

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**ELIMINATING ELITISM IN MENTAL
HEALTH**

www.nextias.com

ELIMINATING ELITISM IN MENTAL HEALTH

Context

- The **Union Budget 2025-26** has made significant strides in **addressing mental health**, allocating 99,858.56 crore to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) underscores the government's recognition of health as a critical pillar of national development.

Key Allocations for Mental Health in the Union Budget 2025-26

- National Tele Mental Health Programme:** The budget has allocated 79.6 crore to this program, which aims to provide accessible mental health services across the country.
- National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS):** It is expected to enhance research and treatment facilities, strengthening India's capacity to address complex mental health challenges.

About the Mental Health

- According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Potential Reasons Mental Health Disorders

- Exposure to unfavorable social, economic, geopolitical and environmental circumstances – including poverty, violence, inequality and environmental deprivation.
- Early adverse life experiences**, such as trauma or a history of abuse (for example, child abuse, sexual assault, witnessing violence, etc.)
- Use of **alcohol or drugs**, having feelings of loneliness or isolation, etc.
- Dysfunctional family relationships** and lack of support systems can negatively impact mental health.

Burden of Mental Health Disorders

- Global:** In 2019, an estimated 970 million people were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depression being the most common.
 - These conditions can lead to significant distress, impairment in functioning, and an increased risk of self-harm.
 - The economic consequences of mental health disorders are significant, with productivity losses often outweighing the direct costs of care.
- India:**
 - 15% of India's adult population** suffered from mental disorder (national study);
 - Mental Morbidity:** Higher in urban metro regions (13.5%) as compared to rural areas (6.9%) and urban non-metro areas (4.3%).

Challenges in Mental Health Care

- Socio-Economic Factors:** Socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and food security impact the mental health conditions.
 - Social Discrimination:** Stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations further exacerbate the challenges faced by individuals with mental health conditions.
 - Budgetary Allocations:** National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) has faced budgetary ambiguities. In recent years, its **funding has been merged under broader health programs**, making it difficult to determine the exact allocation for NMHP.
- Treatment Gap:** 70% to 92%; More pronounced among blue-collar workers, who often face demanding jobs, unsafe work environments, and a lack of adequate legislative and policy protections.

- ♦ It is particularly **wide in low- and middle-income countries**, where mental health services are often under-resourced and of poor quality.
- **Limited Scope of Existing Policies & Regulations:** The **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020)**, for instance, focuses primarily on physical safety, excluding mental well-being and preventive measures.
 - ♦ Similarly, the **Code on Social Security (2020)** does not recognize mental strain as a compensable injury, further exacerbating the disparity in mental health care.
 - ♦ **Mental Healthcare Act of 2017** enshrines access to mental health as **a statutory right**, over 11 crore people in India still suffer from mental health disorders, with **80% not seeking help**.

Steps Towards Inclusive Mental Health Care

- **Policy Reforms:** Governments need to revise existing policies to include mental health as a critical component of occupational safety and health.
 - ♦ It includes recognizing mental strain as a compensable injury and providing adequate support for mental health care.
- **Awareness and Education:** Public awareness campaigns and educational programs can help reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues and encourage individuals to seek help when needed.
- **Community-Based Programs:** Implementing community-based mental health programs can ensure that mental health services are accessible to underserved populations.
 - ♦ These programs can provide early detection, treatment, and support for individuals with mental health disorders.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Training healthcare professionals and community workers in mental health care can improve the quality and accessibility of mental health services.
 - ♦ It includes providing training to general physicians, health workers, and other frontline workers to identify and address mental health issues.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector entities can help create a comprehensive and inclusive mental health care system.
 - ♦ These partnerships can leverage resources and expertise to address the mental health needs of diverse populations.

Key Initiatives

- **WHO's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan (2013-2030):** It aims to improve mental health by strengthening governance, providing community-based care, implementing promotion and prevention strategies, and strengthening information systems, evidence, and research.
 - ♦ It emphasizes the importance of integrating mental health into primary health care to ensure that individuals receive the care they need.
- **Role of Community-Based Programs:** These programs can provide early detection, treatment, and support for individuals with mental health disorders, particularly in underserved populations.
 - ♦ By engaging with communities and raising awareness about mental health, these programs can help reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help when needed.

Steps Taken by the Government of India

- **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP):** India has implemented **various initiatives** to improve access to mental health care under it.
 - ♦ These include the establishment of **25 Centres of Excellence** to increase the intake of students in mental health specialties and the launch of the **National Tele Mental Health Programme** to provide quality mental health counseling and care services.
- The **District Mental Health Programme** (component of the NMHP) has been sanctioned for **implementation in 767 districts**, providing training to specialist and non-specialist cadres and offering outpatient services, assessment, counseling, and continuing care.

- **Comprehensive Primary Health Care:** Upgradation of more than 1.73 lakh **Sub Health Centres (SHCs)** and **Primary Health Centres (PHCs)** to **Ayushman Arogya Mandirs**, where mental health services have been added.
- **National Tele Mental Health Programme (NTMHP):** It aims to improve access to quality mental health counselling and care. A total of **53 Tele MANAS Cells** are operational across 36 states /union territories.
- **Manodarpan Initiative:** An initiative under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, aims to provide psycho-social support to students for their mental health and well-being.
- **Kiran Helpline:** The helpline is a step towards suicide prevention, and can help with support and crisis management.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- The Union Budget 2025-26 represents a significant step towards improving mental health care in India.
- By increasing funding for key programs and institutions, the government has demonstrated its commitment to addressing mental health challenges.
- However, continued efforts are needed to ensure transparency in funding allocations and to address the socio-economic factors that contribute to mental health issues.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

Discuss the impact of elitism in mental health care on underserved populations and propose strategies to eliminate this disparity, ensuring equitable access to mental health services for all individuals.

