



MENTAL HYGIENE AND HEALTH

Dr Vanita Anand¹, Dr Promila Dabas², Dr Vipasha Rana³

ABSTRACT

The World Health Organization defines Health as an all round well being of an individual in terms of physical, social and mental aspects and not just the absence of illness or disease.

Mental Health includes rehabilitating mentally sick, preventing all forms of mental disorders, reducing stress in day to day life and attaining a state of attainment of well being that helps the individual work optimally as per his/her mental potential.

In the recent years, a lot of importance and stress is laid upon the importance of mental health in facilitating attainment of global development goals, as it has been included in the Sustainable Development Goals.

In simple words, mental hygiene is a set of healthy habits that aim to keep us mentally healthy.

First of all, one needs to differentiate mental hygiene and mental health. Mental hygiene is a means to attain mental health. Mental Hygiene is “means” and Mental health is “end”.

American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines mental hygiene as scientific approach that helps prevent mental illness and restore mental health by curing mental illness

The key here is prevention and preservation. Mental hygiene mainly concerns itself with positive activities and programmes that help preserve mental health and prevent mental illness.

MENTAL HYGIENE AIMS TO:

Realisation of potentialities: Providing opportunities where one’s inherent potential is realised to ensure prevention of frustration.

Positive attitude: Mental hygiene promotes positive attitude towards life and work and encourages a person to utilise their potential and solve the problems of life with an attitude of hope.

Harmonious development: It is not just emotional health but the all round development of all aspects of one’s personality such as physical well being, emotional maturity, social adjustment etc

Effective Adjustment: Mental hygiene helps one to adjust well in all areas of life be it home, school, work, society, relationships etc. It focuses on effective conflict management and problem solving approach.

Strategies to Practice Mental Hygiene

Realistic Approach: A realistic approach towards one’s strengths and weaknesses can help one avoid many disappointments and frustrations in life. A knowledge of our abilities, aptitudes help us keep realistic in our expectations from ourselves resulting in right decisions and consequently minimising failures.

Emotional Maturity and control: Emotional maturity and a control over one’s behaviour and impulses is essential for a healthy adjustment. This helps keeping calm and composed while responding to tough situations.

^{1,2,3} Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Applications, Maharaja Surajmal Institute, Affiliated to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi



Self esteem: Awareness of self, knowing one's values, beliefs and feelings, and having positive self esteem are essential contributors to mental health.

Positive Thoughts: The quality of thoughts determine one's mental health as negative thoughts such as hatred, fear, jealousy, anger etc evokes negative emotions and consequent behaviour and reactions. However, positive thoughts such as joy, hope, compassion, love etc evoke optimism and empathy. Such emotions add positive energy in one's behaviour to cope with daily life problems and challenges.

LIFESTYLE FOR GOOD HEALTH INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA:

Ayurveda, the science of Indian medicine, talks about importance of four major areas that contribute to good health. deals with four aspects of lifestyle which can ensure good health in us.

Ahara

Achara

Vihara

Vichara

Ahara (Food): A person is what they eat. Our overall health, mental as well as physical, is majorly impacted by what we eat. Eating food that is good for mood, is rich in vitamins and minerals, including whole foods in diet, staying hydrated, skipping sugars, not skipping meals and mindful eating go a long way in maintaining health, checking mood fluctuations, improved focus and overall happy outlook.

Achara (Routine): Acharya means setting a proper time for daily activities that is in sync with

the seasons (Ritucharya), day (Dincharya) and night (Ratricharya). The activities include food intake, daily rituals clothing etc.

Vihara (Recreation): Vihara includes activities that help one keep healthy, boosts immunity, makes body strong and increases appetite. Recreation activities like games, music, gardening help furthering good health.

Vichara (Thinking): Right thinking is a means to right conduct. A person having healthy thinking, ability to take criticism, accommodative thinking and control over their thoughts, enjoys healthy relationships would be able to maintain sound mental health.

Thus, mental hygiene is basically following right Ahara, right achara, right vihara and right vichara. In the absence of any of these, mental health issues are inevitable.

According to WHO, one of the leading causes of disability is depression followed by suicide in the age range of 15-29-year-olds. People who suffer from severe mental health conditions tend to die prematurely, sometimes as early as two decades as they suffer from physical ailments that are preventable.

The World Health Organisation started a Special initiative for Mental Health (2019-23) that aimed at helping all the people to attain highest level of mental well being.

To implement this, 12 countries were prioritised where interventions and mental health services were to be scaled up to prevent neurological disorders and substance dependence, introduce sound mental health policies, and advance overall mental health initiatives. The vision of the initiative being to provide quality mental health care to 100M more people by 2023. Some

^{1,2,3} Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Applications, Maharaja Surajmal Institute, Affiliated to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi



of those countries are Zimbabwe, Paraguay, Jordan, Nepal, Bangladesh etc.

This **WHO's Special Initiative for Mental Health** shows the pathway for the attainment of objectives **the 13th General Programme of Work (GPW13)** and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was recognised that without mental health, sustainable development would be ineffective. Mental health issues are the common in people suffering from HIV, TB, Cancer, Cardiovascular disease i.e., communicable and non-communicable diseases both. Stigma, discrimination and human rights violations are very commonly faced by people having mental health conditions.

The strategical action planned includes:

- 1: Advancing human rights, and mental health policy.
- 2: Upscaling services and interventions that are community-based.

The goal of **universal health coverage (UHC)** is to ensure access to cost effective, reachable and quality mental health care in the priority countries by 2023.

Objectives:

- Helping all people achieve highest levels of mental well being
- Provide access to quality yet affordable mental health care services.

Implementation: In the 12 priority countries, WHO will support to assess needs of mental health care in the current situation. It would then help these countries design and implement context specific approaches based on its strengths and needs. Each country would need to

establish a specific monitoring and evaluation framework to keep the initiative on track .

SCENARIO IN INDIA

There are some studies that show mental health literacy in the context of India. According to one study, adolescents are very low on awareness and literacy about mental health where only 29.04% are aware of signs and symptoms of depression and only 1.31% were aware of psychosis. Further, stigma was a major inhibition in help-seeking.

The suicide rate in India was reported to be 15.7/100,000 in 2015 which is more than the global average (10.6) and the average for the region (12.9). Among 15–29 year olds, the leading cause of death in India is suicide. This still remains unaddressed. These figures saw major jump in Covid-19 pandemic and according to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data, India lost more people to suicides than Coronavirus in 2020. Amongst the 1.53 lakh suicides in 2020, at least 12,526 students committed suicide constituting over 8 per cent of total deaths.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS: ROADMAP

1. Media: The influence of mass media is all pervasive and deeply influences our perception and attitude of mental health. The media has contributed to stigmatising mental illness through its inaccurate, exaggerated and comical portrayal. Here, Social Learning Theory- on the portrayal of the treatment meted to mentally ill and Cultivation Theory -people who watch most of the time in watching mental illness through virtual world form the similar opinion and perceptions about them. Unfortunately,



media portrays them as dangerous, unpredictable and violent. Thus, they are feared and avoided. The media coverage of prominent suicide cases intends to sensationalise rather than objective reporting that increases the vulnerability and actual attempted and committed suicide cases. This is termed as *Werther Effect* i.e., mimicry of suicide after a highly publicised suicide coverage by media.

The media needs to be responsible, balanced, objective and accurate while dealing with reports of portrayal of mental Health. Mental illness must be humanised by approaching it as common, treatable and real. Celebrity endorsements, sharing stories of recovered people and treatment options available has been the mainstay of media drives. Mental Health professionals have now started partnering with media.

2. Government programs and policies

Government initiatives and policies are formed as an attempt to integrate mental health with general health and to reduce the treatment gap and extent of disability due to mental illness. National Mental Health Policy of India, 2014 sought to create new pathways and hope for better mental health, prevention of stigmatisation of mental illness and provide quality mental health care services. The policy takes a holistic view of mental health by recognising relationship between body, mind and soul.

The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 provides for providing mental health care to mentally ill and promotion, protection, and fulfilment of rights of such persons during treatment. The act gives every citizen the access to quality, government run and funded mental health services, and the right to live their life with dignity.

In year 2020, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched, Kiran, a toll free helpline aimed to support people having mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, depression, suicidal thoughts and any other mental health concern.

Apart from a number of Mental Health Programs at District and National level, the National Rural Health Mission is providing mental health care as a part of its integrated primary care services. A dedicated approach, sound policy interventions and allocation of funds by government would further strengthen mental health situation in India.

3. Educational system

As a majority of chronic mental illnesses see onset before adulthood, it is imperative to provide an early mental health education, counselling services etc in schools. Raising awareness of mental health, providing tools and strategies to deal with stress and related issues, early interventions, de-stigmatization, removing discrimination are some of the ways all educational institutes need to make available. Furthermore, encouraging help seeking, promoting self-esteem and self-confidence, fostering resilience can significantly improve students' mental health in future.

4. Industry

There is a direct link between mental wellbeing and productivity. A significant 60-65% of insurance claims related to disability in Canada are constituted of Mental Health Disability. (Stewart, W., Matousek, D., and Verdon, C. (2003). However, this disability is not addressed by insurance sector in India.



The Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University developed 'Mental Health First Aid' strategies to deal with workplace stress. Countries like Australia and England have already implemented this. It refers to preserving life where a mentally ill person might pose danger to themselves or to others and providing immediate help to stop any mental illness becoming more serious.

Recently, the industry has woken to its corporate social responsibility to engage with mental health awareness campaigns and activities.

5. Social Media

Mobile phones and social media can prove to be potent tools for creating awareness of mental health issues, remedies and helplines. Due to access to internet by all, all can avail necessary information and guidance about prevention, remedies and who to reach in the time of crisis. Governmental policies may be advertised regularly on websites and social media. Internet can help take online surveys, questionnaires, inventories etc and provide online services such as counselling, psychiatric consultations, online support groups etc.

MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed our vulnerability for mental health. It has made the world sit up and notice beyond just physical health. Today, it is much less of stigma, more of understanding and fewer inhibitions to seek help. Governments are prioritising access to mental health care. Mental health apps have become convenient, free or low cost, readily available 24 hours a day and provide anonymity to the user. With the option of online consultation, care and treatment, the future of mental health has become

brighter than ever. Psychological skills, good eating and exercising and overall mental hygiene is helping people improve their mental well-being. The shift to mental health becoming a conscious priority like physical health, thus becoming an equally important part of overall health has opened avenues for personalised professional services tailored to the specific needs of the patient. It can be safely concluded that the much needed change is already here. It is hoped that the visibility that mental health has secured due to pandemic is here to stay and it helps create better mental health care available and accessible to all.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.britannica.com/science/mental-hygiene>
2. <https://centerforliving.org/blog/3-ways-internet-can-help-manage-mental-health/>
3. <https://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2017/175248.pdf>
4. https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1
5. <https://old.amu.ac.in/emp/studym/99997892.pdf>
6. <https://www.aetna.com/health-guide/food-affects-mental-health>
7. <https://www.nios.ac.in/media/documents/secpsycour/English/Chapter-19.pdf>
8. <https://www.who.int/initiatives/who-special-initiative-for-mental-health>
9. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5479084/>
10. [news18.com](https://www.news18.com)
11. <https://www.verywellmind.com/future-of-mental-health-care-5199120>
12. https://nhm.gov.in/images/pdf/National_Health_Mental_Policy.pdf



13. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3016691/>
14. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6198586/>
15. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>
16. <https://stigmafreesociety.com/blog/the-importance-of-mental-health-education-in-schools/> Stewart W, Matousek D, Verdon C. The American Productivity Audit and the Campaign for Work and Health. *The Center for Work and Health, Advance PCS* [[Google Scholar](#)]
17. Ogorchukwu JM, Sekaran VC, Nair S, Ashok L. Mental health literacy among late adolescents in South India: What they know and what attitudes drive them. *Indian J Psychol Med.* 2016;38:234–41. [[PMC free article](#)] [[PubMed](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]
18. Patel V, Ramasundarahettige C, Vijayakumar L, Thakur JS, Gajalakshmi V, Gururaj G, et al. Suicide mortality in India: A nationally representative survey. *Lancet.* 2012;379:2343–51. [[PMC free article](#)] [[PubMed](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]
19. World Health Organization. World Health Statistics 2016. Geneva 27, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2016. [[Google Scholar](#)]