

Experts Speak

MENTAL HEALTH: CONCERNS, CHALLENGES & THE WAY FORWARD

Concept Note

“Mental illness is not a personal failure. In fact, if there is failure, it is to be found in the way we have responded to people with mental and brain disorders”, said Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of WHO, on releasing the World Health Report.

One in four people in the world are affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide. Treatments are available, but nearly two-thirds of people with a known mental disorder never seek help from a health professional. Stigma, discrimination and neglect prevent care and treatment from reaching people with mental disorders, says the World Health Organization (WHO). Where there is neglect, there is little or no understanding. Where there is no understanding, there is neglect.



In a new report entitled “New Understanding, New Hope” the United Nations’ health agency seeks to break this vicious cycle and urges governments to seek solutions for mental health that are already available and affordable. Governments should move away from large mental institutions and towards community health care, and integrate mental health care into primary health care and the general health care system, says WHO.

A lack of urgency, misinformation, and competing demands are blinding policy-makers from taking stock of a situation where mental disorders figure among the leading causes of disease and disability in the world, says WHO. Depressive disorders are already the fourth leading cause of the global disease burden. They are expected to rank second by 2020, behind ischaemic heart disease but ahead of all other diseases.

The responsibility for action lies with governments, says WHO. Currently, more than 40 percent of countries have no mental health policy and over 30 percent have no mental health programme. Around 25 percent of countries have no mental health legislation.

The magnitude of mental health burden is not matched by the size and effectiveness of the response it demands. Currently, more than 33 percent of countries allocate less than 1 percent of their total health budgets to mental health, with another 33 percent spending just 1 percent of their budgets on mental health. A limited range of medicines is sufficient to treat the majority of mental disorders. About 25 percent of countries, however, do not have the three most commonly prescribed drugs used to treat schizophrenia, depression and epilepsy at the primary health care level. As per WHO estimates (2001), “More than 40% of countries, covering about 65% of the world’s population, have access to less than one psychiatric bed per 10 000 population. Beds are particularly deficient in the African and South-East Asia Regions.”

In India, WHO estimates that the burden of mental health problems is of the tune of 2,443 DALYs per 100,000 population, and the age-adjusted suicide rate per 100,000 population is 21.1. It is estimated that, in India, the economic loss, due to mental health conditions, during 2012-2030, would be approximately 1.03 trillion dollars.

Mental health, like other aspects of health, can be affected by a range of socioeconomic factors that need to be addressed through comprehensive strategies for promotion, prevention, treatment and recovery through a holistic approach.

Determinants of mental health and mental disorders include not only individual attributes such as the ability to manage one’s thoughts, emotions,

behaviours and interactions with others, but also social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors such as national policies, social protection, living standards, working conditions, and community supports. Poverty and low education levels are the key amongst these factors. Quite a large range of psychological, personality and genetic factors contribute towards the vulnerability.

Treatment of mental health disorders is of utmost importance. Policy makers should be encouraged to promote availability of and access to cost-effective treatment of common mental disorders at the primary health care level.

The *Liberal Studies* journal invited five eminent experts in the domain to ponder over the mental health challenges and concerns in the contemporary times. **Dr. B. Mukopadhyay** discusses how the practices available in yogic sciences can preserve the mental health and can prevent from mental ailment along with its remedial measures. From the beginning of the last century research work on the psychology of the east created huge impact among the psychologists and the educationists of the west and they observed yogic sciences form the core of the eastern psychology. **Dr. D.M. Pestonjee** and **Taronish Pastakia** reflect upon inter-generational adjustment issues in the workplace. The modern world of work has to take into account factors like uncertainty, complexity, speed, technology, virtual- workspace, hyperspecialization, cultural diversity



and communication and also macro-level factors like gender-issues, work-life balance, the changing legal environment, social structure and support systems and mental health issues. Cutting-edge advances in the virtual-workspace like the roles of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) have also been discussed.