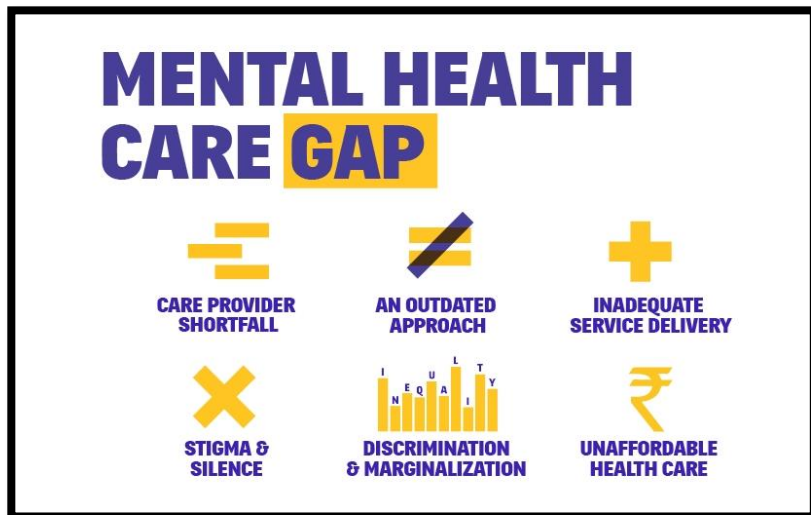


## Mental Healthcare: Issues & solutions

### Context:

- The suicide of the actor Sushant Singh Rajput has brought to the fore the significance of the mental health in contemporary times.
- Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code had criminalized attempted suicide but this was removed through Mental health care Act 2017.



- The Sustainable Development Goals target 3.4 and 3.5 talks about reducing mental illness within the population.

### What are the issues related to Mental Health care in India?

- **Neglected Area:** Mental health which forms the core of our personhood is often neglected which impeded the development of an individual to full potential.
- **Stigmatised:** Mental health illness is often considered as Taboo that leads to reluctance on part of family members to seek diagnosis & treatment for the patient.
- **Burden of Demography:** According to WHO, the burden of mental disorders is maximal in young adults. India being a young country (nearly 50% of its population below the age of 25) will face increased burden of mental illness in short term.
- **Major contributor to the burden of illness:** An estimated 150 million people across India are in need of mental health care interventions, according to India's latest National Mental Health Survey 2015-16.



- **Disproportionate impact:** It is the poor, dispossessed and marginalised who bear the greatest burden of mental health problems, but historically their sufferings are dismissed as a natural extension of their social and economic conditions.
- **Post-Treatment gap:** There is need for proper rehabilitation of the mentally ill persons post his/her treatment which is currently not present.
- **Lack of Specialists:** Low proportion of mental health workforce in India (per 100,000 population) include psychiatrists (0.3), nurses (0.12), psychologists (0.07) and social workers (0.07).
- **Dangers of increase in post-COVID order:** Mental health problems, tend to increase during economic distress leading to reduction in life-expectancy. This has been described by Nobel prize winning economist, Angus Deaton, as “Deaths of Despair”.
- **Prone to abuse:** Mentally ill patients are vulnerable to and usually suffer from drug abuse, wrongful confinement, even at homes and mental healthcare facilities which is a cause of concern and a gross human right violation.
- **Affordability issues:** Due to inadequate number of mental health caretakers, such service is often concentrated in Urban areas and are also expensive.
- **Needs Unique approach:** There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for mental health issues as they are intimately intertwined with unique, personal life stories.

## What are the solutions?

- **Awareness:** People should be made aware of significance of mental health, as much as that of physical health.
- **Destigmatising the issue:** Sharing one’s story about mental health (through media campaigns) is the most effective strategy to reduce stigma attached with mental illness.
- **Community Approach:** There is need to deploy community health workers who, with appropriate training and supervision, effectively deliver psychosocial interventions for the needy.
- **Increase Funding:** State governments need to scale up its psychosocial interventions through community health workers.

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- **Broadening the scope:** Mental health care must embrace the diversity of experiences and strategies which work, well beyond the narrow confines of traditional biomedicine with its emphasis on “doctors, diagnoses and drugs”.
- **Digital initiatives:** To help improve rural India’s mental health through telemedicine, initiatives like Schizophrenia Research India’s (SCARF) mobile bus clinic is being run by an NGO. There is need for scaling up such initiatives through public-private collaboration to bridge the rural-urban divide.

**Measures that can be taken at individual level** by people who are suffering from mental illness;

- Reminding oneself that all of humanity is goes through tough times.
- Doing something for others, for science has shown that care-giving and community service makes life more meaningful & rewarding.
- Discussing with friends & families about the issues being faced.