Mental health cries for more attention

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The phrase 'mental health' figured in the union government's budget for the first time in 2022. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement that integrated methods would be formulated to prevent mental health issues increasing post-pandemic lockdown is welcome.

An individual's mental health is inseparably intertwined with the health of the society. Generally, we don't give as much importance to mental health as to physical health. When one is affected psychologically, we treat it as the individual's weakness. So, to discuss mental health openly is considered as a stigma.

At a time when mental wellbeing is also gaining acceptance as physical health does, the union government's initiative will eliminate negative perspectives and stigma about mental ill-

health, paving the way for constructive debates in the society on the issue.

Post-lockdown

The World Health Organisation in its report has said that psychological problems affecting mental health have been rising up post-lockdown. Particularly in the developing countries, the problem is getting more acute and severe. There are several factors affecting mental health such as economic recession, loss of job, stagnation in education, crises in the familial relationships, loss of equality, overuse of social media tending to increase violence, its impact on the youth, changes in the family structures, alienation of the elderly people and so on. All countries must formulate integrated guidelines and plans to fix these problems, the WHO has said. Consequently, the Union Finance Minister has spoken about these problems.

Prevention of suicide

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report published in August, 2022, the number of suicide cases has recorded 7 per cent rise compared to last year. In the number of suicides, Tamil Nadu comes next to Maharashtra. Suicides by the young are consistently and uniformly increasing across the nation.

Sixty per cent of the people who committed suicide last year belonged to the economically weaker sections. Studies have pointed out that economic crises and loss of job after the lockdown clamped in the wake of the Corona might have been the main factors for this syndrome. Mostly it is family problems that had driven women's suicides. Both union and state governments have drawn up new action plans and guidelines to prevent suicide. But they have suggested only superficial measures such as appointment of psychologists, online psychological consultations and so on.

In India most suicides happen among the oppressed sections of the society. So, the government must realize that mere consultative mechanism will not help prevent suicides unless their economic and social security is ensured and steps are taken to mitigate the effects of social and economic crises they are confronted with.

Students and mental health

The advent of technology has taken a toll more on the students and the youngsters. Somehow technology also has a role to play in the youth's increasing mental health issues. The students' academic acumen and concentration levels have considerably been dented by the longer time they spend on being riveted on the mobile phone's digital screen. Besides, the fellow human relationships have, to a large extent, reduced. Human values have changed. The elderly people, who point out these drawbacks afflicting the youth, are just pooh-poohed. Students have turned totally selfish and created an environment where there's no space for humanity, feeling of camaraderie and respect for the fellow humans.

But shockingly, the parents are least bothered about these negative qualities of their children. Their main concern is that their children should not be faced with any problem in their life and so they don't allow the children to act on their own. As a result, when the children happen to face a crisis for the first time in their life, they just goof up, turning extremely sensitive and land somehow in this or that danger.

Besides, the cloying overuse of mobile phones and other digital instruments has made them lonely. They are aroused to violence by the internet games they spend endless hours on. Owing to the lack of openness and transparency, they get caught in internet crimes. The easy availability of narcotic substances has lured them to the point of making them criminals. As a corollary of all these factors, the students' mental state has, of late, been turning worse.

Last year we witnessed the youth's problems erupting in larger numbers unlike before. The lethal internet games that drove several youngsters to commit suicide, theft, letting loose violence on others, threatening teachers and perpetrating atrocities on women… all these syndromes drive home the point that the youth's mindset has been drastically affected and poisoned.

The governments try to bring in action plans to safeguard the youth's mental wellbeing. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, several plans such as art festival, screening of good films, psychological consultation and so on have been introduced all these years. Apart from them, action plans at the State-level must be drawn up to integrate all schools.

Improving mental health

The World Federation for Mental Health had set the theme of 2022's Mental Health Day as follows: "Make mental health and wellbeing for all a global priority."

Mental health has also figured in the UN's 'Millennium Development Goals' (2000) along with elimination of hunger and poverty and preventing infant mortality.

The World Health Organisation has recognized Mental Health Day on October 10 every year.

The mental health issues have been increasing owing to the new economic policies and the changing lifestyle. Depression is one of the five prominent diseases afflicting the people.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) says, "Everybody is entitled to higher positions in physical and mental health."

Each society, realizing its nature, must fulfil the health needs of its marginalized sections. Mental health must be prioritized in pursuit of a good and healthy life. Similarly, the government must

take measures to safeguard dignity, human rights and livelihood of the mentally ill.

Individuals must openly talk about their mental health issues. Mental illness should not be viewed as a weakness; rather the efforts made to get it cured after finding proper ways and means must be looked upon as a note of strength.

Human ethics, values and respect for fellow human beings must be instilled in the minds of the children so their mental health can be ensured. Mental health for all can be attained if all of us put our act together. This can be understood from our initiatives taken last year.

Translated by V. Mariappan.