INADEQUACY OF INDIA'S APPROACH TO MENTAL ILLNESS

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"Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all"

Bill Clinton

ABSTRACT

Mental health is the influential part of one's well-being has gained its importance worldwide. Without mental health, there can be no good physical health. India has a far-reaching approach to mental health but it lags due to improper implementation of laws. This paper deals with the contemporary aspects of human life which tend to have a greater impact on one's emotional and psychological well-being. This paper tends to give an insight into how social media has an impact on one's mental health and how the present time of COVID 19 has contributed to increasing the cases of mental illness and suicide.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health refers to the psychological well-being and the emotional well-being of a human being. The way how a person is thinking, feeling, and behaving reflects his mental health. Mental health of an individual helps him to cope with stress in life, enables him to realize his capabilities, and also encourages him to work productively and fruitfully to make a contribution to the country. For an individual social, physical, and mental health are crucial and interwoven strands of life. It becomes more apparent that mental health is very important for the well-being

of an individual, family, communities, and countries as we tend to know more about the relationship between social, physical, and mental health.[i] The mental functioning of an individual is fundamentally interlinked with his physical and social functioning and health outcomes. For instance, depression is a risk factor for cancer, diabetes and heart diseases, etc. Mental illness has a significant impact on the health and well-being of not only on an individual but also to their families and community. We live in a world that is market-oriented, liberalizing economies, and also having an invasive media which has a major role in creating hazardous lifestyle. Today people are being more vulnerable to social, psychological, and mental problems due to their fragile pattern of life.[ii] Mental health has always been underestimated because of lack of connectedness between mental illness and other health illnesses[iii]. Mental health or disorders have always been ignored and neglected in many parts of the country as mental health has never been accorded the same importance as physical health. There can be no health without mental health, it is equally important to stay mentally healthy as it is to stay physically healthy.

The major reason why India is inadequate towards mental illness is the lack of awareness and sensitivity of the issue which tends to poses a threat to inadequate delivery of mental health care system[iv]. People with mental illness have always been looked down upon by society and they are often termed as lunatics, idiots, or whatnot. In a country like India, mental illness is still considered as a stigma which leads to suicide or isolation of patient suffering from the same. People seeking help from therapists and psychiatrists are ashamed to come out because in a country like India people tend to consider those people as insane minds.

INDIAN SCENARIO ON MENTAL HEALTH CARE

India is one of the largest populations around the world which have been affected by mental illness. According to a study, one in seven people from India is suffering from mental illness be it from depression, anxiety to severe conditions such as schizophrenia. [v] In India recognition of mental illness, its importance and awareness is very limited due to which it's understanding and promoting becomes a tedious task[vi]. In India, the discovery of mental illness is often followed by denial and hesitation to seek help as there is always a big mark around people who are suffering from any kind of mental health issue. The people around the world are facing

mental health challenges for instance autism, intellectual disability in childhood, adult conditions such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and psychosis or dementia in old age. [vii] Although mental disorders can be controlled or cured, most people tend to brush their issues under the carpet and suffer in silence. [viii]When it comes to physical health people are very conscious but when it comes to mental health people tend to ignore and neglect. In most of the cases or situations, people are not even aware that they are suffering from mental illness.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE LAWS IN INDIA

The Mental Health Care Bill in India became the Mental Health Care Act in 2017 with the President's assent. The act aims to enact the protection and promote the rights of and improve the care and treatment for people affected by mental illness in India. This act defines mental illness as "a substantial disorder of thinking, mood and perception, orientation, or memory that grossly impairs judgment, behavior, capacity to recognize reality or ability to meet the ordinary demands of life, mental conditions associated with the abuse of alcohol and drugs. But it doesn't regard mental retardation, a condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind of a person, especially characterized by sub normality of intelligence, as mental illness[ix]". This act provides governance to the persons who are suffering from mental illness with healthcare and services to protect their rights.

People suffering from mental health should be aware of the treatments which are gruesome and forbidden by law and should not be scared of it. The treatments like Electro-convulsive therapy without the use of muscle relaxants and anesthesia, Electro-convulsive therapy for minors, Sterilization of men or women, when such sterilization is intended as a treatment for mental illness are prohibited by the law. [x] People need to be aware of the right granted by the Mental Health Care Act and the treatments which are prohibited. For instances, no psychosurgery shall be performed until, the informed consent of the patient on whom surgery is being performed and approval from the concerned board to perform the surgery[xi]. However, Doctors tend to deceive patients as they are not aware of the provision and rights granted to them by the act.

Every individual who's suffering from mental illness has the right to access mental healthcare services. This act aims to protect such persons from inhumane treatment, to gain access to free

legal services and their medical records, and have the right to complain in the event of deficiencies in provisions. The individuals who are suffering from mental illness have certain rights under this act which are right to community living; right to live with dignity; protection from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; treatment equal to persons with physical illness; right to relevant information concerning treatment, other rights and recourses; right to confidentiality; right to access their basic medical records; right to personal contacts and communication; right to legal aid; and recourse against deficiencies in provision of care, treatment, and services[xii]. However, all these rights are still not recognized by a country like India which still lacks its awareness regarding mental illness and still takes it as a serious health issue. Presently in our country, people are not even aware that there are laws related to mental health care as well. Persons who suffer from serious psychological disorders cannot often make sound decisions, and in a society like ours they even fear more to seek professional help. The result of inadequacies regarding the awareness about mental illness tends to lead to the degradation of the standard of living and quality of people who are suffering from mental illness. Although the major highlight of this act has been one of the tremendous steps to decriminalize the attempt to suicide and the prohibition on all those treatments or procedures that were gruesome and harm the people suffering from mental illness.

COVID 19 IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID 19 a pandemic has negatively affected people's mental health and also had created new hurdles for the people who are already suffering from mental illness. The measures taken by the government which is necessary to stop the spread of coronavirus harm an individual's mental health which includes social distancing, business, and school closure, shelter in place orders which lead to financial distress and isolation of an individual.[xiii] The reason behind why the measure taken by the government to stop the spread of COVID is increasing mental health illness. Firstly, as we say a man is a social animal it becomes an arduous task to stay at home and sometimes it becomes suffocating which tends to lead anxiety, stress, panic disorder depression, and suicide. Secondly, people are worried about their health and their loved ones falling as there is uncertainty about prognosis, treatment, and future which commonly increases the feeling of anxiety. Thirdly due to the lockdown people are suffering from financial loss

because of the business closure and losing their jobs which has a major impact on the life and living standard of an individual. Lastly, people have increased the consumption of alcohol and substance use that leads to the problem of mental health and other health issues. Every human being is different, having their lifestyles and has different ways to respond to a certain situation. During the COVID 19 pandemic how a human being responds to stress and anxiety depends wholly on their background, family and friends support, financial situation, health and emotional problems, the society they live in, and many other factors. [xiv] The Indian Psychiatry Society (IPS) has conducted a recent survey and have found that the number of mental health cases have been increased by 20% during the lockdown and at least one in five Indian is affected by mental health[xv]. Health experts have said that mental health could be the country's next crisis as anxiety, depression, and suicide are on the rise.

The study conducted by public interest technologist Thejseh GN, activist Kanika Sharma and Aman assistant professor at Jindal Law School has found that the leading cause of non-coronavirus deaths in India is because of distress triggered by the nationwide lockdown.[xvi] Over 300 suicide cases were reported during lockdown which was due to depression, anxiety and stress which is the result of loneliness, non-availability of alcohol, lack of human touch or social gathering, lack of freedom of movement, fearing of infection or stigma attached to the disease and some people were stuck alone away from families. Psychologist and psychiatrist have claimed that the lockdown period is a challenge for everyone but the most vulnerable are people suffering mental health[xvii]. People suffering from anxiety, depression, or has a history of genetic depression need special attention so to make it easier for them to overcome the problems and lead a normal life.

Depression is a hidden disease and the manifestations are as varied as the people it affects. Some of the cases people committing suicide came into the limelight and some are still unknown. The famous Bollywood star Sushant Singh Rajput had committed suicide during the lockdown. One of the major reasons due to which he was pushed to the edge to commit suicide was depression as he was suffering from the same for the past 6 months. Experts have also mentioned that we will never be able to know the exact reason behind suicide but the possible reason can be loneliness or isolation and restricted lifestyle during the lockdown.[xviii] Sushant Singh Rajput's demise has an impact on many of his fan's lives and some of them weren't able to handle this loss and also committed suicide. The other instance where the

young 18-year-old Tik Tok star committed suicide during the lockdown the reason which pusher her to the edge was depression after the ban of Tik Tok by the government[xix]. Depression, anxiety, psychological disorders, stress, and other mental health illness are the reason behind increased suicide rates during lockdown due to loneliness, financial distress, and restriction on movement and many others.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Social media has become tremendously popular over the last decade and has entrenched an entirely different medium for human association. Online social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Whatsapp have made it very easier to connect widely. These social networking platforms have caused major changes in the way how people communicate and interact with each other. Social media platforms have become a very integral part of our lives. The social media platform is like a coin having both sides positive and negative. We cannot deny that social media has its positive aspect and impact on people's life for instance it develops social awareness, helps in teaching and learning, develops self-confidence helps in showcasing talent, and especially its convenience and saves time. The saddened part that these social media platforms also have a negative impact on an individual life for instance develops anxiety and depression, reduces productivity, cyberbullying and theft of data or privacy and, many others. As human being is a social animal, social media plays an influential role in our life subsequently we start comparing our real world with this platform and which creates a serious risk to an individual's mental and emotional health. Today's youth spend their days maintaining their social media lives and is getting influenced more by others life in social media by comparing themselves to others. These platforms were created for connecting people but now people started having animosity amongst each other. Social media platforms have become a serious risk to one's mental and emotional health. Recently cyberbullying has also been in limelight and which also harm one's mental health. All these factors tend to lead to suicidal thoughts, depressions, and anxiety issues, psychological disorders, etc.

Social media has not only impacted the outer lifestyle of an individual but also has a greater impact on an integral part of the lifestyles of individuals. For instance, it has reliably manifested

a link between mobile screen time before bed and a range of poorer sleep outcomes, including shorter sleep duration, poor sleep quality, and daytime sleepiness. Thus, this impact of social media on sleep quality remains a primary risk for subsequent mental health concerns among youth which subsequently leads to impact their physical health as well as leads to eating disorders. Disturbed sleep problems also lead to mental illness as people often overthink situations which often leads to depressions and also to the extent it leads to suicidal thoughts. Today social media has completely impacted the lives of people that they have become so reluctant to social media that they seem to forget their real life. The reason behind this is because the individuals are spending less time on reality and more on social media platforms. Also, today's youth are more impacted by the comments section in social media where people interact or appreciate as nowadays nobody appreciates anyone but they criticize you at every point. Even in some cases influencers or social media users have to put off their comments section just to avoid negative thoughts. The rise of social media has been an ingenuous phenomenon, we must be cautious about how we can avoid manage its negative impact on mental health and focus on positive aspects.

CONCLUSION

Mental illness impacts an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. Without Mental health care, there can be no true physical health[xx]. Mental illness is of far-reaching importance but instead, we tend to neglect or ignore the people suffering from it. A reality to be found around the globe is that people suffering from mental illness are being deprived of human rights for meeting their basic needs. [xxi] People suffering from mental illness have always been looked down upon by society and considered as being the burden on family or community. They are often being referred to as idiots, lunatics, and what not and always been maltreated and marginalized due to the sensitive nature of their illness. Mental illness not only causes misery to the patient suffering from it but also to their family members, friends and which subsequently leads to loss of quality of life, economic loss, and social dysfunction. The burden of mental illness is not just financial or economically but it is also associated with disability and stigma attached to it which has a negative impact on patients and their family members. It also results in lower productivity, lack of earning potential also leads to antisocial behavior,

drug and alcohol use, domestic violence, crime and, many others. Sometimes mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, stress, and psychological disorder lead to the suicide of the person which affects not only the family but also the society.

The problem of mental illness has not been ignored by the government, they are taking active steps to bridge the treatment gap. The first step National Mental Health Program (NMHP) in 1982. The objective behind NMHP is promoting health care services within the community, to enhance the knowledge of mental health and to ensure the availability and accessibility of minimum mental healthcare for all. These programs have been subsequently amended. Later in 2017 the Mental Health Care Act came in to place to protect the rights of the people suffering from mental illness. When policies are considered India is par with the western countries but it only lags in its implementation. Today social media plays a very important role in an individual's life sometimes it negatively affect one's emotional well- being which subsequently leads to anxiety, depression and, stress and a sometime a person is pushed to the edge to commit suicide. However, we need to understand everything has its flip side we just need to be cautious and focus on positive aspects. The recent time of COVID 19 also has a major role in increasing the problem of mental illness as due to restriction in movement, isolation and loneliness, non-availability of alcohol, staying away from family, lack of human contact all these factors contribute towards depression, anxiety, stress and psychological disorders and sometimes it leads to suicide. It is the time we start taking mental illness as a serious disorder and should not neglect or ignore it and put it in the equal pedestal as any physical health because no mental health means no physical health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mental Health is a worldwide concern and India has far-reaching approach towards the mental health of its citizens. When it comes to policies India is not behind any Country and is par with western countries but only lags in implementation. The major why India is inadequate toward mental illness is the lack of awareness and sensitivity about the issue. Though mental disorders can be controlled or cured, most people tend to brush their issues under the carpet and suffer in silence.[xxii] When it comes to physical health people are very cautious but when it comes down to mental health people tend to ignore and neglect it. To reduce the disgrace and stigma

around mental health, we need measures to train and to sensitize the society about the issue[xxiii]. It can only happen when we have determined nationwide efforts to educate society and makes them more aware of mental illnesses.[xxiv] In many cases or situations, people are not even aware that they are suffering from mental illness. To make people more aware regarding mental health as a serious illness, we need to promote actions that involve the improvement of psychological and emotional well-being. The most crucial step towards normalizing the issue of mental health is supporting individuals to talk openly and without inhibitions about their mental health issues.

The mental health situation in India demands active policy involvement and granting resources by the government which is assisting and helping individuals to seek professionals help if they need one. Mental health promotion should be mainstreamed into governmental and non-governmental policies and programs as it is one of the important aspects of human life[xxv]. The government should take initiatives or should organize campaigns to promote mental health for raising awareness and so one can take it as a serious issue. These illnesses could be controlled by giving proper treatments which include professional help and providing sensitivity to the issue. In today's world science and technology have come to the zenith and have a diagnostic for every illness and now it's time to take action for mental health problems as well.[xxvi] We can save lives and livelihood through providing effective mental health care facilities to individuals who are in need. The most effective method is providing counselling as every other person who is suffering from mental illness nowadays needs one and it is also cost-effective.

The other measure that should be taken by the government is to make community-based centres available for the people suffering from mental illness who is need of professional help. Community mental health services should be integrated into primary health care system[xxvii]. The community mental health care centers should meet all the mental health needs of the community, including the promotion of mental health, prevention of mental illness, psychosocial needs of the community, needs of special groups like adolescents, elderly, women, refugees, etc. and prevention of harm from substance abuse. Today's generation is in need to be aware of mental health and the issue should be talked about and should be considered as a taboo or stigma. The other measure government can take is to provide free mental health counselling or professional help to the people who are not financially strong or not able to pay the required fee as one of the major causes of depression is financial distress or poverty which pushes the person to edge to commit suicide. In the present time people at large in much need

to understand the importance of mental health advancements and should widen their scope of social, professional and, political awareness. The other measure that the government can take is to organize the programs or services for suicide prevention which has the dual advantage one being the prevention of premature loss of lives and other being sensitization of people toward the issue of mental health. This will also help in supporting the person who has already attempted suicide to prevent repetition, and also to provide support to the families where suicide has occurred and will give recognition to mental health illnesses.

With rising awareness of mental illness, it can be anticipated that early recognition and access to treatment will follow, as will the adoption of preventive measures. The guidelines provided by the Mental Health care Act 2017 need to be assessed and analysed on aspects such as primary prevention, reintegration, and rehabilitation because without such strengthening, its implementation would be incomplete and the issue of former mental health patients will continue to exist. We should not only concern about mental disorders policies but also have to promote them in every possible way and should focus on its implementation. Providing promotion and educating people at large about mental illness plays a remarkable impact on mental illness. Recently it is observed that many Psychiatric disorders have been found at the beginning of adolescence so to provide early treatment facility to these age group will definitely play a vital role and therefore we must focus on providing better treatments or better services to children and young generation. In a country like India with a colossal population, the only way forward for mental health is enhancing the awareness which will generate its own demand.

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