

## Kerala's Mental Healthcare Model

### Why in news?

Kerala has always boasted of European standards in healthcare but mental healthcare remains a blind spot.

### What are the issues?

- In February 2022, an inmate was murdered by another at the mental health centre in Kozhikode.
- On the directions of the Kerala HC, the district judge conducted an inspection and reported many violations.
- Recently, a suo motu case was registered by the State Human Rights Commission on the inhuman treatment being meted out to patients at the Government Mental Health Centre in Thiruvananthapuram.

### What did the inspection expose?

- The latest intervention exposed the deplorable conditions at the Thiruvananthapuram facility where patients were found locked up in cells with tin roofs and closed windows.
- Patients are being treated like prisoners and live amid dirt.
- There has been gross violation of patient rights guaranteed by the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.
- Infrastructure inadequacies to insufficient number of staff were cited as the reasons of the pathetic conditions.
- Efforts to constitute review boards were initiated by the state mental health authority only this month.
- The authority which was formed in January 2021 met only once so far though the law mandates that the body should meet at least four times a year.

*According to a survey by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) 7.5% of the total country's population is hit by mental illness.*

### What does the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provide for?

- The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 aims to provide mental healthcare services for persons with mental illness.
- It ensures that these persons have a right to live life with dignity by not being discriminated against or harassed.
- **New definition of mental illness**- Earlier, Mental illness was defined as any mental disorder and seldom as mental retardation but the new act provides a broader definition.
- **Rights for persons with mental illness**- It includes

- Right to obtain mental health care
- Right to live with dignity
- Non-discrimination
- Rights of confidentiality
- Right to protection from barbaric and demeaning treatment
- **Advance directive-** A person with mental illness shall have the right to make an advance directive that states how he/she wants to be treated for the illness and who his/her nominated representative shall be.
- The advance directive should be certified by a medical practitioner or registered with the Mental Health Board.
- **Mental health authority-** The Bill provides power to the government to set-up the Central Mental Health Authority at national-level and State Mental Health Authority in each State.
- **Mental health treatment-** The Bill also specifies the process and procedure to be followed for admission, treatment and discharge of mentally-ill individuals.
- **Decriminalization of suicide-** This is a milestone judgement which annulled Section 309 IPC which punishes person attempting to perform suicide.
- **Abolishment the barbarous treatments-** It affirms that a person with mental illness shall not be subjected to electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) therapy without the application of muscle relaxants and anaesthesia.
- Electro-convulsive therapy for minors is prohibited.
- Chaining in any manner or method is banned.
- **Mental health review boards-** Section 73 of the Act mandates the constitution of mental health review boards.

*WHO noted in a report in 2017 that there are less than two mental health professionals for every 100,000 people in the country.*

## **What initiatives were taken regarding the mental health?**

- **De-stigmatizing Awareness-** Organizations like The MINDS Foundation, Manas Foundation, The Banyan, Aasra, etc. are key in de-stigmatizing mental health in India.
- **NMHP-** The government of India launched the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) in 1982 to focus mainly on increasing the reach of minimum mental health services for the poor.
- **The Mental Health Care Act-** It mandated affordable mental health care, the right to make decisions and informed consent, the right to live in a community and the right to confidentiality.
- **Tele-health Initiatives-** The Government of India has proposed to launch a National Tele Mental Health Program.
- **Community-based Approaches-** Sangath, an NGO provides affordable mental healthcare by strengthening state and private sector services by training the community.
- **MANODARPAN** is an initiative of the Ministry of Education to provide psychosocial support to students for their mental health and well-being.
- **Rehabilitation-** Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has launched the 24x7 Toll-Free Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline “**KIRAN**” to provide relief and support to persons with Mental Illness.

## What is the need of the hour?

- The inmates of mental hospitals are the most vulnerable section in the health sector.
- They are voiceless and they don't have voting rights.
- Sincere effort is needed from the state government to implement the act in its true spirit.

### References

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