School Mental Health Program

> Mains Syllabus: GS II - Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in the News?

India finds itself at a critical juncture concerning mental health, with the most recent surveys and studies painting a stark picture.

What is the status of mental health issues faced by students?

- **National Mental Health Data** - Approximately 10.6% of the population has grappled with mental health issues at some point, with 13.7% currently affected as of then, as per National Mental Health Survey 2015-2016.

> *National Mental Health Survey (NMHS 1) was conducted in 2015-16 in 12 states and preparations for NMHS 2 are underway.*

- **Mental Health Issues of Children**- 27% of children and adolescents experienced depression, 26% had anxiety disorders, 7% exhibited hyperactivity.
- 9%, 19%, and 15% experienced emotional, conduct, and peer problems, respectively.
- **Student Suicide Rate** – It is standing at alarmingly high rate of 7.6% as per National Crime Record Bureau (2022).
- **Increase in Student Suicides** - There has been a staggering 32% increase in student suicides from 2017 to 2022.
- **Internet Addiction** - A study published in General Psychiatry (2021) found that internet addiction among students in 19 states of India ranges from 19.9% to 40.7%.
- This high prevalence highlights the growing issue of internet dependency among young people in the country.
- **Behavioural Addictions** – There is excessive use of social media, video games, online pornography, and mobile phones among Indian youth.

What are the impacts of these mental health issues?

- **Poor Academic Performance** - Difficulty concentrating, decreased motivation, and impaired cognitive function can lead to lower grades, increased stress, and potential academic setbacks.
- **Sleep Disturbances** – Internet addiction, excessive use of social media and dooms scrolling affect sleeping patterns, cycle and quality of sleep.
- **Emotional Dysregulation** – These addictions causes can increased reactivity,

irritability, and impulsivity, impacting relationships, including family interactions.
- **Familial Conflict** - Mental health issues can strain relationships with family members, leading to increased tension, arguments, and a breakdown in communication.

What are the challenges in addressing mental health issues?

- **Non-recognition** - Mental health conditions are often not identified or addressed promptly, leading to prolonged suffering and potential worsening of symptoms.
- **Inadequate Health Services** - Only 29% of individuals with psychiatric disorders receive treatment, leaving 71% untreated, National Mental Health Survey.
- This gap underscores the mismatch between demand and supply in mental health services.
- **Stigma** - The stigma associated with mental illness prevents individuals from seeking help due to fear of judgment, discrimination, or social exclusion.
- **Lack of awareness** - Limited knowledge about mental health conditions, their symptoms, and available treatments hinders early identification and appropriate intervention.
- **Insufficient Mental Health Education** - Mental health is often treated as a separate issue from general health, leading to a lack of integration into school curricula and discussions.
- This can result in missed opportunities to educate students about mental well-being and provide support.

What are the significances of school mental health programs?

- **Vital Role** - The World Mental Health Report (2022), WHO, emphasises the vital role of schools in addressing mental health issues through education, supportive environments, and collaboration with health services.
- **Promoting Mental Health Awareness** - World Health Organization's Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030, emphasise the pivotal role of schools in promoting mental health awareness and supporting adolescents.
- **Promoting Mental Well-Being** - School programs can teach students how to manage stress, build resilience, and develop positive coping mechanisms.
- **Preventing Mental Illnesses** - Early intervention through school programs can help identify and address mental health concerns before they escalate into more serious conditions.
- **Reducing Stigma** - Mental health programs can educate students, staff, and families about mental health conditions, challenging misconceptions and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help.
- **Creating Inclusive Environment** - Open discussions and positive messaging can create a more inclusive and supportive school environment.
- **Enhancing Community Mental Health**- When schools prioritize mental health, they contribute to a healthier community overall.

Mental Health Initiatives in India

• **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)** – It was launched in 1982 to ensure the availability and accessibility of minimum mental healthcare for all.
• **District Mental Health Program (DMHP)** – It was launched under NMHP in the year 1996 (in IX Five Year Plan) for providing mental healthcare services at the district level, including outreach programs, training for medical officers, and community-based interventions.
• **National Tele Mental Health Programme (Tele MANAS)** - Launched on October 10, 2022, It provides a 24/7 toll-free helpline (14416 or 1800-89-14416) for mental health support in various Indian languages.
• **Ayushman Bharat** - Mental health services are integrated into the comprehensive primary health care package offered under AB Health and Wellness component.
• **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017** -This act provides a legal framework for protecting the rights of individuals with mental illnesses and ensuring access to appropriate care.

What are the key strategies in implementation of school mental health program?

- **Integrating Mental Health and Education Services** - Given India's vast student population, integrating digital mental health services like the nationwide helpline Tele-MANAS (1-800-891-4416) in educational institutions is essential.
- **Establishing an Advisory Board** - A Mental Health Advisory Board (MHAB) comprising trained teachers under institutional leadership can facilitate structured mental health initiatives.
- **Mental Health Orientations** - Schools can conduct mental health orientations for teachers and students, fostering resilience through workshops and peer support.
- **Reducing Exam Pressure** - Providing structured psychological support before, during, and after exams can help students manage anxiety and distress.
- **Fostering Stress-free Communications** - Parents and teachers can adopt such strategies to foster a positive environment, emphasising that education is just one aspect of personal growth and development.
- **Awareness Creation** - Institutions can promote helplines such as Tele-MANAS and others to ensure students seek timely support.
- Since media plays a vital role, weekly editions of educative, informative and skill-building editorials, along with dedicated sections in local language newspapers can be published.
- **Embedding Mental Health Initiatives in Education** – It will foster student well-being, resilience and academic success, creating a more inclusive learning environment.
- **Capacity Building at Grassroot Level** - District mental health teams can train ASHA and Anganwadi workers in illness identification, psychological first aid for children and mothers and referral to advanced mental health services if needed.
- **Mental Health Audit** - To prioritise mental health in education, mental health audits can be included in the accreditation process of educational institutions from primary to higher education.

What lies ahead?

- To bridge the gaps in mental health services , policy-makers need to focus on

community-based services and school mental health initiatives.

- Urgent investment in mental health is crucial to reduce disparities and address this escalating crisis.
- It is essential for stakeholders, such as governmental bodies, policy-makers, educational institutions, parents, students, media, and researchers, to prioritise mental health care.
- Integrating mental health education, resilience building, and coping skill training into regular school and college activities and school curricula will create a supportive environment for mental wellbeing.
- School-based suicide prevention, early socio-emotional skills development and anti-bullying programmes are essential components of comprehensive mental health strategies.

Reference

[The Hindu | School Mental Health Programmes]

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