

Mental Health Facilities for Children from Low-Income Families in India

Angana Nandy*

Tenderminds, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Introduction

With growing awareness about child mental health and the important role it plays in the overall well-being of a child more and more parents are seeking help from trained mental health professionals practicing in hospitals, clinics and child development centres. Complete elimination of stigma associated with mental health is not an easy task but we are making an effort to understand this crucial aspect of life better and spread awareness as much as possible. With more awareness campaigns being organized across the country families from varied socio-economic backgrounds are acknowledging the difficulties faced by their children and seeking timely professional help. High and middle-income families usually have better access to good quality mental health facilities developed for children and adolescents and are able to bear the costs required for treatment. Low-income families on the other hand struggle with the costs and have fewer options available. Drop-out rates from treatment are high which means children from these families continue to face long-term difficulties and developmental challenges. Making mental health affordable for families in India is something we collectively need to strive for aside from spreading awareness on the subject. This article seeks to explore a few practical ways in which this can be achieved. Some can be achieved over a short period of time while some are long-term goals which need to be worked on rigorously (Figure 1).

Free Clinic Day

Various child development centres, mental health clinics and hospitals with psychiatric departments can work on a plan that aims to provide free consultations to children from low-income families on one particular day of the month. A selected number of doctors and other mental health professionals can be assigned to the task of providing good quality services to families and ensuring that their problems are heard and their needs are addressed [1].

Trained Psychologists in Government Schools

Well trained and qualified psychologists can be approached and encouraged to lend their expertise in this area. Working in government

schools can be both a challenging and enriching experience and psychologists can be awarded continuous professional development points (CPD points) in exchange for their valuable services. Twice a month provision can seek to ensure that behavioral, social, emotional and academic problems are addressed in a timely and professional manner.

Free Mental Health Camps

Professionals practicing in various organizations can come together to organize free camps where parents from low-income families can bring their children for free mental health screenings and consultations. This can be arranged on a quarterly basis in urban as well as rural areas across the country. Participating professionals can be awarded certificates adding to their professional development. This can also be a good opportunity for fresh graduates looking to gain experience in the field before seeking full-time employment [2].

Subsidized Therapy Fees

Child development centres and other mental health clinics can formulate a plan that provides therapeutic services to children from low-income families (who require regular sessions) at subsidized rates. Minimum of two reserved seats per centre can be a good starting point.

Non-governmental Organizations Focusing on Child Mental Health

Individuals interested in social work and who aim to work towards the elimination of stigma associated with mental health can set up non-governmental organizations that lend psychiatric and psychological help to children and adolescents from low-income families. Funding from corporate (corporate social responsibility) can be looked at as one of the possible sources for capital [3].

Foreign Volunteers

Medical and non-medical volunteers and interns from foreign countries with degrees in mental health and social work who seek to offer their services free of cost can be posted in different organizations across the country that work with children from low-income backgrounds. Clear police and medical reports, verified educational backgrounds, a minimum commitment of three months and willingness to work with the vulnerable population can be the minimum eligibility criteria for appointing them. They can engage in direct clinical work with children



Figure 1: Long-term difficulties and developmental challenges.

*Corresponding author: Nandy A, Developmental Psychologist at Tenderminds, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560008, India, Tel: + 91 9035476405; E-mail: mail.rinkee@gmail.com

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as well as train other professionals in this area.

Each approach mentioned above comes with its own set of challenges. An open mind, willingness to initiate change and the desire to work hard can all contribute towards creating a society that does not discriminate people on the basis of their mental health. Children depend on us for safety and love so let's create an environment that promotes their growth and development in the best possible way.

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