

IT'S A TICKING TIME BOMB

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Abstract: In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is another pandemic that has been hiding in plain sight. Mental health diseases are rapidly growing, and the United Nations predicts that mental health ailments, such as depression, will be the number one disease burden worldwide, by 2030[1].

Millions of people worldwide suffer from mental health conditions, and it is estimated that one in four adults in the United States suffer from a diagnosable mental health issue every year[2]. Depression and Anxiety, together (while being different conditions), are the leading causes of mental health disabilities.

These mental health disabilities can manifest in many social problems including substance, sexual and physical abuse. These conditions commonly occur in the workplace, medical facilities, and homes. The consistent negligent view on mental health and its accompanying social stigmatization continues to force people to hide their conditions, mirroring our society's initial behavior during the pandemic.

Consequently, understanding and devising treatment methods, which can range from counselling to medication depending on severity, continue to be herculean efforts. Depression is ranked third in the Global Burden of Disease today and is projected to rank first in 2030. ***This is a wakeup call !***

Lancet reports that globally, 264 million people had depression disorder and 163 million people were suffering with anxiety disorder in 2018. A 2017 collaborative study between ICMR and Bill & Melinda Gates foundation, found over 197 million mental disorder patients in India, including 45.7 million with depressive disorders and 44.9 million with anxiety disorders[3].

During the coronavirus pandemic there was a reported jump of over 40% in mental disorder incidences, worldwide. Approximately 250K (2.5 lakh) people in India die of depressive disorders every year, of which 70% commit suicide[4]. In comparison, India reports roughly about 105K (1.5 Lakh) deaths due to alcohol abuse annually in India[5]. The disparages are not lost on the medical professionals, who are an already heavily overwhelmed entity

of the medical fraternity in the country. Dr Khatri, a neuroscience expert at NIPER Hyderabad, comments *“to counter this emerging pandemic of mental health it is important to bring together the three Sciences of Neuroscience, Psychiatry and Public health”*. However, all is not lost.

Leading new-age research groups such as NBI Biosciences and NIPER Hyderabad are spearheading the charge against many chronic conditions such as mental health disorders. Innovative thinking is inducing the emergence of a new world of support medicines. Anjali Kumar, a director with NBI Biosciences, recalls experience of supportive systems at University of Michigan: *“this silent but growing threat [of mental health disabilities] requires an enhanced focus from governments and support groups, by communicating the dangers to the public at large and learning about its effects on children and geriatric populations”*.

Both, NIPER Hyderabad and NBI biosciences are working toward the development of modern pharmaceuticals that will help support groups therapies along with doctors to work closely with government and other regulators.

[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs | Disability. (2016). Mental health and development.

[2] Johns Hopkins Medicine. Mental health disorders statistics.

[3] The Lancet | Psychiatry. (2019, December 20). The burden of mental disorders across the states of India: The Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2017.

[4] The Lancet | Public Health. (2018, September 11). Gender differentials and state variations in suicide deaths in India: The Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2016.

[5] Statista | Health, Pharma & MedTech. (2018, September 21). India – number of alcohol related deaths by cause 2016.