Transforming Perspectives and Approach towards Better Mental Health Care

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Keywords

Mental Health Literacy; Tele-MANAS App; Tele MANAS Toll-free Helpline Number

Abbreviations

YLDs: Years Lived With Disability; NCRB: National Crime Records Bureau; NTMHP: National Tele Mental Health Programme; Tele MANAS: Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking across States; NHM: National Health Mission.

Introduction

Mental health forms an integral component of overall well-being. The definition of health as given by World Health Organization also remains incomplete without the mental health component. Yet when compared to healthcare approaches due to physical health, the mental health issues remain hidden within the society. Many individuals often perceive mental health disorders as personal weaknesses rather than medical issues requiring care. This misconception not only delays treatment but also increases the risk of conversion of milder form of disorder to more severe forms. In this context, it is crucial to acknowledge the fact that healing begins with understanding which includes understanding of the nature of mental illnesses and the necessity of seeking timely and appropriate care.

Challenges

In India, mental disorders are the second leading cause of years lived with disability (YLDs) and suicide ranked as the third leading cause of death [1]. The suicide rate as per the report from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), showed a consistently rising trend from 9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh population in 2022 [2]. Common mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders affect nearly 10% of the population yet a substantial treatment gap remains ranging from 70-92% of individuals with mental disorders either not seeking treatment or unable to access available care [1,3]. It has been reported in National Mental Health Survey 2015-16 report that only about 1 in 10 people with mental health disorders receive evidence-based treatments in India [3]. This gap is further widened by limited awareness and the stigma surrounding mental illness e.g., being called using derogatory terms which continues to hinder open discussions, leading to delayed intervention and worsened outcomes [3]. Much research reveals that misconceptions about mental health persist across various socio-demographic groups and the existing societal stigma and cultural beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward mental illness and help-seeking behaviour. Hence, addressing these challenges demands a collective shift in awareness and perception towards embracing mental health care as an essential component of overall health.

A Path to Transforming Perspectives

Transforming perspectives towards mental illnesses require multifaceted approach:
- Knowledge and awareness generation through conduction of mental health literacy campaigns targeting schools, colleges, and community centres to normalize conversations about mental illness and dispel myths.

- Promotion of self-care practices in each and every individual which include regular exercise, healthy eating, quality sleep, relaxing activities, gratitude, positivity, goal-setting, and staying connected with supportive people.

- Interactive workshops involving families alongside younger generation can address generational gaps in understanding states of mind of different generation and help in creating an ecosystem of inter-generational support.

- Community-driven initiatives, like peer-led support groups and mental health survivors to support and guide the victims of mental illness focusing on normalization of conversations about mental health challenges.

- Integrating mental health assessments into routine check-ups can make professional help less intimidating and more routine.

- Social media which is otherwise a double-edged sword can become a powerful ally. Platforms that disseminate evidence-based information, share stories of recovery, and foster peer support can reshape attitudes. Youth-led initiatives on these platforms can amplify the message that mental health is as important and treatable as physical health. Celebrities and influencers who advocate for mental health can lend credibility and relatability to these efforts.

- Maximal promotion of Tele MANAS App and Tele MANAS toll-free helpline number "14416" [4].

- Establish suicide prevention helplines for timely intervention.

- Promotion through various modalities of the fact that like any physical ailments, mental illness is treatable.

Mental Health Literacy

Jorm AF [5] introduced the term "mental health literacy", defining it as the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that assist in their recognition, management, or prevention. Similar to how conventional literacy enables individuals to read and write, mental health literacy equips people to understand, discuss, and navigate issues related to mental well-being. In a world where mental health challenges are both common and often misunderstood or stigmatized, fostering mental health literacy is essential for building a compassionate and supportive society.

The key components of mental health literacy include:
- Recognizing specific disorders or psychological distress.

- Understanding risk factors and causes.

- Knowledge of self-help strategies.

- Awareness of available professional help.

- Positive attitudes that encourage recognition and help-seeking.

- Knowing how to access reliable mental health information.

This comprehensive understanding helps individuals take proactive steps toward mental well-being.

Tele MANAS App

Tele MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States) toll-free helpline number "14416" was introduced as an initiative under National Tele Mental Health Programme (NTMHP) by the Government of India which was launched on October 10, 2022 nationwide [1]. The National Health Mission (NHM) launched the Tele MANAS app on World Mental Health Day (10th October, 2024) and also added video consultation facility to already existing audio facility [4]. The Tele MANAS app is available for download on Google Play Store and Apple App Store. This app can potentially serve as an effective tool to enhance mental health literacy among the population. It features library of comprehensive resources for self-care tips, guidance on how to recognize distress signals with strategies for managing early signs of stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges. It also offers engaging content such as mind challenge games and exercises. The app is also designed to provide free and confidential mental health support 24/7, thereby, connecting users with trained mental health professionals across India for immediate counselling [4].

Conclusion

Transforming perspectives about mental health is not just a necessity but a responsibility we collectively share. By encouraging and advocating mental health literacy from the young age we can cultivate a generation that view mental health not as a taboo but as a priority. With each conversation, effort and understanding, we must strive to takes us one step closer to a society where an individual feel safe to express their struggles and access care without judgment. We should commit to pave a way for a generation that seeks help, offers support, and thrives in all dimensions of well-being.

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