

Home is Where the Mind is Safe:

Role of Families in Youth Mental Health

Families impact the mental health of young people in the most profound ways. They serve as young people's immediate and most important support systems that help them become independent and develop to their fullest potential. Families can provide resources to cope with stress, enhance self-esteem, engage in healthier behaviors, all of which lead to higher well-being.

However, various family related factors have a negative influence on young people's mental health, such as unhealthy or stressful family atmosphere due to any reason, frequent conflicts including domestic violence in the family, poor quality of relationship between parents and children, single parenthood, presence of a step-parent, and family trauma. Parents who have poor mental health themselves or are suffering from mental health conditions may find it more difficult to provide care for their children as compared to parents who have good mental health. For young people with mental health conditions, families have an additional role to provide support and care, which can impact a young person's recovery tremendously.

This note highlights the key findings of the landscaping exercise and discusses the role of family in youth mental health. In addition, three key aspects have been identified, which will not only promote mental health among young people but also enable families to better support young people with mental health conditions.

With support from Fondation Botnar, PATH recently completed a multi-pronged landscape analysis titled **Stakeholder-led Advancement of Mental Health of Young People (SAMYP)**, entailing an environmental scan of rapidly evolving multisectoral policies, programs, and services addressing the mental health needs of young Indians aged 15–24 years.

SAMYP Approach



Primary focus on mental health of young people (15-24 years) living in low-income urban communities in India



stakeholders, policies, public and private sector initiatives, and legislations review and analyses of enablers and challenges



Comprehensive needs assessment, identification of enablers and barriers for digital mental health interventions



Technical Advisory Group, Youth Advisory Groups including young people with lived experience of mental health problems



Employ human-centered design principles and stakeholder-led co-creation process for developing interventions

Key Imperatives From SAMYP SPOTLIGHT Report

- There exists a high treatment gap and limited data on treatment coverage among adolescents and young adults specifically, posing a huge challenge for India.
- There is a need to reimagine the scope of current mental healthcare programs and provide a spotlight on mental well-being as compared with mental disorders or illnesses.
- Parents, teachers, healthcare workers, and policies need to be supported to enable creation of safe spaces to promote safe and frank discussions on mental health with young people in their care.
- There are systemic barriers such as poor implementation of policies and acts, less publicization of mental health unlike other competent health programs, minimal and unsustained efforts to address the dearth of skilled workforce and sustained funding.
- Stakeholder actions are fragmented with lack of national and state level platforms to convene dialogue between key stakeholders, including youth engagement. A collective push leveraging innovative solutions is warranted to foster these learnings into tangible actions.

1. Normalization and Acceptance of Mental Health Conditions

Mental health and self-care are not frequently discussed in schools and colleges. There is a need to provide adolescents a reliable access to accurate and comprehensive information on mental health. In addition, promoting self-care for mental health is also a key priority.

Young people imbibe attitudes from their immediate social surroundings. Families can play a major role in normalizing mental health conditions and shaping young people's attitudes and behavior towards mental health conditions and people with mental health conditions. This paves the way for effective communication, early identification, and timely treatment of mental health conditions.

“There is a need to change the adults' mindsets. We need to talk more about it, we need to discuss our own mental health issues. Setting examples, creating comfort, normalizing mental health issues is needed. There is a lot of resistance to send students to psychiatrists.” – School Counselor, Bhubaneswar

2. Effective Communication

Effective communication with parents, families, teachers, as well as service providers regarding mental health is a major challenge. A lack of common understanding and expressions for expressing mental health concerns, anticipated negative reactions from parents and teachers, and uncertainty about the support offered contribute to this challenge.

“We need to open up and talk about our own situation more frequently with our parents, so that they realize that mental health issues are not a hoax. For that, we need a common and easy vocabulary to bridge the communication gap between parents and children.” – Young Woman, Youth Advisory Group, Lucknow

There is a need for open discussions about mental health and self-care in homes and among family members. These discussions need to be safe, sensitive, and devoid of judgement, ridicule, or dismissal.

“We don't get a platform where we can share without feeling judged. Everyone is different and their needs for support are different. Families too, often do not understand us.” – Young Man, Youth Workshop, Lucknow

3. Mental Health Education

Families do not have sufficient information regarding mental health, mental health conditions, their symptoms, duration, expected consequences, and types of treatment.

Families equipped with the correct information and resources to cater to young people's mental health requirements, mental health conditions, and their treatments can support young people by addressing their misconceptions and helping families overcome their hesitation to seek appropriate mental health care for young people.

“Education of parents on how to respond to the emotional needs of their adolescent children and create supportive relationships within the family is important.” – Senior Psychologist, Bhubaneswar

Family's Role in Promoting Mental Wellbeing

- Create safe, positive home environment by spending quality time and having open conversation with children.
- Frame the mistakes of your children as a way of learning to boost their confidence and self-esteem.
- Participate in fun physical activities with children - walking, playing indoor or outdoor games.
- Regulate and control screen time - put digital devices away when you are with your children.
- Prioritize bedtime and practicing yoga meditation.
- Observe changes in thinking, feelings, behavior, appetite, sleep pattern, relationships, social isolation, loss of interest etc.
- Upon observing changes, help your child in seeking appropriate care from school counselors or nearest health facility.