

Declining Mental Health: An Aftermath of Fast-Paced Urbanization

Dr. (Brig.) Amarjit Singh

CEO, Principal Director & Professor Emeritus, (Radiodiagnosis & Imaging), Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. (Brig.) Amarjit Singh, Department of Psychiatry, Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pimpri, Pune, Maharashtra, India

e-mail: ceo@dpu.edu.in

How to Cite this Article: Singh A. Declining Mental Health: An Aftermath of Fast-Paced Urbanization. *J Int Med Sci Acad* 2022;35(4):243-244.

Access this article online : www.jimsaonline.com



The United Nations estimated in 2020 that over 56.2% of the global population resides in urban areas of settlement. Urbanisation plays a critical role in the social and economic development of a nation and impacts overall global development. Opportunities for education, employment, healthcare, transport, and social and cultural progression are all better in urban areas of settlements and undoubtedly attractive to those who are not born into such areas. But not all that glitters is gold, and this fast-paced urbanisation has rendered individuals vulnerable to mental illnesses, has caused a decline in overall mental health at a community level and has worsened outcome and course of mental illnesses as well [1,2]. Poor housing standards, overcrowding, pollution of air, water, sound, scarcity of potable water, poor food standards, poor standards of sanitation and waste disposal, excessive road-traffic, poverty, unemployment, high rates of crime and violence are only some of the vices which can cast a shadow on the mental health of the urban dwellers [3].

Mental illnesses are now being labelled as an urban phenomenon as the instability and insecurity progressively skew the dynamics of a healthy lifestyle in today's time and age. Major mental illnesses such as mood disorders, anxiety, psychotic disorders and substance use disorders are seeing an uprising trend in urban communities, at rates which may be as high as two-folds, when compared to rural communities [3].

A typical day in an urban area is characterised by incessant exposure to high frequency audios or sounds of machinery, tedious daily commute across large distances, flashing and

glaring lights, excessive crowding in areas of public utility; over and above the seemingly impossible task of balancing work, family and self-care. Most urban dwellers deem themselves incapable of enduring the simultaneous exposure to so many stressors at once, and can even quantify a progressive deterioration of their mental faculties. It is not unusual for us to hear someone, or even ourselves, let out a "I just cannot", time and again [2,4].

The overbearing competition which is inevitably arises as a result of stark imbalance between scanty opportunities and overwhelming aspirants, now occupies a prominent role in urban living. Running the gauntlet to acquire nearly anything: no matter how trivial or consequential, is now a routine activity for an urban dweller. Needless to say, a quest can only have so many winners, leaving multitudes to deal with the anguish of failure, rejection, and disappointment. Moreover, resilience is a subjective property and some may take a larger hit at a loss, than others. Daily struggles of such sort insinuate a sense of inferiority in people, which takes them only further down the ladder of achievements and acquisitions [2].

An urban settlement provides an array of cultures and traditions, religions and allegiances, attitudes and outlooks, interests and hobbies. Large neighbourhoods, work spaces, educational institutions and various other areas in a city mandate interaction amongst people with varied belief systems, which provides a conjectural potential to give rise to conflicts and misunderstandings. This is an often-overlooked area of mental distress, as people are advised to treat it as insignificant even when it invariably affects their

daily functioning and efficiency. Many a times, conflicting beliefs are blown out of proportion and may create havoc and confusion on a more widespread basis, as is seen in religious and political debaucheries [2,3].

Loneliness has now acquired the tag of an epidemic in the modern urban society. It can be defined as a discrepancy between one's expectations and realities of interpersonal relations. Cities in the developed west have citizens reporting rates of loneliness which go as high as 76% today. The sudden and exponential rise in loneliness can be largely attributed to the widespread incorporation of technology, world wide web and social media in the life of an average urbanite. While on one hand, easy access to the internet has provided facile solutions to daily life; it has also unequivocally tumbled the fabric of healthy social survival. Overexposure and continuous exposure to unwanted information, guileful and superficial relations through smartphone applications, the pressure to keep up with the waxing and waning trends on social media, and a marked reduction in pursuit of activities which require physical and mental presence are certain vices which have markedly influenced the increased sense of perceived isolation in individuals, which they term 'loneliness' [5].

Slums are houses or neighbourhoods in urban cities, which are informal settlements and in a condition which is unsafe and improper for residence. Although not a hard-ruled dictum, most of the slums comprise rural natives in search of better economic avenues, immigrants, or social outcasts. Formation and expansion of slums in a city is an inevitable consequence of rapid urbanisation and it is estimated that nearly 40% of India's urban population resides in slums. There is a stark disparity in the standard of life in the urban slum, as demonstrated by poor education and employment opportunities, child labour, income inequalities, poor access

to clean food and water, poor housing and sanitation, lack of easy access to health care, increased vulnerability to conflicts and disasters, and high rates of crime. Such factors have a negative effect on the mental stability of urban slum dwellers as evidenced by higher rates of mental illnesses, accidents, suicides and homicides, substance abuse, and antisocial activities [2,3].

Effectively tackling the mental health hazards arising from urbanisation requires development of policies and schemes which can be applied at both the individual level as well as the community level. The relevant factors which need urgent addressal have been highlighted above. Mental Health Care Act, 2017 has granted mental illnesses the same footing as physical illnesses in terms of attention and treatment, and health-care workers should ensure its effective implementation. Attention is also needed from local authorities and governing bodies to ensure safe and sanitary living conditions, access to clean water and food, and equity in terms of education in employment. Last but not the least, camaraderie should be encouraged in neighbourhoods and institutions, as the father of our nation once said, "*Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow men.*"

References

- 1) Compton MT, Shim RS. The social determinants of mental health. *Focus*. 2015 Oct;13(4):419-25.
- 2) Hiremath SS. Impact of Urbanisation on Mental Health: A Critical Appraisal. *of*. 2021;4:2.
- 3) Gruebner O, Rapp MA, Adli M, Kluge U, Galea S, Heinz A. Cities and mental health. *DeutschesArzteblatt International*. 2017 Feb;114(8):121.
- 4) Turan MT, Besirli A. Impacts of urbanization process on mental health. *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2008 Dec 1;9(4):238-43.
- 5) Bermúdez JP. Social media and self-control: The vices and virtues of attention.

