Editorial Note

DESTIGMATIZING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS:
AN APPROACH TOWARDS COMMUNITY BUILDING

Mental health after the Covid-19 pandemic has taken centre stage in our daily lives. Government, Policy makers, leaders, civil society, and media have brought mental health to the forefront of our agenda and everyday discourse in society. During the COVID - 19 pandemic, the worry about their livelihoods, rise in domestic violence, and disruption of routine, among other factors, took a toll on people's mental health. Online polls performed between March and May 2020 revealed significant rates of anxiety and depression in the general population. For instance, the 'FEEL-COVID' poll, which surveyed 1,106 people in 64 cities between February and March 2020, revealed that a third of respondents experienced a major 'psychological impact' as a result of COVID-19 (Balaji & Patel, 2021).

People with pre-existing mental health issues found it difficult to cope with the fears described previously. The disruption of mental health services and the difficulty of travel made things worse for some people, which may have caused them to take less of their prescription medicine (Balaji & Patel, 2021). It was highlighted that stress and anxiety levels also witnessed a sharp spike after the pandemic struck India (Awasthi, 2020). While many people dependent on alcohol and other substances experienced withdrawal symptoms due to the abrupt closure of all liquor stores nationwide and the cutting off of drug supply, many alcohol "addicts," troubled by their urge, turned to harmful drugs like hand sanitizers as replacements and lost their lives or committed suicide (Balaji & Patel, 2021). 68.6% of therapists reported an increase in the number of clients they see and the number of hours they spend seeing patients. The number of people seeking treatment for the first time has increased since the Covid-19 epidemic, according to 55% of therapists (Awasthi, 2020).

Mental health is considered a precondition for our physical health. It was found that people who suffer from anxiety and depression are more likely to develop 29 physical health issues, including illnesses and bacterial infections. Having a chronic disease, in turn, can contribute to sadness and anxiety, emphasising the significance of a healthy lifestyle as well as quick treatment and support (Rowan & Rowan, 2023). It is also closely related to other development factors such as poverty, employment, economic development, peace, and justice. The pursuit of social inclusion, equity, access to justice, and human rights, as well as sustainable economic growth, all depend on the state of one's mental health (Votruba & Thornicroft, 2016).

 Our mental health not only influences our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, but also acts as the cornerstone for such processes as decision-making, and relationship-building (World Health Organization, 2022a). More than just the absence of disease,

mental health is an integral component of both our individual and societal health and well-being (World Health Organization, 2022a). India's mental health burden accounts for almost 15% of the worldwide mental health burden. Given the effects of poor mental health on society and the economy, this number alone should be cause for concern (Deloitte, 2022). The rise in global threats to mental health, such as economic downturns, social polarization, public health emergencies like COVID-19, extensive humanitarian crises, and climate change, further compound the risk and burden of mental health issues globally.

According to WHO, the burden of mental health problems in India equals 2443 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) per 100,000 people, with a suicide rate of 21.1 per 100,000 people. 1.03 trillion USD is projected to be lost in economic output between 2012 and 2030 as a result of mental health issues (World Health Organization, 2019). In 2022, for individuals over the age of 18, the overall weighted prevalence of mental illness was 10.6%, with a lifetime prevalence of 13.7%. India is responsible for roughly a fourth of all male suicides worldwide, and nearly a third of all female suicides, and suicide has historically been the main cause of death among young Indians. Males had a higher prevalence of mental health disorders (13.9%) than females (7.5%). Women, on the other hand, had a higher rate of mood disorders (Balaji & Patel, 2021). Residents in metropolitan areas had a higher frequency of mental illnesses, and people in lower-income quintiles had a higher prevalence of one or more mental disorders. (World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia, 2022). India has a sizable treatment gap as well. Despite having been ill for more than a year, stigma prevents approximately 80% of individuals affected from obtaining treatment. The treatment gap ranged from 28% to 83% for all categories of mental health issues (Deloitte, 2022).

In terms of suicide rates, India reported a rate of 12 (per lakh people) in 2021, a 6.2% rise over 2020 (Adhikari, 2023). The reported

figure is the highest ever recorded in the country since the NCRB began reporting suicides in 1967. The treatment gap for mental health care is serious, accounting for more than 80% in India, however, this has improved over the last decade (Das et al., 2022). Individuals aged 18 to 30 years and those aged 30 to 45 years accounted for 34.5% and 31.7% of total suicides, respectively, with a substantial number of them belonging to students (Singh, 2022). Thus, financial troubles, suicide in young adults, daily labourers, and marriage-related pressures in female victims are all topics of concern when it comes to mental health and well-being in India.

In a study on mental health in the workplace, more than 80% of respondents reported at least one negative mental health symptom and more than 50% reported three or more such symptoms. Among the most commonly reported mental health symptoms, those related to depression, such as sadness, declining interest in enjoyable activities, fatigue, inability to concentrate, and poor decision-making, were reported by more than 59 percent of the surveyed employees (Deloitte, 2022). While factors like deadlines, overwhelming workloads, dysfunctional team dynamics, and a lack of job satisfaction have long existed and contributed to workplace stress, the COVID-19 epidemic brought with it new challenges. The epidemic made it more difficult to draw clear lines between work and home, and it was up to the employees to cope with extended work hours, the isolation of a virtual workplace, and worries about job security (Deloitte, 2022).

India is home to over 138 million senior citizens, 67 million of whom are male and 71 million are female. Aging of the brain, issues with physical health, cerebral pathology, and socioeconomic factors like the breakdown of family support systems, social isolation, and declining economic independence are all contributing to the burden of mental disorders' morbidities among Indian seniors. In addition to dementia, mood disorders, particularly depression, are common mental illnesses in the Indian elderly. Anxiety disorders,

drug and alcohol misuse, delirium, and psychosis are some other disorders prevalent in the elderly population in India. Suicide, particularly suicide due to depression, is more common in the elderly, compounding the problem (Prakash & Kukreti, 2012).

Social media use has always been linked to worries about mental health, which have gotten worse in recent years. Significant negative effects of the photo app on young users' mental health, like elevated rates of eating disorders among teen girls, have in the past generated calls for tighter regulation (Paul, 2022). Even by well-intentioned video creators, misinformation about mental health illnesses can spread quickly, just as stigma and beliefs about mental diseases can be debunked (Biggs, 2022). In a study by Yeung et al. (2022), it was found that 52% of the videos examined on the site under the hashtag "ADHD" contained false material, which is worrying given that the clips under review received an average of three million views each.

With the current buzz surrounding AI advancements such as ChatGPT, the idea that chatbots can deliver mental health care is on the horizon, partly driven by increased mental distress during and post the pandemic and the shortage of mental health professionals in most countries (Rosenthal, 2023). Though promoted to treat diseases such as anxiety, ADHD, and depression, or to forecast suicidal inclinations, many applications warn users (in small print) that they are "not intended to be medical, behavioural health, or other healthcare services." There are valid reasons to be wary of this marketing juggernaut, in addition to the fact that research on their effectiveness is limited (Rosenthal, 2023).

In the Union Budget 2022-23, the Central Government established the National Tele Mental Health Programme (NTMHP), intending to improve access to quality mental health counselling and care services across the country. The nodal centre for Tele-MANAS

has been designated as NIMHANS, Bengaluru, and technical assistance will be given by IIIT, Bengaluru (International Institute of Information Technology, Bengaluru). In April 2023, it received over 1 lakh call since its inception in October 2022 (MoHFW India, 2023). It was observed that most callers belonged to the age range of 22 to 40 years calling regarding relationship issues, family problems, teenage issues, and schizophrenia. Many people with suicidal thoughts have been saved, thanks to telecounselling (Ghosh, 2023). The government's emphasis on expanding digital mental health is reflected in the efforts to promote T-MANAS which may help distant areas of the nation gain easy access to mental health services and partially fill the gap in mental health staffing (Mahashur & Fernandes, 2023). However, in order to bridge the treatment gap and improve community mental health services, more funds need to be allocated to improve the infrastructure and establish regulatory bodies at community levels to supervise the implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. The New Education Policy (NEP), 2020 also requires separate mental health centres in Universities and colleges which necessitate the additional allocation of budget and manpower.

Within the realm of psychological discourse, a vigorous debate rages on: is mental health primarily an individual concern or a pervasive societal epidemic? Advocates from both sides present compelling arguments. Those favoring the individual perspective assert that mental ailments stem from personal factors. Consequently, they contend that bolstering psychological capital and resilience requires a concerted effort on an individual level, aided by the guidance of mental health professionals. Conversely, proponents of the social standpoint contend that the weakening of social bonds and communities can exacerbate issues related to mental well-being.

In recent times human life has become mechanical with technological development where emotions and empathy have

parted their ways from society, which leads to stress anxiety and other issues of mental health. Discourses of mental health are not limited to psychology but entered various fields to understand the nature of mental health issues and how it impacts one's life. Many literary writers are displaying different mental health conditions to help readers to understand its relevance in the society and to break the stigmas attached to it. It is not only in the literature but in the field of sciences and social sciences too various researches are being conducted to improve the access to mental health treatments. A lot of education and awareness is being disseminated in society through various workshops, seminars, conferences, and books. This edition of Sambhashan on Mental health is one such attempt to contribute to the community unfolding the importance of mental health for everyone. In this ongoing dialogue, the role of individual responsibility intertwines with the broader implications of social health, sparking a crucial examination of our collective approach to mental wellness.

Overview of the current issue of Sambhashan

The current issue sheds light on diverse facets of mental health, ranging from cinema and literature to environment and education, to name a few. In the first article, Amita Valmiki views a Russian film and a Hindi film through the lens of psychoanalysis. Aishe Debnath highlights the role of exposure to natural and urban environments on our mental health and well-being and the beneficial impact of green spaces. The third article by Kenia & De Sousa outlines the unique set of challenges faced by college students and advocates for a mental healthcare plan that caters to their needs. Sharma & Upadhyay discuss how literature has been used as a therapeutic tool by renowned literary figure Sylvia Plath by analyzing two of her poems- 'Daddy' and 'Lady Lazarus'. Upasana Saraf explains the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) in schools while providing a detailed account of their uniquely designed SEL curriculum's design, implementation,

and effectiveness at the Bombay Cambridge Gurukul Schools. Deepti Puranik, in her article, explores the significance of polygraph examination and its application in diverse settings. Sood, Kohli & Kohli aimed to determine whether coronavirus stress led to COVID-19 burnout, impacting the well-being of healthcare personnel during the pandemic. Konar, Martin & Ningthoujam elaborate on the history of testing and assessment practices and insights for relevant stakeholders. Archana Raghavan explores issues related to confidentiality in marriage and family therapy from an Indian perspective. Upneet Lalli & Praveen Kumari Singh examine corruption using various psychological approaches and argue for psychology-based interventions to combat corruption. Bhushan discusses the need for and importance of disaster management in terms of recent disasters. This issue features two book reviews by Anjali Majumdar and Aishwarya Bellam. This issue also pays tribute to Professor Vasanti Damle.

Conclusion

In reflection, the World Mental Health Day, an annual observance on October 10th, stands as a global rallying point, reinvigorating our dedication to safeguarding and elevating mental well-being. This year's focus, aptly encapsulated in the theme "Mental Health is a Universal Human Right," underscores the imperative of making mental health an unequivocal priority for all (Loza, 2023).

The sobering reality of mental health challenges is starkly evident. A pre-pandemic landscape revealed that one in eight individuals worldwide grappled with mental illness, yet access to appropriate resources and support remained disconcertingly inadequate (Madaik, 2022; Deloitte, 2022). While strides have been made in recognizing mental health's pivotal role in global development, the harrowing statistics persist - suicide continues to rank as the fourth leading cause of death among the young, while depression

remains a formidable source of disability (Madaik, 2022; World Health Organization, 2022b).

Moreover, discrimination, stigma, and human rights violations cast a long shadow over those confronting mental health issues. The World Mental Health Day serves as a beacon of hope, a collective endeavour to redress these injustices and emphasize the paramount significance of mental well-being. As we venture into 2023, the clarion call for concerted action remains. Reducing stigma, enhancing public understanding, and fostering mental health and well-being necessitate unwavering commitment. The burgeoning risk factors demand proactive strategies, while the elderly warrant a focused approach to prevent suicide and integrate geriatric mental health within primary care.

To sculpt a truly inclusive and comprehensive mental health landscape, we must transcend antiquated paradigms. The charge falls upon experts, clinicians, and service providers to reconfigure existing mental health care delivery systems, harnessing sustainable modifications that actively mitigate disparities in healthcare access. An astute assessment of treatment protocols, rigorous and ongoing, paves the way for effective care strategies.

Yet, the mantle of responsibility extends beyond individual efforts. Governments and policymakers bear the duty of reducing treatment gaps, an endeavor demanding amplified budgets and the establishment of eminent mental health institutes. Just as the NIMHANS stands as a beacon of excellence, the global community must rally to create similar bastions of knowledge and care.

In closing, our collective journey toward holistic mental well-being necessitates a harmonious symphony of effort, innovation, and empathy. As the World Mental Health Day beckons us forward, let us remain unwavering in our pursuit of a world where mental

health is cherished as an essential human right, enriching lives, transcending barriers, and embodying the universal tapestry of human existence.

Acknowledgment

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