Mental Health of Informal Workers

Why in news?

Informal workers, despite their significant contribution to national income, are perennially exposed to economic, physical, and, in turn, mental vulnerabilities.

Status of Informal workers
• **Global**- Around 2 billion (61.2%) of the world's employed population worked informally in 2016. • This proportion was relatively higher for emerging and developing countries at 69.6%. • **India-** India's informal workforce accounts for more than 90% of the working population. - Urban- 79% of total jobs - Rural-96% of total jobs • 95% of India's working women are engaged in informal sector.

Who are informal workers?

- **Informal employment**- It broadly refers to workers who are employed in jobs where they do not have access to social security benefits under existing labour legislations.
- They are private unincorporated or unregistered enterprises, owned by households or individuals.
- This can be either because of the informal nature of the enterprise where a person is employed, or due to the nature of the work itself, which can be casual, part-time, or home-based self-employment.

Steps taken to formalize the Informal Sector
• **e-shram portal**- It was developed in 2021 to create a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW) for optimum realization of their employability and to extend the social security benefits. • **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana**- It was launched in 2019 to protect unorganized workers like street vendors, agriculture related work, construction site workers etc., • **Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana-** It was launched in 2016 to create employment for the unskilled or semi-skilled workers by providing incentives to the employers. • **Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana**- It was launched in 2008 to provide socio-economic security to the BPL workers by providing them with health insurances • **Gatidhara Scheme**- It was launched by the West Bengal transport department for giving employment to the youth who has registered themselves as unemployed. • **Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana**- It was launched in 2020 during COVID-19 to promote employment opportunities for migrant workers. • **PM Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)**- It was launched in 2020 to provide affordable working capital loan to street vendors to resume their livelihoods that have been adversely affected due to Covid-19 lockdown.

Why informal workers face mental health issues?

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) says that 15% of working-age adults, globally, live with a mental disorder.

- **Mental health**- Unemployment, unstable or precarious employment, workplace discrimination, etc. can all pose a risk to a worker's mental health.
    - As per *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),* unemployment and poor-quality employment have consistently been detrimental to mental health
- **Psychological risks-** Workers in low-paid, unrewarding or insecure jobs, or working in isolation, are more likely to be exposed to psychosocial risks, thus compromising their mental health.
- **Safety risk**- Working in unsafe working environments, enduring for long hours, little access to social or financial protections, etc. add to the issue.
- **Patriarchy**- The structures and practices in social and familial spaces put women without social protection.
    - *The State of Inequality in India Report 2022* observes that the unemployment rate actually increases with educational levels, particularly for educated young women who show an unemployment rate of 42%
- **Negative emotions**- Youth unemployment is one of the highest in India which, along with the stigma around unemployment, significantly impacts their mental health.
    - *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies'* survey among 9,316 youth aged between 15 to 34 years in India has shown that they are highly susceptible to negative emotions.
- **Old age**- The absence of proper financial and health-care security among the working elderly can severely impact their physical and mental health, aggravating their vulnerability.
    - The *Census of India 2011* shows that 33 million elderly people are working post-retirement in informal work.

The theme of World Mental Health Day (October 10) 2023 is 'Mental Health as a Universal Human Right'.

How the lack of social security impact the mental health of informal workers?

- **Mental distress-** Informal workers face mental distress due to accumulating debt and rising health-care costs, which are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.
- **Post COVID**- A study by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) among informal workers in Delhi, mostly migrants, indicates that recovery post COVID-19 remains uneven among informal workers
- **Basic necessities-** Mental health and well-being are impacted by factors such as food security, access to livelihood and financial stability.
- **Lack of funding**- Schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) have seen their funding slashed in this Budget.
- **Code on Social Security 2020**- The current Code on Social Security does not

universalise social security.

In 2021, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported that 26% of the people who died by suicide were daily wage earners.

Initiatives taken to tackle Mental Health Related Issues
• National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru • National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), 1982 • Mental Health Act, 2017 • National Mental Health Policy, 2014 • KIRAN mental health helpline, 2020 • Tele-MANAS helpline, 2022

What lies ahead?

- India need to increase budgetary allocation for mental health, currently it is *1% of total health budget.*
- World Mental Health Report 2022 observed, addressing mental health involves strengthening community-based care, and people-centred, recovery-oriented and human rights-oriented care.
- There is an urgent need for proactive policies to improve mental health recognition and action.
- Mental health is critical in upholding the basic human right to good health, including mental health, and in advancing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially
    - **SDG 3**- Good health and well-being
    - **SDG 8**- Decent work for all/ economic growth

References

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3. Vikaspedia- Formalising the informal sector

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