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## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS IN INDIA

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### **Abstract**

*Millions of people suffer from mental illnesses in India with one of the highest suicide rates globally. Mental health is an important element of overall well-being, yet it remains an ignored aspect of healthcare in India. Despite increasing awareness around physical health, mental health continues to be overshadowed by stigma, misconceptions, and inadequate resources. The widespread lack of awareness, compounded by cultural taboos, poor mental health education, and the lack of mental health professionals has made mental health care inaccessible for Indians. The major challenges facing mental health awareness in India, including the stigma surrounding mental illness, widespread misconceptions, and insufficient mental health resources. Additionally, the role of cultural barriers and policy gaps that hinder effective mental health care. Some useful techniques to improve mental health awareness are educational initiatives, public campaigns, and the use of digital media platforms. Supporting mental health infrastructure, encouraging community help networks, and developing sustainable intersectoral collaborations are also important to improving access to mental health care. Promoting mental health education and awareness in India can break the cycle of stigma and ensure timely treatment and support for individuals suffering from mental health issues, ultimately leading to healthier individuals, communities, and a more resilient society.*

### **Keywords**

*Mental Health, Awareness, Challenges, Services, Policy*

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## **Intorduction**

Mental health is a basic element of overall well-being, yet it remains one of the most ignored areas of general health globally. Mental, neurological, and drug abuse disorders represent more than 10% of the international disease burden; however, approximately 85% of people in low and moderate income nations do not have access to treatment (Ghebreyesus, 2019). While awareness of physical health problems has been boosted greatly, mental health often lags, trapped by stigma and misconception. Around 970 million individuals suffer from any mental problem worldwide and around 60 to 70 million people which is 4.29 to 5 per cent of the total population of India are dealing with mental disorders with 2.6 lakh of suicide cases per year which makes India the world capital in the suicide rate (Jain, 2023). Mental health diseases affect a significant section of the population in India, where they are highly prevalent. According to epidemiological research, the prevalence of mental health disorders in India ranges from 9.5 to 370 per 1000 individuals. This prevalence represents a wide range of mental health conditions and the various obstacles that are being faced by the people in the nation. Therefore, the requirement for efficient interventions and support networks to address the population's mental health becomes important as we look at the prevalence rates of mental health illnesses in India (Srinivasaraju et al., 2010). As mental health problems continue to rise worldwide, awareness plays an important role in early intervention, reducing stigma, and enhancing access to care. This chapter explores the significance of mental health awareness, highlights the challenges that hinder improvement, and suggests techniques to improve understanding and support for mental well-being. By addressing these problems, we can better prepare individuals, communities, and societies to foster healthier conditions prioritising mental health as much as physical health. Access to mental healthcare remains a notable matter, with big gaps in access to and quality of treatment and limited availability of mental health professionals, especially in rural areas, bad infrastructure, a lack of awareness, and poor integration into primary healthcare systems hinder access to appropriate mental care in India (Meghrajani et al., 2023).

The increasing incidence of mental health issues and lack of awareness in India, as well as their varied consequences, need an in-depth understanding of the importance, factors and challenges of mental health awareness.

### **Importance of Mental Health Awareness**

There is much more importance to mental health awareness than we think. Awareness and information are the first steps towards prevention, treatment and knowing the symptoms of mental illness in society. In a developing and diverse country like India, a lack of awareness makes it much more difficult to improve mental health, this increases the importance of awareness in the field of mental health. Factors that can improve mental health awareness among people have been discussed below.

- 1. Personal Impact:** If a person has the right information about his disease and condition, then he can improve his health by getting mental health care at the right time and with the right person, probably the mental health professional who studies human behaviour, human psychology and having enough experience to deal with the patients with mental health problems.
- 2. Community Well-Being:** Mental health awareness is important not only for an individual but also for society as a whole. Suppose a person is aware of mental health. In that case, he will help improve mental health not only for himself but also for his family, colleagues at work, friends and society by knowing the mental health problems, their causes, early interventions and attitude toward seeking mental health professional help.
- 3. Economic costs:** Lack of awareness places a burden of untreated mental health problems on the health service and the economy. As an outcome, it is challenging to enforce mental health services and policies in the country and their impact remains down. Economic Survey 2023-24 acknowledged that mental health is the primary driver of the nation and individual development (Perappadan, 2024).
- 4. Breaking the Stigma:** Indian societies are full of stigma like shame, discrimination, isolation, fear of treatment, superstitious beliefs,

and family dishonor which are associated with mental health. Lowering the stigma covering mental sickness is essential to managing mental health issues in India. Stigma creates obstacles that restrict people from seeking the necessary assistance and aid they need (Meghrajani et al., 2023).

- 5. Improve access to treatment:** Mental health treatments are still far away from the reach of many Indians. Mental health awareness and knowledge make access and readiness for treatment. Also ensuring that care is reached easily and quickly, driving timely solutions to mental health problems possible. Increasing mental health awareness helps the people, governments and mental health facilitators too.
- 6. Improve quality of life:** Awareness improves the quality of life by helping individuals understand their emotions, recognise the reasons behind them, and know the first aid and remedies for managing their mental health challenges. This makes personal, professional, family, and work life better.

#### **Factors Affecting Mental Health Awareness**

Spreading awareness of mental health is crucial but before knowing the techniques of awareness it is important to understand the factors about mental health awareness that can affect the awareness of mental health in many ways.

- 1. Societal Factors:** Societal factors refer to the common societal forces and institutions that shape the behaviour of humans and interactions within a community. Social factors like cultural attitudes, stigma and discrimination, media representation and government policies are the main social factors that affect mental health awareness the most. Cultural norms and stigma or discrimination within the community are among the most important factors that influence mental health awareness as Cultural beliefs frequently interpret mental health problems as personal flaws or spiritual challenges rather than physical diseases, resulting in silence and shame. This stigma can restrict people from getting medical care, creating a lack of awareness and misunderstanding. The media has an important role in establishing cultural views on mental health.

Positive media portrayals of mental health can assist in eliminating stigma and encourage people to seek treatment. Negative or over-exaggerated media coverage, on the other hand, may propagate damaging stereotypes and misconceptions. Public health policies, government initiatives, and advocacy groups can help raise social awareness of mental health among people. Societies that engage in mental health awareness campaigns, education, and accessible services tend to have more knowledgeable citizens. In contrast, in areas where mental health is not a government priority, public awareness may be low.

- 2. Educational Factors:** The majority of chronic and persistent mental diseases begin before the age of 24 when most people are still in their educational institutions. From incorporating mental health narratives into the curriculum to de-stigmatization, discriminatory elimination, and early detection, to empowering stakeholders for early detection and simple interventions, the educational system provides numerous chances to raise mental health awareness (Srivastava et al., 2016). Curriculum, teacher training and accessibility of mental health services are educational factors that affect the awareness of mental health from its roots.
- 3. Healthcare Factors:** The healthcare factors refer to various elements within the healthcare system that affect how individuals perceive, understand and address mental health-related problems. Availability of mental health professionals, quality of care, and insurance coverage are the healthcare factors that significantly affect mental health awareness in India. The availability of mental health specialists, counselling, and therapy services can have a significant impact on awareness levels. If services are easily accessible, people are more likely to seek help and become more aware of their mental health needs. High-quality mental health services such as accurate diagnosis, effective treatment and continuous support can help to raise awareness about the need to address mental health issues. Also, healthcare providers play a key role in educating people about mental health. Public campaigns by healthcare institutions can raise awareness and reduce stigma. Healthcare policies that support

mental health services, such as, extensive mental health treatment, and insurance coverage, can also have an impact on mental health awareness. Several individuals with a variety of mental illnesses are disadvantaged due to limited access to care. This could be because care isn't available, or because the way they interact with caregivers discourages or diverts the assistance they are seeking (Dowrick et al., 2009a). Thus, healthcare factors are very important in raising mental health awareness.

**4. Individual Factors:** The individual factors are those which interact to shape an individual's overall awareness and attitudes towards mental health and also towards the problems associated with the mental health of a person. Personal experiences, social support, education and knowledge are the personal factors of mental health awareness. Personal experiences of individuals who have directly encountered mental health struggles or witnessed others struggling are more aware and compassionate about mental health issues. Social support from family, friends, and the community all have a large impact on public awareness. Individuals with supportive social networks are more likely to seek treatment, whereas those in unsupportive or critical situations may deny or avoid mental health difficulties. Education and knowledge are important factors for mental health awareness as the level of awareness a person has regarding mental health concerns is frequently related to their education and those who receive mental health education are more likely to detect signs and seek treatment.

#### **Challenges in Mental Health Awareness in India**

India is a very diverse country, especially in terms of its culture. There are so many types of beliefs about mental health in different regions of the country. Mental health problems are like a taboo that's why mental health awareness is a challenge in India. Below are some important challenges to mental health awareness in India.

**1. Stigma:** Patients are afraid or do not seek mental health services due to fear of judgment, rejection or negative consequences. Due to this, the person's mental condition worsens over time. This is the major challenge in spreading mental health awareness in India

The root cause of mental health stigma is not understanding mental illness. Stigma can be decreased by taking the initiative, getting educated, and reporting issues.

- 2. Misconceptions:** Most people have any type of myths and misconceptions about mental health illness like, more than half of the population believe that mental illness can be cured after getting married, and mental illness can be treated only in a mental hospital. Most people think tension and sadness are the causes of mental problems (Kaur et al., 2016). These types of misconceptions and myths lead to the challenge of spreading mental health awareness in India.
- 3. Lack of Resources:** There are insufficient numbers of psychiatric hospitals, outpatient clinics, and community-based mental health services, mainly in rural locations (Panda, 2024) This is the prime contributor to the mental health awareness challenge. Resources available for mental health care in most low-income and middle-income countries are minimal, and shortages are likely to continue. Not only are resources for mental health lacking, but they are also equitably distributed between countries, areas, and citizens (Saxena et al., 2007).
- 4. Cultural Barriers:** Traditional beliefs in India also discourage people from seeking mental health help. The individual who suffers from mental problems, which society generally labels as mentally ill, lunatic and possessed, is sent to a mental hospital rather than understanding their situation and problem. A large number of individuals seek treatment from conventional healers like Baba's instead of mental health professionals because they believe that magical or spiritual powers are the core cause of any mental disorder (Handa, 2024). This makes cultural belief a challenge to mental health awareness in India.
- 5. Education Deficit:** Lack of education is one of India's major barriers to mental health awareness. Lack of education spreads stigma, and confusion regarding mental health. Without proper education or with wrong education, people are unable to understand mental health and its concepts and they don't know how to deal with this

and how to cure mental health. Mental health education is a good tool to boost awareness and understanding and decrease the stigma about mental health (Shim et al., 2022).

**6. Policy and Implementation Gaps:** Mental health remains a lower preference in healthcare funding due to poor implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 with a lack of grants and skilled professionals for mental health services. Which has become a challenge in mental health awareness in India.

#### **Strategies to Raise Mental Health Awareness**

People waver to get out for support due to a shortage of the proper resources. Mental health awareness is likely the foremost key to busting the stigma and helping individuals find professional help to treat their problems. Creating awareness around mental health disorders is the most effective tool sufferers can use to reduce the shame and denial of those who suffer. While there are many ways one can go about raising awareness, the most important thing is to try (REAN Foundation, 2023). Some strategies to raise mental health awareness are mentioned below.

- 1. Public Campaigns:** General awareness drives are one of the most practical techniques for spreading mental health knowledge. They deliver a medium to inform people about the significance of mental health, decrease stigma, and uplift individuals to seek help. A successful example of this is World Mental Health Day, which has significantly raised global awareness about mental health issues. Mental health campaigns are increasing mental health awareness by virtually using digital media as an information dissemination platform. This can reach a large number of people in a short time, but in rural areas of India, working online as well as on the ground level will be more effective (Latha et al., 2020).
- 2. Educational Programs:** Education is key to removing misconceptions about mental health and lowering the shame about it. By teaching mental health in academics, youths can learn how to understand and take care of their mental well-being from a young age. Programs that focus on handling emotions, dealing with stress, and knowing when to ask for assistance can create a more

collaborative atmosphere for everyone. For adults, community workshops and conferences can present helpful knowledge about spotting symptoms of mental health problems, finding resources, and helping families and buddies who may be struggling. These efforts can be led by the government, charities, or mental health institutions (Strategies for Mental Health Awareness in India, 2024).

- 3. Media and Social Media:** The media has a huge influence on public perception and is a strong instrument in lifting awareness around mental health in India. National drives in which public figures and ordinary people discuss their mental health fights can normalize these discussions and motivate others to pursue aid. Social media platforms can strengthen these messages, which can quickly reach a wide audience. Hashtags, challenges and viral content can engage younger demographics and spread awareness naturally. Associations with influencers who can connect with different sections of the population can also enlarge the reach of these movements (Strategies for Mental Health Awareness in India, 2024).
- 4. Strengthening Mental Health Infrastructure:** Enhancing access to mental health services is essential for increasing mental health understanding in India. This includes training more mental health experts and assuring they are available in places where services are lacking. Telemedicine and online counselling can assist close the gap between urban and rural healthcare, offering essential help to people in isolated locations. Government policies should also concentrate on mental health by increasing the budget for mental health programs and incorporating mental health services into primary healthcare systems. This wide approach can make mental health care more accessible and reduce the stress on specialized facilities (Strategies for Mental Health Awareness in India, 2024).
- 5. Policy and Initiatives:** Existing programs have vital options to improve mental health care. The national mental health policy, adolescent health programs, and health and wellness centers emphasize the importance of focusing on mental health. Also, schools promote life skills and mental health, while the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports promotes overall youth growth. This

requires teamwork across health, community, and education sectors to create an atmosphere supporting mental health. Services must be tailored to meet the specific needs facing mental health challenges, considering their cultural backgrounds and preferences for both online and offline assistance. Key movements should include forming sustainable collaborations for quality services, empowering people, respecting their rights, and embracing meaningful use of digital tools (Girase et al., 2022).

- 6. Community Support Networks:** Developing community support networks can help create more welcoming surroundings for individuals with mental health challenges. Community centres, NGOs, and local health employees can manage support groups where individuals can share their stories and learn from each other. These networks can also offer practical help, like guiding people via the healthcare system or providing relief and support for caretakers. Peer support is another useful approach. By training individuals who have successfully dealt with their mental health conditions to become peer counsellors, they can offer understanding, guidance, and encouragement to others going through similar struggles (Strategies for Mental Health Awareness in India, 2024).

### **Conclusion**

The state of mental health in India is very pathetic. Indians are suffering from many mental illnesses and there are not enough services for treatment and education for prevention and identification. Awareness is the only tool that can improve the mental health of Indians. It is not manageable to spread awareness about mental health in India. It encounters many challenges like, deeply entrenched stigma, cultural misconceptions, shortage of mental health professionals and poor infrastructure in rural locations. Tackling these challenges requires a multifaceted strategy. Educating individuals through schools and public campaigns, increasing the budget for mental health services, and incorporating mental health care into the primary healthcare system are the first important steps. Digital platforms and community networks can further support mental health outreach and access. By addressing

these challenges and promoting a culture of openness, India can reduce the stigma around mental health and provide more timely care. Collective efforts across health, education, and community sectors are important in creating a supportive environment that can respect mental well-being as much as physical health. Continuous action is necessary to improve awareness and treatment, ultimately improving the quality of life for millions of Indians.

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