment, and rehabilitation of persons with mental illnesses.

(2) **Implementation :** The program is implemented through collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, state health departments, and district administrations. It operates under the National Mental Health Program (NMHP).

(3) **Service Delivery :** DMHP aims to integrate mental health services into primary health care settings. It includes initiatives such as screening camps, outreach programs, and training of primary health care workers to identify and manage common mental disorders.

(4) **Infrastructure Development :** The program supports the establishment and strengthening of mental health facilities, including district-level mental health clinics, psychiatric wings in general hospitals, and residential care facilities for severe mental illnesses.

(5) **Human Resources Development :** DMHP focuses on capacity building by training medical officers, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, and psychiatric nurses in evidence-based practices for mental health care.

(6) **Community Participation :** Community involvement is encouraged through awareness campaigns, involvement of local NGOs, and self-help groups to reduce stigma and promote mental health literacy.

(7) **Monitoring and Evaluation :** Regular monitoring and evaluation are conducted to assess the effectiveness of services provided under DMHP, improve service delivery, and ensure accountability.

(8) **Expansion and Coverage :** Over the years, the program has expanded to cover more districts across India, aiming to reach a larger population in need of mental health care services.

Overall, the District Mental Health Program plays a crucial role in addressing the mental health needs of the community at the grassroots level, promoting early intervention, reducing stigma, and improving access to essential mental health care services in India.

The National Mental Health Program (NMHP) in India is a comprehensive initiative aimed at addressing mental health issues across the country⁴. Here are the key components and objectives of the National Mental Health Program :

(1) Objectives :

- **Service Delivery** : To ensure the availability and accessibility of minimum mental health care for all.
- **Human Resources Development** : To develop human resources for mental health to provide mental health services.
- **Information, Education, and Communication (IEC)** : To promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma.
- **Research** : To undertake research in mental health.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** : To monitor implementation and evaluate outcomes.

(2) Implementation :

- The program is implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, in collaboration with state health departments and other stakeholders.
- It operates through various components, including District Mental Health Program (DMHP), mental health clinics, and psychiatric wings in medical colleges and general hospitals.

(3) Service Delivery :

- NMHP aims to integrate mental health services into primary health care through the DMHP. This includes providing treatment for common mental disorders, severe mental illnesses, and substance use disorders.
- The program also supports the establishment of mental health facilities and the training of health care professionals in evidence-based practices.

(4) Human Resources Development :

- NMHP emphasizes capacity building by training medical officers, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, and nurses in mental health care.
- It encourages the recruitment and deployment of mental health professionals at various levels of health care delivery.

(5) Community Participation :

- NMHP promotes community involvement through awareness campaigns, advocacy programs, and the engagement of local NGOs and self-help groups to support persons with mental illnesses.

(6) Research and Evaluation :

- The program supports research initiatives to

generate evidence for effective mental health interventions and policies.

- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place to assess the implementation of NMHP activities and their impact on mental health outcomes.

(7) Challenges and Future Directions :

- Challenges include stigma associated with mental illness, limited mental health infrastructure in rural areas, and the need for sustained funding and political commitment.
- Future directions include expanding coverage, improving quality of care, integrating mental health into broader health policies and addressing the mental health needs of vulnerable populations such as children, adolescents, and the elderly.

In summary, the National Mental Health Program in India is a crucial initiative aimed at promoting mental health, improving access to mental health care services and reducing the burden of mental illness on individuals and society.

A General Hospital Psychiatry Unit (GHPU) is a specialized department within a general hospital that provides psychiatric services to patients first started at R G Kar Medical College & Hospital, Kolkata in 1933 by Dr Girindra Sekhar Bose⁵. The GHPU offers comprehensive psychiatric care to patients who require treatment for various mental health disorders. It aims to integrate mental health services with general medical care, addressing both physical and mental health needs. Psychiatrists and mental health professionals assess patients for mental health disorders through interviews, observations, and sometimes psychological testing. A GHPU typically operates with a multidisciplinary team that may include psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, and other mental health professionals. GHPU facilities include inpatient wards for short-term stays, outpatient clinics for follow-up care, and day treatment programs. The GHPU coordinates closely with other departments within the general hospital, such as emergency services, intensive care units, and medical/surgical wards. Many GHPU units are involved in education and research activities, training medical students, residents, and fellows in psychiatry, and conducting studies to advance knowledge and treatment options in mental health.

Investment in mental health is crucial for several reasons and it encompasses various forms of support, funding and resources allocated to improve mental health outcomes⁶. Here are some key aspects and reasons why investment in mental health is important:

(1) Improving Access to Services :

Investment allows for the expansion and enhancement of mental health services, including the establishment of community-based clinics, psychiatric facilities, and telehealth services. This helps bridge the gap in access to care, especially in underserved areas.

(2) Early Intervention and Prevention :

Funds directed towards mental health can support early intervention programs aimed at identifying and addressing mental health issues before they escalate. This includes screening programs, school-based interventions and workplace mental health initiatives.

(3) Integrated Care and Holistic Approach :

Investment promotes the integration of mental health services into primary health care settings, ensuring that individuals receive comprehensive care that addresses both their physical and mental health needs. This approach improves overall health outcomes and reduces healthcare costs associated with untreated mental illnesses.

(4) Research and Innovation :

Funding for mental health research fosters innovation in treatment methods, medication development, and understanding of mental health disorders. It supports studies on effective interventions, prevention strategies, and the impact of social determinants on mental health.

(5) Reducing Economic Burden :

Mental health conditions impose a significant economic burden on individuals, families, workplaces, and society as a whole. Investment in mental health can lead to cost savings by reducing productivity losses, healthcare expenditures related to untreated mental illnesses, and social welfare costs.

(6) Promoting Mental Health Literacy and Awareness :

Resources allocated to education and awareness campaigns help reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues. This encourages early help-seeking behavior and promotes a supportive environment for individuals living with mental health conditions.

(7) Addressing Vulnerable Populations :

Investment can target specific vulnerable populations such as children and adolescents, elderly individuals, marginalized communities, and those affected by trauma or substance use disorders. Tailored programs and services can meet their unique mental health needs.

(8) Policy and Advocacy :

Adequate funding supports advocacy efforts and policy initiatives aimed at improving mental health care delivery, expanding insurance coverage for mental health services, and advocating for mental health parity laws.

Investment in mental health is essential for building resilient communities, promoting overall well-being, and reducing the personal, social and economic impacts of mental health disorders. It requires a multi-sectoral approach involving governments, healthcare providers, researchers, advocates, and the community to achieve lasting improvements in mental health outcomes.

Future direction : The future of mental health holds promises and challenges across various dimensions:

- (1) **Technology Integration :** Advances in technology like AI and virtual reality are reshaping mental health diagnostics, treatment, and accessibility. Telehealth and digital platforms offer convenience and reach, especially in remote or underserved areas.
- (2) **Personalized Medicine :** Precision medicine approaches are becoming more prevalent, tailoring treatments based on genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. This could lead to more effective interventions with fewer side effects.
- (3) **Destigmatization and Awareness :** Increasing awareness and efforts to reduce stigma around mental health are crucial. Education and advocacy campaigns can encourage early intervention and support.
- (4) **Integration with Physical Health :** Recognizing the strong link between mental and physical health, healthcare systems are moving towards integrated care models that address both aspects comprehensively.
- (5) **Challenges :** Despite progress, challenges like data privacy concerns, unequal access to technology and the need for trained professionals remain. Additionally, cultural attitudes and societal norms about mental health vary globally.
- (6) **Treatment Resistant :** Continued research into novel therapies such as psychedelics for treatment-resistant conditions, and non-traditional approaches like mindfulness and art therapy, offer new avenues for healing.
- (7) **Policy and Funding :** Adequate funding and supportive policies are essential for scaling effective mental health interventions and ensuring equitable access to care.

While technology and research are advancing mental health care, addressing stigma, enhancing accessibility, and integrating holistic approaches remain critical for shaping a positive future in mental health.

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