

Tele-MANAS: A Review Of India's National Tele-Mental Health Initiative

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Abstract

Tele-MANAS: Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States. It is India's initiative aimed at strengthening mental health services through tele-consultation. Launched on October 10, 2022 under the National Tele Mental Health Programme (NTMHP), this initiative started to deal with the growing burden of mental health disorders by providing free, 24/7 tele-mental health services. This review explores the implementation, impact, challenges, and future prospects of Tele-MANAS in India.

Keywords: Tele-Manas, Mental Health, Counselling, Psychotherapy.

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I. Introduction:

Mental health disorders are a significant public health challenge in India, made worse by stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate mental health infrastructure putting society to think negatively towards mental disorder. According to 2017 data, there were 197.3 million India's population suffering from mental disorders, access to professional mental health services remains a critical concern. Tele-MANAS was launched as part of the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) to bridge this gap by influencing digital health solutions.

II. Need Of Tele Manas :

India, home to 18% of the global population, faces a significant mental health crisis, with mental disorders being the second leading cause of years lived with disability (YLDs) and suicide ranking as the third leading cause of death in many states. National studies reveal that 15% of India's adult population experiences mental health issues requiring intervention, yet the treatment gap ranges from 70-92%, leaving millions without access to care.

Although the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 enshrines access to mental health as a statutory right, over 11 crore people in India still suffer from mental health disorders, with 80% not seeking help. Each year, more than 1 lakh people die by suicide, while countless others attempt to end their lives, underscoring the urgent need for intervention.

Tele MANAS was established to bridge this gap and make mental healthcare accessible to all. By offering counseling, psychotherapy, and referral services via telephone, the program provides a lifeline to individuals who might otherwise be unable to seek help. Most mental health issues do not require specialized care but can be managed effectively by trained healthcare providers, ensuring that no individual faces discrimination or neglect due to mental illness. Access to mental healthcare is a fundamental human right, and Tele MANAS is a vital step toward realizing that right for millions of people across India.

III. Aims & Objective:

The primary aim of Tele MANAS is to provide universal access to equitable, affordable, and quality mental health care through a 24x7 tele-mental health service, forming a key digital component of the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP). This service is available across all Indian States and Union Territories, with assured linkages to ensure seamless care.

Implementation and Service Framework Tele-MANAS operates through a two-tier system:

1. Tier 1: State Tele-MANAS cells with trained counsellors and mental health professionals who offer initial consultations and crisis management.
2. Tier 2: Specialist mental health professionals and referral services to advanced mental health institutions when required.

The service is available via a toll-free number (14416) and can be accessed in multiple regional languages. The initiative functions through partnerships between the central and state governments, medical colleges, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Impact and Benefits As its launch-Tele-MANAS has expanded mental health access across urban and rural areas. Key benefits include:

- **Increased Accessibility:** Overcomes geographical and economic barriers, providing nationwide access to mental health services.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Reduces the financial burden on individuals seeking mental health care.
- **Early Intervention:** Facilitates early diagnosis and intervention, potentially preventing severe mental health complications.
- **Reduction in Stigma:** Encourages people to seek help anonymously, addressing societal stigma around mental health.

IV. Challenges And Limitations

Despite its advantages, Tele-MANAS faces several challenges:

- **Limited Awareness:** Many individuals remain unaware of the service.
- **Shortage of Mental Health Professionals:** High demand often overwhelms the available workforce.
- **Digital Divide:** Limited internet and smartphone penetration in rural areas restricts access.
- **Quality Assurance:** Maintaining consistent service quality across different states is a challenge.

V. Future Prospects And Recommendations-

To enhance the effectiveness of Tele-MANAS, the following measures are suggested:

- **It will Increase Public Awareness Campaigns:** Utilize social media, television, and community outreach to promote the service.
- **Capacity Building:** Train more mental health professionals and integrate AI-based chat bots for preliminary screening.
- **Integration with Primary Healthcare:** Strengthen linkages with primary healthcare centers for better follow-up and continuity of care.
- **Data Security and Privacy Policies:** Ensure stringent data protection measures to maintain user confidentiality.

VI. Conclusion:

Tele-MANAS represents a significant step toward improving mental health care accessibility in India. While challenges exist, strategic improvements in awareness, workforce capacity, and technology integration can enhance its impact. As the program evolves, it has the potential to become a global model for digital mental health interventions.

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