General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Making mental health a public health priority

Introduction

- Ever since Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic, millions of lives around the globe have been significantly upside down.
- While the catastrophic loss to life and post recovery health issues have been central to this pandemic there are many areas where we will face disruption for long.

Issues arising due to COVID-19

- Learning loss due to missed school,
- insecurities of job loss,
- stress due to prolonged periods of loneliness,
- strained relationships due to excessive proximity,
- the feeling of lack of control and helplessness in general

Mental Illness

- Mental illness has been a global problem resulting in widespread stress.
- It has also caused large scale economic loss.
Children struggling to cope, domestic violence, suicide, productivity loss due to absenteeism are all manifestations.

According to a report more than 300 million people worldwide suffer from depression. What is more alarming are the treatment disparities.

The disparity can be observed in disadvantaged groups such as women, children and people living below poverty line.

2020 report by the WHO exposes the heightened disruption in mental health services due to the pandemic.

**India and its Mental Health Services Gap**

- Mental health issues in India are hugely complex. Data on mental illness is remarkably patchy.
- Mental illness is stigmatised and considered a taboo.
- Most data is based on self-reporting of conditions and extrapolation.
- Factors contributing to the country’s gaps in mental health treatment:
  - socio-economic causes,
  - undiagnosed pre-existing conditions,
  - human resources shortage,
  - fragmented service delivery models and
  - lack of research capacity for implementation and policy change

**Why does mental health need to be a priority?**

- Globally mental health illnesses are affecting almost over 970 million people annually.
- Some like Depression, Anxiety and Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often make individuals look normal while gradually making them incapable of living a normal life.
- Consequences are drop in productivity, alienation, stress and sometimes even suicide.
- We need an urgent action plan which starts with acceptance of the problem.
- We need to have assessment tools and techniques which communities are made aware of and allowed to use with ease.
- E.g. an annual exercise in schools to determine how many youngsters may be impacted and being lost to the system.
- We need a significant investment in trained resources for counselling and supporting rehabilitation.
- We need role models to talk openly about the problem and showcase journeys that will inspire others to recognise and come forward to seek help.
- Treatment from a mental health professional is often constrained due to the high costs.

**Way Forward**

- Human wellness is about body and mind. Lasting change is possible only through a collaborative effort of policy-makers.
- Invest in institutional support mechanisms like hospitals, treatment centres, qualified health care support and community support mechanisms.
- We need large scale social security support or insurance to cover costs.
- Mental illnesses should be covered in health insurance policies.
- The government must ensure that treatment is widely available and costs are regulated.
- India must draw lessons from other countries as well as draw upon its own ancient wisdom to holistically treat mental health.