

## Mental Health and Mental Well-being

Mental wellness is an essential component of holistic wellbeing, yet it remains largely neglected due to prevalent stigma, lack of awareness, and misconceptions. In India, public health service delivery often

**Mental Health Interventions**  
For children, adolescents, young adults and families

- Provide structured counseling sessions and therapeutic support tailored to address emotional and psychological needs. Counselling sessions will be provided in mental health facility provided by the organization
- Tele-counseling support
- Develop peer support networks to ensure sustainability

faces a significant challenge, and mental health interventions frequently take a back seat due to limited resources and a shortage of qualified professionals. In 2017, the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, declared that the nation was facing a "mental health crisis," a situation that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's effects were

particularly severe on children and adolescents, making them more vulnerable to psychosocial distress. In light of these challenges, JPISC launched a comprehensive mental health project in Howrah District in West Bengal, India in April, 2023 to support the development and expansion of a coordinated system of care that integrates mental health services in the home, schools, and the community in collaboration with Private German sponsor: German Doctors e.V and BMZ.

In South 24 Parganas (Canning), with UNICEF's support, JPISC in partnership with Institute of Psychiatry (IOP), Government of West Bengal launched another initiative focused on community mental health for children and adolescents. This project raises awareness among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, service providers, and government officials, through workshops and the distribution of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials. It also ensures that individuals are connected to mental health services such as the District Mental Health Program for timely and effective intervention.

Through these targeted interventions, JPISC is building a foundation for mental health awareness, early detection, and accessible care, empowering communities to prioritize and sustain mental well-being.

### Background:



The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated the mental health crisis, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups. Many people lost their jobs and face persistent food insecurity and inadequate healthcare. The closure of educational institutions during the pandemic led to severe social isolation of children and young people, which has long-lasting health and social consequences. Children and young people have to deal with increased anxiety and also due to the precarious situation in their families, are more often at

risk of becoming victims of mental health challenges. Furthermore, many children and young people have lost one or both parents as a result of a Covid infection, which also contributes to a high level of psychological and emotional stress. The widespread stigmatization of mental illness contributes to the fact that people often do not seek help despite suffering considerably.

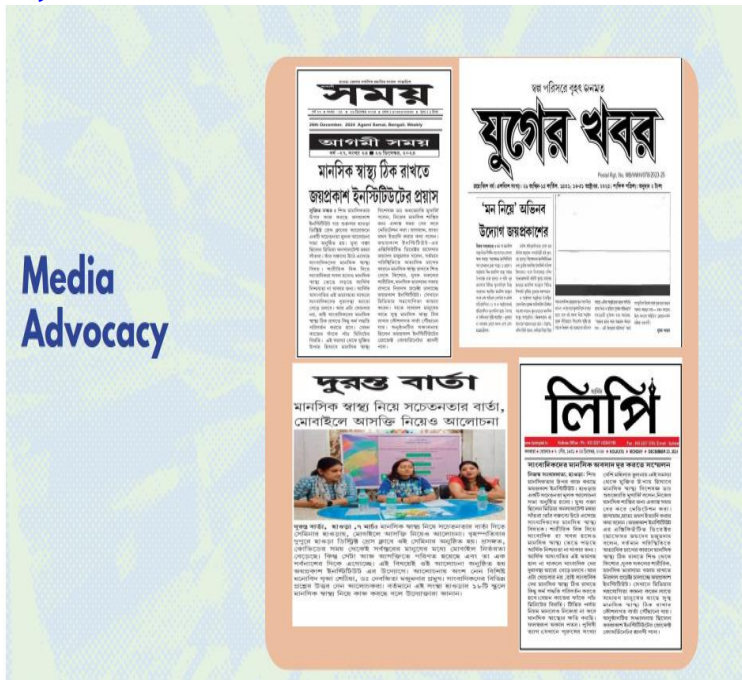


Childhood and adolescence are key developmental phases that significantly shape people's identity and are important influencing factors for long-term mental health, for example when it comes to the type of resources or resilience needed to cope with difficult life situations. A lack of knowledge about mental illness and mental health promotion in general can lead to children and adolescents having limited ability to classify their needs and feelings and to know and use limited coping strategies to deal with mental challenges that arise. In addition, children and adolescents who suffer from mental illness or who are under severe psychosocial stress are often exposed to social exclusion and discriminatory behavior from those around them. As a result, there is a high barrier to seeking support, be it from family, friends or health or social institutions. In addition, a lack of education and awareness of mental illness and mental health and limited access to mental health services are key factors that significantly exacerbate the situation.

**Objective:**

The objective of the project contributes to overarching objectives at international and national level. At inter-national level, the focus here is on the sub-goal of Sustainable Development Goal 3.4 "Promote mental health and well-being". At national level, the project objective is in line with the National Mental Health Policy, which specifically aims to reduce stigma, increase awareness and improve access to health services in the area of mental health.

**Project Framework:**

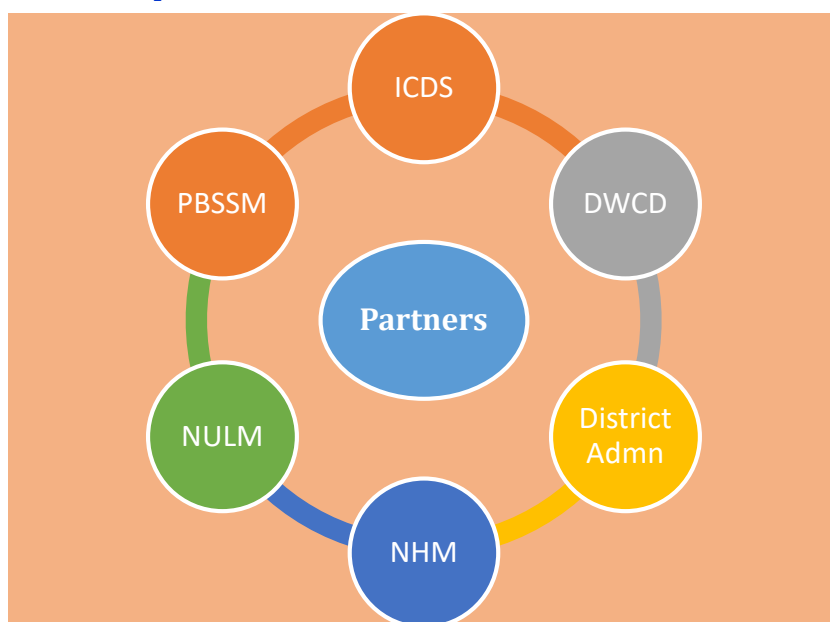


The project envisages sustainable improvement of psychosocial care for vulnerable children and adolescents through counseling services, capacity building and awareness building. The project aims at building resilience among the children and adolescent suffering from mental health challenges to cope well in difficult situations or adversities which is critical not only for their well-being during adolescence but also for their physical and mental health in adulthood. Partnerships with local schools and other actors forms the key strategy of the project and a means for developing convenient access to mental health services and supports. Needs-based services and support mechanisms, such as (group) therapies and telephone counseling for children and young

people, are being created and comprehensive awareness training for parents, teaching staff at schools, health care providers, social workers, community members, media persons and various stakeholders is being carried out. In addition, a Mental Health Support Center (clinic for mental health) has been setup as part of the project, where the specialists employed in the project can examine, further advice or treat

children and young people affected by mental illness/stress. Particularly due to the existing fear of exclusion and stigmatization, the need was expressed to establish a low-threshold contact point from which cases requiring further follow-up/treatment could be referred to state institutions. This facility is currently used approximately twice a week by the employed psychologists, the social counselor and the psychiatrist to care for children and adolescents who have been referred directly by teachers and/or parents. Such children and adolescents, if needed, are referred to the district hospital, which provides medication free of charge. As an outcome of the sensitization programmes, the participants will develop understanding on the signs, symptoms and effects of various psychological, emotional and behavioural problems of the children. The other outcome will be referral of the 'At risk' children for specialized services in hospitals/clinics/District Mental Health Programme (DMHP).

### Partnership



The project is being implemented by a team of experts including Psychiatrist, Clinical Psychologist, Psychologist, Counsellors, Social Workers in collaboration with State Health Department, Women and Child Development Department, State Education Department, West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights, District Education Department, National Urban Livelihoods Mission, National Health Mission, Howrah Municipal Corporation, Bally and Uluberia Municipality.

### Key Achievements and Outreach

#### ✚ School Sensitization and Teacher Engagement:

Through sensitization programs, 8,315 children and adolescents, along with 544 teachers, were educated on basic mental health issues and the importance of early intervention. Workshops for teachers were conducted to equip them with the skills necessary for providing initial support to students in need.

- ✚ **Life Skills Programs:** Over 2,800 children and adolescents participated in life skills sessions aimed at building resilience and coping mechanisms to manage everyday stressors.
- ✚ **Peer Support and Youth Empowerment:** A total of 53 youth groups were established across schools to encourage student ownership in raising awareness and providing peer support during crises. These efforts resulted in 86 monthly meetings and the mobilization of 1,519 students, fostering a peer support system within schools and the broader community.
- ✚ **Mental Health Support and Counselling:** The initiative also includes a counselling unit, operating three times a week to offer free counselling, therapeutic interventions, and psychiatric consultations. To date, 127 mental health cases have been directly addressed through counselling, and 518 calls have been handled through telephonic counselling services.
- ✚ **Community Engagement:** Community-level engagement has been a core aspect of the initiative. Over 2,500 parents participated in sensitization programs, and 21 mothers' groups were formed to enhance mental health awareness. Additionally, 25 focus group discussions were held to deepen community understanding.
- ✚ **Wider Outreach:** The initiative reached 4,810 individuals, including those from local CBOs, NGOs, trade unions, and traffic guards. Media sensitization programs involving 81 local press personnel helped amplify the message, and 596 frontline health workers—such as ASHA workers, ANMs, counselors, and AWWs—were trained to support mental wellbeing.

### Impact and Future Directions

This initiative has had a substantial impact on both individual mental health and community awareness. As a result of the program, more students are actively seeking counseling and participating in mental health initiatives. The comprehensive approach, which includes school programs, community

sensitization, and direct support services, has led to an increase in referrals and better access to mental health services.

By fostering awareness, building resilience, and strengthening community support systems, JPISC is working towards a future where mental wellness is prioritized, and individuals can access the support they need without stigma or barriers.

# IEC materials to educate and make an impact.



**Mental Health Helpline numbers:**

West Bengal Govt. Tele-Mental Health number (toll free) – 14416 or 1-800 899 4416

For specialized service + 91 6291094904 / 9330696330 / 9330774746