

## Mental Health of Informal Workers

### Why in news?

Informal workers, despite their significant contribution to national income, are perennially exposed to economic, physical, and, in turn, mental vulnerabilities.

### Status of Informal workers

- **Global**- Around 2 billion (61.2%) of the world's employed population worked informally in 2016.
- This proportion was relatively higher for emerging and developing countries at 69.6%.
- **India**- India's informal workforce accounts for more than 90% of the working population.
  - Urban- 79% of total jobs
  - Rural-96% of total jobs
- 95% of India's working women are engaged in informal sector.

### Who are informal workers?

- **Informal employment**- It broadly refers to workers who are employed in jobs where they do not have access to social security benefits under existing labour legislations.
- They are private unincorporated or unregistered enterprises, owned by households or individuals.
- This can be either because of the informal nature of the enterprise where a person is employed, or due to the nature of the work itself, which can be casual, part-time, or home-based self-employment.

### Steps taken to formalize the Informal Sector

- **e-shram portal**- It was developed in 2021 to create a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW) for optimum realization of their employability and to extend the social security benefits.
- **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana**- It was launched in 2019 to protect unorganized workers like street vendors, agriculture related work, construction site workers etc.,
- **Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana**- It was launched in 2016 to create employment for the unskilled or semi-skilled workers by providing incentives to the employers.
- **Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana**- It was launched in 2008 to provide socio-economic security to the BPL workers by providing them with health insurances
- **Gatidhara Scheme**- It was launched by the West Bengal transport department for giving employment to the youth who has registered themselves as unemployed.
- **Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana**- It was launched in 2020 during COVID-19 to promote employment opportunities for migrant workers.
- **PM Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)**- It was launched in 2020 to provide affordable working capital loan to street vendors to resume their livelihoods that have been adversely affected due to Covid-19 lockdown.

## Why informal workers face mental health issues?

*A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) says that 15% of working-age adults, globally, live with a mental disorder.*

- **Mental health-** Unemployment, unstable or precarious employment, workplace discrimination, etc. can all pose a risk to a worker's mental health.
  - As per *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*, unemployment and poor-quality employment have consistently been detrimental to mental health
- **Psychological risks-** Workers in low-paid, unrewarding or insecure jobs, or working in isolation, are more likely to be exposed to psychosocial risks, thus compromising their mental health.
- **Safety risk-** Working in unsafe working environments, enduring for long hours, little access to social or financial protections, etc. add to the issue.
- **Patriarchy-** The structures and practices in social and familial spaces put women without social protection.
  - *The State of Inequality in India Report 2022* observes that the unemployment rate actually increases with educational levels, particularly for educated young women who show an unemployment rate of 42%
- **Negative emotions-** Youth unemployment is one of the highest in India which, along with the stigma around unemployment, significantly impacts their mental health.
  - *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies'* survey among 9,316 youth aged between 15 to 34 years in India has shown that they are highly susceptible to negative emotions.
- **Old age-** The absence of proper financial and health-care security among the working elderly can severely impact their physical and mental health, aggravating their vulnerability.
  - The *Census of India 2011* shows that 33 million elderly people are working post-retirement in informal work.

*The theme of World Mental Health Day (October 10) 2023 is 'Mental Health as a Universal Human Right'.*

## How the lack of social security impact the mental health of informal workers?

- **Mental distress-** Informal workers face mental distress due to accumulating debt and rising health-care costs, which are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.
- **Post COVID-** A study by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) among informal workers in Delhi, mostly migrants, indicates that recovery post COVID-19 remains uneven among informal workers
- **Basic necessities-** Mental health and well-being are impacted by factors such as food security, access to livelihood and financial stability.
- **Lack of funding-** Schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) have seen their funding slashed in this Budget.
- **Code on Social Security 2020-** The current Code on Social Security does not

universalise social security.

*In 2021, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported that 26% of the people who died by suicide were daily wage earners.*

### Initiatives taken to tackle Mental Health Related Issues

- National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru
- National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), 1982
- Mental Health Act, 2017
- National Mental Health Policy, 2014
- KIRAN mental health helpline, 2020
- Tele-MANAS helpline, 2022

### What lies ahead?

- India need to increase budgetary allocation for mental health, currently it is 1% of total health budget.
- World Mental Health Report 2022 observed, addressing mental health involves strengthening community-based care, and people-centred, recovery-oriented and human rights-oriented care.
- There is an urgent need for proactive policies to improve mental health recognition and action.
- Mental health is critical in upholding the basic human right to good health, including mental health, and in advancing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially
  - **SDG 3**- Good health and well-being
  - **SDG 8**- Decent work for all/ economic growth

### References

1. [The Hindu- Mental health and informal worker](#)
2. [Oxfam- Glance at Informal Workers](#)
3. [Vikaspedia- Formalising the informal sector](#)