State of Mental Health in India and Policy Recommendations

SANKHYA (संख्या)

"There cannot be a good plan for economic progress without adequate data and there cannot be adequate data without a good plan for collecting them…"

P.C Mahalanobis, Member, First Planning Commission of India & Scientist

MENTAL STATE: A GLOBAL SCENARIO
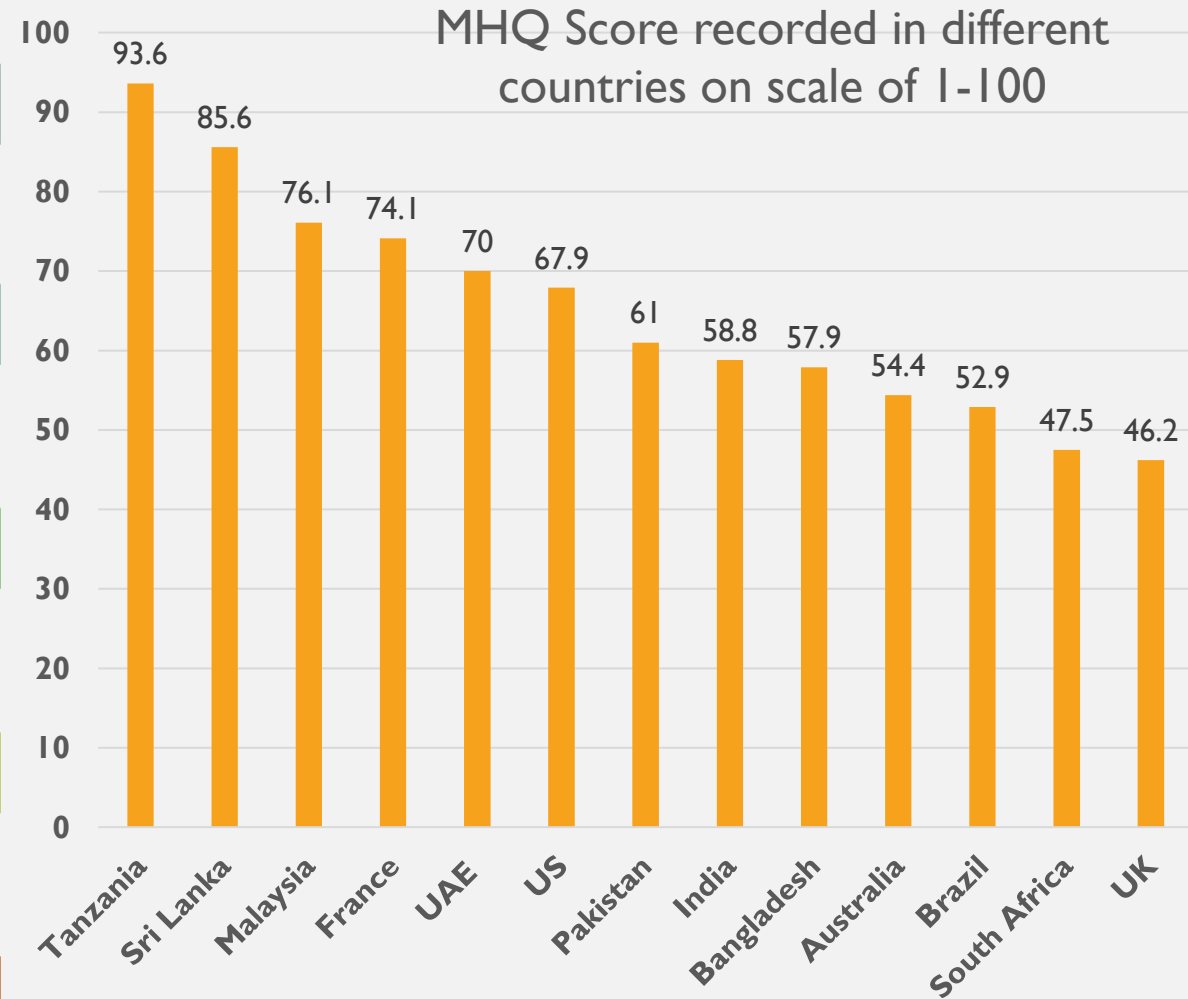
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The mental state of the world report is released annually by Sapiens Lab, a non-profit organization. The report is based on the mental well being survey of internet users.

Every person is scored on Mental Health Quotient (MHQ). MHQ captures the spectrum of emotional, social and cognitive attributes across 10 different mental health disorders as well as positive mental attributes of a person.

The mental state of the world report 2022 is the third in the series highlighting the mental well-being of people in 64 countries. In the report, the average score of countries on a scale of 100 was recorded at 64.
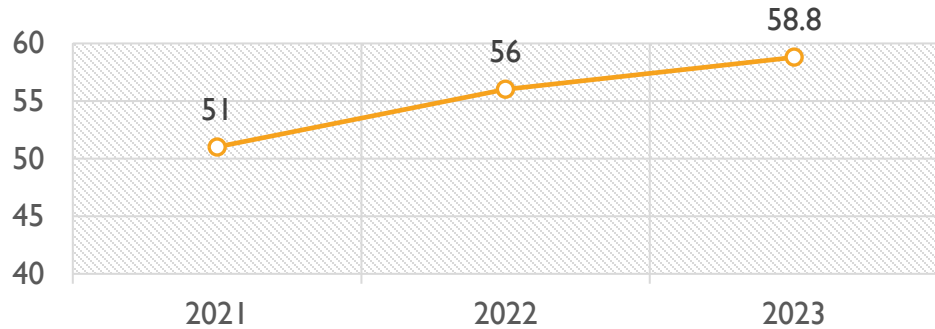
The score was highest in South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, while Oceania and South Asia showed the lowest overall mental well-being. Among countries, Tanzania scored the best with a score of 94. Whereas, the United Kingdom was at the bottom scoring 46.2.

The report, which studied 34 countries, revealed that the average score in 2021 was 67 and the situation has not improved in 2022, with no recovery towards pre-pandemic levels of mental well-being.

MHQ Score recorded in different countries on scale of 1-100

Country	MHQ Score
Tanzania	93.6
Sri Lanka	85.6
Malaysia	76.1
France	74.1
UAE	70
US	67.9
Pakistan	61
India	58.8
Bangladesh	57.9
Australia	54.4
Brazil	52.9
South Africa	47.5
UK	46.2

STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN INDIA

Growth of India

- 2021: 51
- 2022: 56
- 2023: 58.8

- Although India's performance has improved, India's mental well-being ranks below neighboring countries and scores below the average of 64 nations.
- The National Mental Health Survey of India, conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), reveals that over 80% of individuals in India do not seek professional psychiatric assistance, despite 60 to 70 million people suffering from common or severe mental disorders.
- The suicide rate among Indians is alarmingly high, with an average of 10.9 suicides per 100,000 people according to WHO statistics.
- Furthermore, India was ranked 125th out of 136 countries in the World Happiness Index 2023, making it one of the least happy countries in the world.

Indian Government initiatives to improve mental health

Since 1982, the National Mental Health Program has been implemented by the government to promote mental healthcare and address the issue of shortage of qualified professionals in the field.

In 2017, the Mental Health Care Act was enacted to address the shortcomings of the 1987 legislation by incorporating provisions for the rights of mentally ill patients, adequate regulations for treatment, and community-based mental healthcare services. It repealed the 1987 legislation and complied with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the 24/7 toll-free helpline 'Kiran' in 2020 to address the rising suicide rates in India and provide support to individuals experiencing depression, suicidal thoughts, and other mental health concerns.

Ayushman Bharat was implemented in 2018 making mental health a part of primary care services to make it both affordable and economical.

Additionally, in 2021, India launched the MANAS (Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System) mobile app to promote mental well-being across different age groups..

Further, the MoHFW has set aside INR133.73 crore for the National Tele Mental Health Programme, an initiative launched in 2022 under the NHM. The program aims to improve access to quality mental health counselling and care services in the country

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Prioritize Mental Health in educational institutions

Schools and universities have taken initiatives to promote mental healthcare, but there is currently no regulation mandating the presence of specialists for children suffering from mental illness. It is recommended that every school should have specialists based on their requirements and strengths, and develop policies to change their mindset about mental illness at an early stage.

Insurance Coverage for Mental Health Care

To ensure that mental health care is treated equally with physical health care, basic health insurance plans should cover therapy sessions and related costs as a mandatory requirement. While the Mental Health Care Act mandates insurance policies to provide coverage, the extent of services covered varies. To improve implementation of the law, a minimum list of services to be covered under insurance policies may be prepared.

Targeted Awareness programs

The government should implement targeted awareness programs to promote mental healthcare in India. Programs should target different groups such as rural areas, parents, schools, and urban populations. Programs must aim to change society's mindset towards mental health as there is still a stigma around it. These programs can be conducted through social media, community centers, and educational institutions, and should be available in regional languages. This will reduce the stigma around mental health and encourage more people to seek help when needed.

Promoting Mental Health at workplace

Organizations and companies should implement policies to improve the mental health of their employees by providing on-site mental health services and promoting therapy. They should assist employees in accessing mental health services by covering the cost and encouraging them. For small companies, managers and supervisors can be trained to identify signs of distress and create a supportive workplace culture using low-cost or free online resources, training sessions or workshops.

Develop digital mental health services

The government and private sector should invest in digital mental health services to provide accessible and affordable mental health services to people in remote areas

Mental Health Training for healthcare professionals

To improve mental healthcare in India, the government should implement training programs for healthcare professionals to educate them in handling mental health cases. The training should be tailored to enable them to manage mental state of specific groups, with a focus on under-recognized areas of mental illness. The training should also cover a range of mental health issues and be regularly updated to incorporate new developments in the field. By implementing such a policy, the mental healthcare system in India can be strengthened and improved.

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Sankhya* is an initiative of Bridge Policy Think Tank to create interface snapshots in statistics and policy analysis while promoting critical thinking and analysis.

* Sankhya means numbers and is also a school of rationalist Indian philosophy. According to Sankhya philosophy reliable knowledge comes from only three pramanas (proofs)- pratyakṣa ('perception'), anumāṇa ('inference') and śabda (āptavacana, meaning, 'word/testimony of reliable sources').