

Editorial Note

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement and ever increasing societal pressure, it is imperative that we turn our collective focus towards a paramount issue, which is sound mental health. There is no health without mental health (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022a, p. vi). As our world evolves, so do the complexities of our mental well-being. The need for open dialogue, understanding, and destigmatisation of mental health challenges has never been more crucial. This issue of the journal on mental health stands as a testament to our commitment to fostering a society that not only acknowledges mental health issues but also actively promotes the awareness of these issues and implementation of proactive solutions. By delving into the multifaceted dimensions of mental health in contemporary times, we aim to drive change and empower individuals, communities and institutions to prioritise and optimise mental well-being.

Between 2012 and 2030, it is projected that mental health conditions will cause a US\$1.03 trillion economic loss (WHO, 2019). Poor employee mental health in 2021–2022 cost Indian companies INR 110,000 crore (about \$14 billion). The impact of negative mental health conditions expresses itself in a variety of ways, frequently with far-reaching consequences for an individual's overall well-being, personal relationships, and occupational productivity (Deloitte, 2022).

Despite the urgent and escalating need for prioritising mental health, both mental health services and service professionals are woefully inadequate in India. For example, the recent report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare on 'Mental Health Care and Its Management in Contemporary Times' highlights that there are 0.75 psychiatrists for every lakh people in India. As a minimum requirement, there ought to be at least three psychiatrists for every lakh people, amounting to 27,000 more psychiatrists. This report emphasises the dearth of primary and secondary mental health services (Shah, 2023).

In addition to the challenges of access and the quality of mental health services, the recognition of mental illness is an important factor that affects the number of people seeking treatment. The ability to recognise certain mental health problems; knowing how to access mental health information; awareness of risk factors and causes, self-treatments, and professional help available; and attitudes that support recognition and proper help-seeking are all examples of mental health literacy (Ganasen et al., 2008). It is imperative that an increasing number of persons, in a variety of settings (e.g. home and family, workplace, educational institutions), are mental health literate.

Although the impact of mental illness seriously threatens the successful attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the role of mental health in global development has been largely

neglected while framing the goals. However, in September 2015, the United Nations (UN) took a historic step by recognising the burden of mental illness and designating mental health as a top priority for global development over the next 15 years (Votruba & Thornicroft, 2016).

During the 1960s, mental health was mainly focused on mental illness. The current definition focuses on the individual, highlights the person's strengths, and deemphasises one's weaknesses, with the main objectives being recovery and complete community participation (WHO, 2022b). The wellness model, which views health and disease as two distinct aspects, undergirds these more modern definitions. Recovery serves as a link between health and disease, building on health's advantages while addressing disease's disadvantages. Moreover, a combined focus on mental and physical health is necessary since many persons with mental diseases also have physical illness and vice versa. These focal points are crucial for reform in healthcare (Manderscheid et al., 2010).

Physical ailments, on average, are associated with less stigma than mental ones. In places with limited mental health literacy, this may contribute to a greater presentation of somatic problems in people with underlying mental diseases (Raguram & Weiss, 2004). Hence, it becomes imperative to manage chronic physical diseases by actively taking mental health issues into account (Thomas et al., 2016). In India, the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority (IRDA) has recently mandated that insurance providers also cover mental illness so that mental health issues are not neglected (Shah, 2023).

Although there has been growing recognition of the critical role mental health plays in achieving global development goals, there has not been much progress because suicide is still the fourth leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 29,

and depression is still one of the leading causes of disability. WHO also claims that physical issues can cause severe mental health conditions to cause early death, sometimes shortening life by up to two decades (Madaik, 2022; WHO, 2022c).

Other than those with physical health problems, there are many persons who are especially vulnerable to mental health concerns. One such group is that of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are often subjected to several institutional and ideological obstacles that are frequently a significant cause for their poor mental health. On a daily basis, people with disabilities confront numerous problems, such as physical limitations, unfavourable stereotypes, and limited access to their communities. As a result, persons with disabilities are significantly more vulnerable to mental illness and poor mental health (United Disabilities Services, 2022). In fact, persons with disabilities report regular mental distress (14+ mentally unhealthy days in the last 30 days) about five times more frequently than adults without disabilities. In 2018, over 17.4 million adults with disabilities experienced frequent emotional discomfort, 4.6 times more frequently than those without impairments (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Cree et al., 2020; United Disabilities Services, 2022). Chronic sickness, poor health behaviours, demoralising limits, and mental health issues are all consequences of frequent psychological distress (United Disabilities Services, 2022). Adults with disabilities may have healthcare providers that focus on their primary disability but often overlook diagnosing and treating comorbid mental health issues. Moreover, symptoms related to various physical disabilities and chronic diseases, as well as total functional impairment are aggravated by mental anguish and can be substantially improved with mental health care (Cree et al., 2020). Better mental health awareness and treatment can enhance their quality of life, lessen disease (both mental and physical), and save lives (Thomas et al., 2016).

People living in urban areas carry a greater risk of being affected by mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia because of their mechanical routine and work pressure. While cities might offer benefits like the potential for social connection and greater access to healthcare and education, air pollution and other exposure to pollutants, increased noise, a lack of open space, crime, social inequities, and the stress of sensory overload are some aspects that can be linked to poorer mental health in metropolitan settings (American Psychiatric Association, 2021). In India, efforts are still underway to establish good mental health facilities that are available to everyone. High quality counselling centres are required in every setting and a general awareness that encourages talking and addressing mental health issues appropriately needs to be built.

While the rising number of suicides in India is a matter of grave concern, the increase in student suicides, specifically, demands attention. In 2020, more students committed suicide than farmers, yet whereas farmer suicides are widely identified as a major problem in India, student suicides appear to be ignored. According to the Ministry of Education, between 2014 and 2021, 122 students from IITs, NITs, central universities, and other central institutions committed suicide. In 2021, Maharashtra had the most student suicides (1,834), followed by Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (Sarveswar & Thomas, 2022). Lack of knowledge and access to crucial mental health services are additional issues. Kota is a prime example of an educational hub where adolescents are placed in a pressure cooker environment without access to counselling services. Many tragic instances demonstrate that as human beings we are able to build pressure on young minds but do not know appropriate way to channelise it and have inadequate provision to reduce it through external help.

There is unfortunately too much stigma attached to mental health issues. There is a desperate need to identify persons going

through depression early. Family and friends can play a critical role in identifying and assisting such persons. It is good that celebrities are acknowledging publicly that despite all the luxuries they enjoy, they too do go through severe bouts of depression and need professional help. Recently, actor Imran Khan opened up about his mental health struggle, ways of coping, and the importance of therapy (Jain & Jain, 2023). On World Mental Health Day this year, several celebrities and influencers discussed their experiences with mental health issues, and generated awareness about the need for therapy (Srivastav, 2023).

With modern life's rising levels of stress, mental health issues will only get worse. To lessen and eliminate the stigma associated with mental health issues, public relations campaigns are acutely necessary, and awareness campaigns must be strengthened. WHO requests a thorough plan for prevention, treatment, and recovery using a whole-of-government strategy. People who are otherwise in good physical health must not compromise their lives and contributions as a result of mental health issues. With the right care, their conditions can be managed, and they can optimise their inclusion and participation in family, community and work spheres (Shah, 2023).

Whilst there has been some rise in awareness of mental health in schools, colleges, universities, in urban public spaces and community levels, the efforts need to be amplified to meet the enormity of the need. The government has also taken initiatives but still the steps are not enough and policymakers will also have to increase the mental healthcare budget, build a larger workforce of mental health professionals, and increase the number of mental health services. There is a need to also strengthen the regulatory agency which governs mental health professional services in India. Building awareness in rural areas remains a huge priority.

Overview of the current issue of Sambhashan

The pivotal focus of this issue is promoting mental health awareness in contemporary times. The current issue begins with Deepa Pawar's article that highlights the impact that climate change has had on Nomadic and Denotified Tribes while advocating for social and environmental justice for these communities. The next set of articles deal with mental health among the youth. While the second article explores how social media usage interacts with self-esteem and immediate gratification among today's youth, the third one examines the role played by socio-contextual factors such as gender roles, cultural ideals, and unrealistic performance standards in influencing the well-being and mental health of young adults. In the next article, Roy and Jain shed light on the plight of females working in the informal sector with respect to their difficulty in exercising the basic human right of access to leisure and rest. The fifth article presents the use of narrative ideas and practices in helping a nine-year-old child and his family deal with his performance anxiety. This is followed by a juristic critique of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. In the seventh article, there is a discussion about the mental health inequities faced by people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for immediate changes in policies regarding this. The eighth article addresses the pressing issue of enhancing mental health services in the country, the risks involved in the practice of counselling in the absence of appropriate training, and the need for quality control measures for mental health services. In the next article, Sinha analyses Shanta Gokhale's seminal novel titled *Rita Welinkar* in the light of women's mental health. Also, Dev presents her take on Amruta Patil's *Kari* and Anoushka Khan's *Still Life*.

In addition, this issue features a book review of 'Where There is No Psychiatrist: A Mental Health Care Manual' by Karen Fernandes, a review of the report on Trans Affirmative Mental Health Care Guidelines by Wilbur Gonsalves, and a review of the documentary

'Breaking the Silence' by Tina Chakravarty. In the current issue, homage is also paid to Professor Geeta Ramana.

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