

Concept Note

“Exacerbated inequalities and vulnerabilities: Implications for mental health in times of COVID and beyond”

Monday, 29th June 2020 from 11:30 am till 1:00 pm

The abrupt and extremely harsh response to Covid-19 pandemic in India has caused and augmented social and economic deprivations and inequalities. These inevitably have serious adverse impact on the mental health of the people in the immediate as well as in the long term. These consequences experienced disproportionately by the most vulnerable – at the intersections of gender, caste, race, ethnicity, disability, age and other marginalized social locations. Loss of livelihoods, homelessness, gender-based violence, hunger and starvation, gendered burden of labour and care are some of the many concerns that have been aggravated during the past several months. Along with this, there was significant fear and panic about the spread of infection within communities. The stigma and violence including racial and communal targeting of communities, migrants, refugees and patients are phenomena in the COVID context that have also deeply affected psychosocial wellbeing and compounded the fears and consequences of inequalities, discrimination and intolerance.

According to a survey conducted by the ‘Indian Psychiatry Society’ within a week of the lockdown, the number of reported cases of mental health in India had risen by 20%¹. The cases ranging from acute stress, excessive anxiety, and depression increased during the lockdown period. Cases of severe depression with attempts to suicide were reported concerned with fear of infection and death from Covid-19². It was observed in India suicide was the leading cause of death among 338 studied death cases in duration of March 19 till May 2 by the assistant professor of legal practice at Jindal School of Law Aman³. The group which is acutely affected by the pandemic includes those who are living with mental health issues within & outside of health institutions. The impact on mental health is expected to persist if not aggravate in the forthcoming period.

The current pandemic has amplified deep concerns about mental wellbeing. There is need to reflect upon the how social deprivations, inequalities aggravated in the times of pandemic & impacted the mental health well being of marginalized groups. This webinar seeks to discuss mental health in the context of these amplified vulnerabilities, in terms of program, policy, the realities of persons in institutional care, as well as advocacy strategies. However, there is need to have constructive discussion on the strategies for the future & role of state (s), civil society, along with the community.

¹<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/indias-lockdown-ends-mental-health-crisis-beginning/>

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7161515/>

³ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/may/04/suicide-leading-cause-for-over-300-lockdown-deaths-in-india-study-2138877.html>