



"BETWEEN LAW AND STIGMA: MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA"

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ABSTRACT

Men's mental health in India is increasingly influenced by the way legal systems, social expectations, and stigma come together and shape everyday experiences. In recent years, many men have begun to feel a sense of vulnerability within certain legal processes, especially in cases involving allegations of harassment and assault. While these laws are meant to protect those at risk, their possible misuse can leave some men feeling anxious, powerless, and emotionally strained. At the same time, long-standing ideas of masculinity often discourage men from expressing their feelings or reaching out for help, which only adds to their mental burden and makes it harder for them to cope. This paper examines the relationship between masculinity, self-stigma, and help-seeking behaviour among Indian men and argues for a balanced and sensitive approach that ensures fairness in legal systems while promoting mental health awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health today is no longer a hidden concern but a central part of overall well-being, influencing how individuals cope with stress, maintain relationships, and function in everyday life. The World Health Organization defines mental well-being as a state where a person is able to realise their abilities, manage life's normal pressures, work productively, and contribute to society.[1] However, in India, this ideal often remains out of reach for many, especially men. Rising levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, combined with social and economic pressures, have made mental health a growing concern.[2] Yet, despite this increasing awareness, men continue to struggle quietly. Deep-rooted ideas of masculinity—where men are expected to be strong, self-reliant, and emotionally controlled—often prevent them from expressing vulnerability or seeking help.[3] This silence can have serious consequences, as reflected in the disproportionately high rates of suicide among men in India, pointing towards a deeper, unaddressed mental health crisis.[4]

What makes this situation more complex is the way mental health intersects with legal realities and social perceptions. In recent years, many men have expressed a sense of vulnerability within certain legal processes, particularly in cases involving allegations of harassment and assault. While such laws are essential for

protecting vulnerable groups, concerns around their misuse have contributed to feelings of fear, helplessness, and emotional strain among some men.[5] Alongside these external challenges, stigma—both from society and within oneself—continues to act as a major barrier, discouraging men from seeking help. Studies show that self-stigma significantly reduces help-seeking behaviour, even when support is available.[6] Taken together, these factors reveal that men's mental health in India is shaped not by one issue alone, but by a complex mix of social expectations, legal experiences, and deeply internalised beliefs.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Indian men hesitate to speak about their problems because they have been brought up to believe that men = Strength, they are strong, when they are toddler they have been taught that boys don't cry, hence from a young age expressing emotion is not encouraged and being vulnerable is considered as weakness. With such kind of mindset men feel that they have to handle everything on their own, even when they are struggling they wont ask for help, over a period of time this pressure leads to suppressed emotions and stress.

What makes it even harder is self- stigma, men feel that if they ask for help it will portray them as less capable. Over the period of time these



suppressed emotions take the shape of anxiety, depression and even aggression. The inability to communicate emotions also weakens personal relationships and increases feelings of isolation. As Indian society considers mental health a taboo, this prevents the early diagnosis and discourage the individual from seeking professional help. Due to lack of awareness many men fail to recognise their distress, which requires attention, this situation only worsen the condition of those men.

WORKPLACE STRESS

One of the major factors of young men deteriorating mental health is workplace stress. There is a constant pressure to perform better than others, meet the deadlines, increase the earning, to cope up with corporate politics. Long working hours, financial and job insecurity can leave the men mentally exhausted affecting his self-confidence and self-worth. As they don't talk about the stress leading it to frustration, burnouts, depression and anxiety.

CHALLENGES FACED BY MARRIED MEN LEADING TO MENTAL STRESS

- **False Allegations of Cruelty/Dowry Harassment** : Section 498 of IPC protects the women from harassment, cruelty and domestic abuse and is silent if the same happens to men raising the question on gender equality. Many men and their families have suffered unfair arrests, mental agony, financial hardships, and lengthy legal battles due to false charges. Falsely accused males face persecution, social humiliation, and financial devastation due to insufficient legal protections. Because of which the men suffers sadness, helplessness and anxiety issues.
- **Prolonged Legal Battles and Delayed Justice (BNSS procedural framework)**
Despite procedural reforms under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, matrimonial disputes often remain time-consuming. Extended litigation,

repeated court appearances, and uncertainty contribute to mental fatigue and emotional strain.[7]

- **Social Stigma and Reputation Damage**

Allegations in matrimonial disputes often lead to immediate social judgment. Even when unproven, they can affect professional standing, family relationships, and social identity, contributing to anxiety and isolation.[8]

- **Limited Remedies Against False Cases (BNS provisions corresponding to §§182 & 211 IPC)**

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita contains provisions addressing false information and false charges (corresponding to earlier IPC §§182 and 211). However, these are not frequently invoked in matrimonial disputes, creating a perception of limited immediate safeguards.[9]

- **Emotional Isolation and Lack of Support Systems**

Social expectations of masculinity discourage men from expressing distress or seeking help. When combined with legal and financial pressures, this isolation significantly worsens mental health outcomes.[10]

MENTAL HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES IN INDIA

1. **Treatment Gap and resource shortage**
India faces a severe shortage of mental health professionals and infrastructure. Studies indicate that a large proportion of individuals with mental illness do not receive treatment due to lack of availability and accessibility. [11]
2. **Accessibility and Affordability Issues**
Mental healthcare services are available only in urban cities and is costly hence not many can afford it. This acts like a hurdle for people



belonging to rural area and for low income groups, creating treatment almost impossible.

3. Policy Implementation Gaps

Indian government have introduce several mental healthcare policies but their implementation is improper. Introduction of mental issues into primary healthcare is still at the evolving stage, limiting it reach and effectiveness.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The Government of India has taken several steps to address mental health challenges through policies, programmes, and legal frameworks.

1. National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)

Launched in 1982, the NMHP aims to make mental healthcare accessible and affordable, particularly for vulnerable populations. It focuses on integrating mental health services into general healthcare systems. [12]

2. District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)

Introduced in 1996, the DMHP provides community-based mental health services, including counselling and treatment at district and primary healthcare levels. It has expanded to cover hundreds of districts across India [13]

3. National Tele Mental Health Programme (Tele-MANAS)

Launched in 2022, Tele-MANAS provides **24/7 tele-counselling services** across India, enabling individuals to access mental health support remotely. This initiative significantly improves accessibility, especially in underserved areas[14]

4. Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

This legislation provides a rights-based framework ensuring access to mental

healthcare and protecting the rights of individuals with mental illness. [15]

5. Recent Policy Developments

The Union Budget 2026 proposed the establishment of new national mental health institutions to strengthen infrastructure and research capacity.[16] Additionally, schemes such as Ayushman Bharat include coverage for mental health treatment, improving affordability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Changing Social Attitudes

Traditional concept of male not expressing their emotions and feelings needs to be changed. Promoting open conversations about feelings and emotions encourages the help seeking behaviour.

2. Strengthening Workplace Support

Every organisation should have internal mental health policies, providing their workers and employees counselling services, and promote work life balance.

3. Expanding Access

Providing easy access to mental health services in rural and smi urban areas at a affordable prices. Giving professional training to primary health care givers can also help to fill the treatment gap.

4. Awareness and Education

Mental health education should be introduced at school level to change the age old mindset of being strong, and supressing the emotions in the name of masculine.

5. Policy Implementation and Monitoring

Their should be a proper implementation of the existing policies and should be monitored from time to time.

CONCLUSION

Men's mental health in India is often a quiet but serious issue. Many men grow up believing they must stay strong and not show emotions, which makes it hard for them to talk about what they're going through. Even though the



government has introduced some policies and programmes to help, there are still big gaps—services are not always easy to access, and awareness is still low.

To truly improve the situation, everyone has a role to play—families, communities, workplaces, and the government. We need to make it okay for men to speak openly about their feelings, reduce the stigma around mental health, and build better support systems. Taking care of men's mental health is not just about individuals—it helps create a healthier, happier, and more productive society for all.

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