

Government Schemes and Programmes for Coping with Mental Health Problems in India

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Abstract

Mental health is an essential component of overall wellbeing and significantly influences emotional stability, productivity, interpersonal relationships, and quality of life. In recent decades, mental health disorders have emerged as a major public health concern globally and in India. Rapid urbanization, technological changes, academic pressure, unemployment, social isolation, and lifestyle transitions have contributed to the increasing prevalence of depression, anxiety, stress-related disorders, and suicide. India faces a considerable burden of mental illness along with inadequate mental healthcare infrastructure and a shortage of trained professionals. To address these challenges, the Government of India has introduced several policies, legislative reforms, and healthcare programmes such as the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), District Mental Health Programme (DMHP), Mental Healthcare Act (2017), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), Ayushman Bharat Scheme, and Tele-MANAS services. The present paper examines the mental health scenario in India, reviews relevant literature, and analyzes major governmental schemes and programmes designed to cope with mental health problems. The study adopts a descriptive research methodology based on secondary data sources. Findings suggest that although significant progress has been made in expanding awareness and access to services, challenges such as stigma, inadequate funding, workforce shortages, and rural–urban disparities continue to hinder effective implementation.

Keywords: Mental health, Government schemes, NMHP, Mental Healthcare Act, Tele-MANAS, India

Introduction

Mental health refers to a state of psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing in which individuals recognize their abilities, manage normal life stressors, work productively, and contribute positively to society (World Health Organization, 2022). Mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness but also includes emotional resilience, self-confidence, positive relationships, and effective coping abilities.

Mental health plays a significant role in every aspect of life, including education, employment, family relationships, and social adjustment. Individuals with good mental health are better able to make decisions, manage stress, maintain healthy relationships, and contribute to community development. Conversely, poor mental health negatively affects productivity, physical health, interpersonal functioning, and quality of life.

In recent years, mental health disorders have increased substantially due to rapid social and economic transformations. Factors such as urbanization, unemployment, academic competition, social media dependency, changing family structures, and financial stress have intensified psychological distress among people of all age groups. Depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance abuse disorders have become common public health concerns worldwide.

In India, mental health disorders are emerging as a serious challenge. Despite increasing awareness, access to mental healthcare services remains inadequate, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Social stigma, shortage of trained professionals, and insufficient infrastructure further complicate the situation. Recognizing the growing burden of mental illness, the Government of India has introduced various mental health policies, laws, and programmes to strengthen mental healthcare services and protect the rights of persons with mental illness.

The present paper focuses on major government schemes and programmes related to mental health in India and evaluates their role in coping with mental health problems.

Review of Literature

Several studies and reports have highlighted the increasing burden of mental health disorders and the need for comprehensive mental healthcare services.

Aaron T. Beck (2011) emphasized the role of maladaptive cognitive patterns in depression and anxiety and proposed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as an effective intervention for mental disorders. His work significantly contributed to evidence-based psychological treatment approaches.

The National Mental Health Survey conducted by National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences reported that nearly one in seven people in India suffers from some form of mental disorder (Gururaj et al., 2016). The survey also identified a substantial treatment gap due to limited mental healthcare resources.

World Health Organization (2021) reported that approximately 800,000 people die due to suicide annually, making suicide one of the leading causes of death among young individuals worldwide.

Taylor (2019) studied the psychological impact of pandemics and observed that global crises increase anxiety, fear, depression, loneliness, and emotional stress. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of accessible mental healthcare services and tele-counseling systems.

Research conducted by Indian Council of Medical Research emphasized the growing prevalence of depression, stress, and substance abuse among Indian youth. Studies indicate that academic pressure, social comparison, unemployment, and social media exposure are major contributors to psychological distress.

Foucault (1965) discussed the historical and social dimensions of mental illness and emphasized the importance of institutional reforms and humane treatment of individuals with psychiatric disorders.

The reviewed literature suggests that mental health disorders are multidimensional problems requiring integrated interventions including awareness, policy support, counselling, rehabilitation, and community-based mental healthcare services.

Mental Health Scenario in India

Mental health disorders are increasingly affecting the Indian population. According to the National Mental Health Survey (2015–16), approximately 14% of India's population suffers from some form of mental illness (Gururaj et al., 2016). Depression, anxiety disorders, stress-related disorders, and substance abuse are among the most prevalent conditions.

India also faces a significant shortage of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, psychiatric nurses, and psychiatric social workers. Government expenditure on mental health remains less than 1% of the total healthcare budget, which affects the accessibility and quality of mental healthcare services.

Major factors contributing to mental health problems in India include:

- Academic and career pressure
- Unemployment and economic insecurity
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Substance abuse
- Family conflicts

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- Urban stress and migration
 - Digital and social media dependency

Suicide has become another major public health concern, especially among youth populations. Academic stress, relationship issues, financial difficulties, and emotional instability contribute significantly to suicidal behavior.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the mental health scenario in India.
2. To analyze major government schemes and programmes related to mental health.
3. To examine challenges in the implementation of mental healthcare services.
4. To suggest measures for strengthening mental healthcare systems in India.

Sources of Data

The study is based on secondary data collected from:

- Government reports
- WHO publications
- NIMHANS reports
- Research journals

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- Books and policy documents

Method of Analysis

Descriptive and qualitative analysis methods were used for interpretation of data and governmental mental health initiatives.

Government Schemes and Programmes for Mental Health

National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)

The National Mental Health Programme was launched in 1982 with the objective of ensuring accessible and affordable mental healthcare services to all sections of society. The programme emphasizes prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and mental health promotion.

The major objectives of NMHP include:

- Integration of mental healthcare with primary healthcare
- Development of community mental health services
- Training of mental health professionals
- Promotion of mental health awareness

District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)

The District Mental Health Programme was introduced under NMHP to decentralize mental healthcare services at the district level.

The programme provides:

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- Outpatient mental health services
 - Counseling and psychotherapy
 - School mental health programmes
 - Community awareness campaigns
 - Referral and rehabilitation services

DMHP has improved accessibility to mental healthcare services in many rural and semi-urban regions.

Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 is a landmark reform in India's mental health policy framework. Major provisions include:

- Right to affordable and quality mental healthcare
- Protection of dignity and human rights
- Decriminalization of suicide attempts
- Advance directives regarding treatment preferences
- Regulation of mental health establishments

The Act emphasizes a rights-based approach toward mental healthcare.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 recognizes mental illness as a disability category and ensures equal opportunities in education, healthcare, and employment.

Ayushman Bharat and Health and Wellness Centres

Ayushman Bharat aims to strengthen primary healthcare systems and improve accessibility to healthcare services, including mental healthcare.

Health and Wellness Centres provide:

- Mental health screening
- Counseling services
- Referral support
- Preventive and awareness programmes

Tele-MANAS and Digital Mental Health Services

The Government of India introduced tele-mental health services such as Tele-MANAS and the Kiran Helpline to increase accessibility to psychological support services.

These initiatives provide:

- Telephonic counseling
- Crisis intervention support
- Suicide prevention services
- Online mental health consultations

Digital mental healthcare became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussion

The study indicates that the Government of India has made considerable progress in promoting mental healthcare through policy reforms, legislative frameworks, and healthcare programmes. Programmes such as NMHP and DMHP have improved community-level mental healthcare services and increased awareness regarding mental illness.

The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 strengthened the legal rights and dignity of persons with mental illness and promoted a rights-based approach toward treatment and rehabilitation. Tele-mental health services and digital initiatives expanded accessibility to counseling and psychological support, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, several implementation challenges continue to exist. Shortage of trained professionals, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and social stigma limit the effectiveness of mental healthcare programmes. Rural populations continue to face difficulties in accessing specialized mental healthcare services.

The findings suggest that mental healthcare should be integrated more effectively with primary healthcare systems, educational institutions, and community welfare programmes. Increased investment, awareness campaigns, workforce training, and community participation are essential for strengthening India's mental healthcare system.

Conclusion

Mental health is a crucial component of individual wellbeing and national development. The increasing burden of mental disorders in India highlights the urgent need for comprehensive mental healthcare services and policy support.

The Government of India has introduced several important initiatives such as the National Mental Health Programme, District Mental Health Programme, Mental Healthcare Act, Ayushman Bharat, and Tele-MANAS services to improve accessibility, awareness, rehabilitation, and protection of rights related to mental health.

Although significant progress has been made, major challenges such as stigma, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of professionals, and insufficient funding continue to hinder effective implementation. Strengthening community-based services, increasing investment, promoting awareness, and integrating mental health into primary healthcare systems are necessary for improving mental healthcare delivery in India.

Implications of the Study

1. Mental health awareness programmes should be expanded in schools, colleges, and workplaces.
2. Government investment in mental healthcare infrastructure should be increased.
3. More psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors should be trained.
4. Community-based rehabilitation and counseling services should be strengthened.
5. Tele-mental health services should be expanded in rural and underserved areas.
6. Public awareness campaigns are necessary to reduce stigma associated with mental illness.

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