

DEMENTIA AND CMDs AMONG INDIAN ELDERLY

Approximately 17 million senior citizens are suffering from mental health problems in India. Some studies also reported nearly 10-15% of older adults in the community have a diagnosable mental illness. For those having any chronic medical condition like diabetes, hypertension, heart disease or other chronic ailments, prevalence of coexisting mental illness can go up to 25 to 50%. However, only a small percentage of all these get recognized especially in rural areas and even fewer are able to receive treatment. Problem is further compounded due to shortage of health care professionals in the country. Among its various tasks, National Program for Health Care of Elderly (NPHCE) launched by Government of India in 2010 mandates to provide mental health care to senior citizens.

Both Dementia and CMDs (Common Mental Disorders like depression and anxiety) are major mental health concerns for the ageing population. Dementia is a progressive, often irreversible and a disabling condition which can slowly render the patient completely dependent on a care giver even for his basic activities of daily living and become a challenge for the entire family. Counselling to dementia care givers greatly helps in managing dementia but there is no satisfactory medical treatment for dementia. On the other hand, CMDs like depression and anxiety can reverse with counselling and treatment but as their name suggests, CMDs are common in the community and are also a source of significant morbidity among senior citizens. Moreover, unlike patients with physical disorders, those with dementia and CMDs not only remain undetected for long periods and therefore unable to get care at various levels but also suffer from social stigma from the society.

As per Indian studies quoted in Dementia India Report, 2010, reported prevalence of dementia among the senior citizens was 0.6% to 3.5% in rural areas and 0.9% to 4.8% in urban areas. The Report mentions there were 3.7 million persons with dementia which are projected to 7.6 million persons with dementia by the year 2030 and that dementia in rural areas was slightly lesser than in urban areas. CMDs are also important as they are common. For instance, depending on the type of tools used and other factors, highly variable prevalence of depressive disorders ranging from 10 to 55% has been reported by different studies among older adults. Data extracted from National Mental Health Survey (NMHS, 2015-2016), supported by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare also indicated that older adults had a high lifetime (6.93%) and current (3.53%) prevalence as far as depressive disorders are concerned. Anxiety disorders in general were about 0.51 times lesser than depressive disorders and that among senior citizens, phobic anxiety disorders were the commonest. Both CMDs were also commoner in urban areas. It is also well known that old age home residents are more vulnerable to cognitive disorder like dementia as well as CMDs.