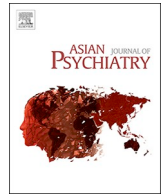




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Mental health in India: Neglected component of wellbeing in COVID-19 era

Good mental health is an essential component of overall wellbeing. In the COVID-19 era, several suicide episodes have been documented among all classes of socio-economic strata (Goyal et al., 2020; Rajkumar, 2020a). Recent suicide by an elite officer in capital city of India due to fear of COVID-19 and by a famous Bollywood celebrity due to unknown reasons are classical examples which have generated a nationwide debate about the mental health issues in the COVID-19 era (“Bollywood actor’s death fuels mental health debate,” 2020; Dhingra, 2020). Earlier, suicide cases occurring due to financial crunch were commonly reported among daily wagers or farmers, however a rising trend of depression and mental illnesses is being commonly reported among all classes and age groups recently, which goes unnoticed in developing nations like India (“Poor fall prey to suicides in India 2018-The New Indian Express, n.d.”). As per World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, one person dies in every one second attributing to 800,000 deaths per annum globally (“WHO, 2020”). There could be various precipitating factors for a person to go into severe depression leading to a suicidal attempt, noteworthy being loneliness and personal emotional issues. The other factors which can lead to severe mental health issues include natural disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, floods etc causing mass destruction of a large scale of population at one particular time, leading to mental stress and panic among the affected community (“PTSD and Suicide After Natural Disasters, 2020”).

In India, consultation about the mental health issues is still considered a social stigma due to which people avoid seeking treatment for mental ailments (Trani et al., 2015). In developing nations, the main focus is on control and prevention of infectious diseases, with mental health issues being ignored markedly. (“Mental health isn’t getting due attention - The Hindu BusinessLine, 2020”). It is the time when in India too, mental health of individuals prone to depression and anxiety disorders, should not be neglected and efforts made at different levels to identify and keep the morale high. Moreover, as per recent Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in Hon’ble Supreme Court of India, averments have been made that insurance firms were violating Section 21(4) of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, which mandated every insurer to make provision for treatment of mental illness on the same basis as available for treatment of physical illnesses (“insurance, 2020). Therefore, Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) should initiate strict action against noncompliance and penalty should be imposed so that mental wellbeing is restored at the earliest and wave of suicides can be curtailed. In COVID-19 era, fear psychosis is very common among the public and provisions should be made at schools, offices and homes to provide counselling for all age groups so that every citizen of India can enjoy mental wellbeing and a sound mental health (Liu et al., 2020; Rajkumar, 2020b; Tandon, 2020a, 2020b). Someone has rightly described a good health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, which underscores the need for emphasizing on mental health in this

COVID era.

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