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Mental Health Problems of Minorities in India

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Abstract

India is a multi religious society with people professing different religions living together. Majority of people professes Hinduism, there are about 20 percent of people, who profess other religions such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. These religious groups are termed as 'minorities' each being smaller in number as compared to the Hindu majority. Problems of identity, security and equity, prejudice and discriminationare the contributing factor for mental health problems of minorities. They found around them environment charged with prejudice, communalism and discrimination. The hostile attitude of administrative machinery all over, towards the rights guaranteed to the minorities of the constitution has caused much damage to the development and progress of minorities, particularly Muslims. These factors have compelled the community to feel helpless, powerless and deprived. In order to help and alleviate mental health problems of minorities, health psychologists should work towards enhancing their self-concept and confidence.

Over the centuries, the structure of Indian society has undergone considerable change with the arrival of people from different parts of the world and settlinghere. Now India is a multi religious society with people professing differentreligions living together. Majority of people professes Hinduism,there are about 20 percent of people, who profess other religions such as Islam, Christianity,Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. These religious groups are termed as 'minorities'each being smaller in number as compared to the Hindu majority. In India, theterm minority is usually used to denote any religious community whose memberstend to

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assert their distinctiveness in relation to the Hindu majority. While peopleare free to profess and preach their own faith, there are common cultural threads,which maintain social coherence and keep the society united (Chauhan, 2011).

'Majority' and 'minority' are the terms most familiar to Indians as they are widely used to describe relationship between Hindus and Muslims. It is to be noted that the terms do not strictly refer to numerical strength of communities. According to sociologists the distinction between majority and minority is to be based on proportion of share of national wealth, power and social status. Yetman and Steel (1975) consider majority as synonym of the dominant and minority as equivalent of subordinate groups.

Wagley and Harris (1958) considered the following characteristics of minorities:

1. Minorities are subordinate segments of complex societies;
2. Minorities have physical or cultural traits which are held in low esteem by dominant segment of the society;
3. Minorities are self-conscious units;
4. Membership in minorities are transmitted by a rule of descent which is capable of affiliating succeeding generations even in the absence of readily apparent special or physical traits; and
5. Minority people, by choice or necessity, tend to marry within the group.

   Heckman (1983) observed that the term 'minority' denotes characteristics of diverse populations' group having a common experience of discrimination and oppression, being deviant or different , and possessing awareness and consciousness of being discriminated against, and having distinct social identity.

On the basis of an analysis of three large-scale historic processes, Heckman (1983) developed a typology of minorities. (1) national and regional minorities groups-the foundation of modern nation-states that led to the formation of these groups, (2) immigrant minorities-the great internal and international migration caused by the change in the mode of production and social structure, (3) young new national minorities-due to the outcome of colonialism and the subsequent foundation of nation-state. These minorities came into existence when the consolidation of the occupied territories was done on the basis of economic, strategic and political considerations.

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Demographic Profile

Indian society is known for its secular outlook with people of differentreligions living together.According to the 2001 census, minorities constitute about19.5% of the people of India. Out of the total population of 1028 million, 827million (80.5%) were Hindus, 138 million (13.4%) Muslims, 24 million (2.3%)Christians, 19 million (2.0%) Sikhs, 7.9 million (0.80%), Buddhists, 4.2 million(0.4%) Jains and 6.6 million (0.6%) were others.

Since independence, India has achieved significant growth and development. It has also been successful in reducing poverty and improving crucial human development indicators such as levels of literacy, education and health. There are indications, however, that not all religious communities and social groups have shared equally the benefit of the growth process. Among these, the Muslims, the largest minority community in the country, constituting 13.4 percent of the population, are seriously lagging behind in terms of most of the human development indicators.

The overall profile of Muslims now presents a gloomy picture. Although constituting about 12% of the population their extreme economic and educational backwardness is admitted by all. Commenting on the sad state of affairs among Muslims in every index of development-income, education, health, share in government services, share in private enterprises, role in self-employment, number in legislature-the level of their achievement is substantially below the share of population. Saxena (1985) has observed that Muslims are ten times more educationally backward than other communities in the country. Educational levels of Muslims were lower and drop-out rate was higher; and this was true of Muslims in all parts of the country and in every economic category. The causes of Muslims' educational backwardness listed by Saxena include poverty, impact of partition, minority complex, discrimination and indifference to education.

All minorities except Muslims have kept pace with the overall educational development in the country. Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and Jains have taken care of their own education and are in fact, more advanced educationally than the total population. It is only the Muslim community that has been educationally backward religious minority and a subject of concern for the Government of India. Muslims constitute the largest religious minority in the country, about 13.4% of the total population. It may be observed that among all the minorities, the

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growth rate of Muslims population has been the highest. The poor, economically backward and least educated Indian Muslims cannot join the national mainstream unless they advance educationally in all fields, especially in science and technology. These considerations led the framers of the constitution to introduce specific clauses intended to ensure educational, social, economic and cultural advancement of minorities in Free India.

Table: Indian Population by Religion (Percent)

GROUPS	**1951**	**1961**	**1971**	**1981**	**1991**	**2001**
HINDUS	85.00	83.50	82.70	82.60	82.40	80.50
MUSLIMS	9.90	10.70	11.20	11.40	11.70	13.40
CHRISTIANS	2.30	2.40	2.60	2.40	2.30	2.30
SIKHS	0.70	1.80	1.90	2.00	2.00	2.00
BUDDHISTS	_	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.80	0.80
JAINS	_	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.40	0.40
OTHER	1.10	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.60
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Compiled from different sources

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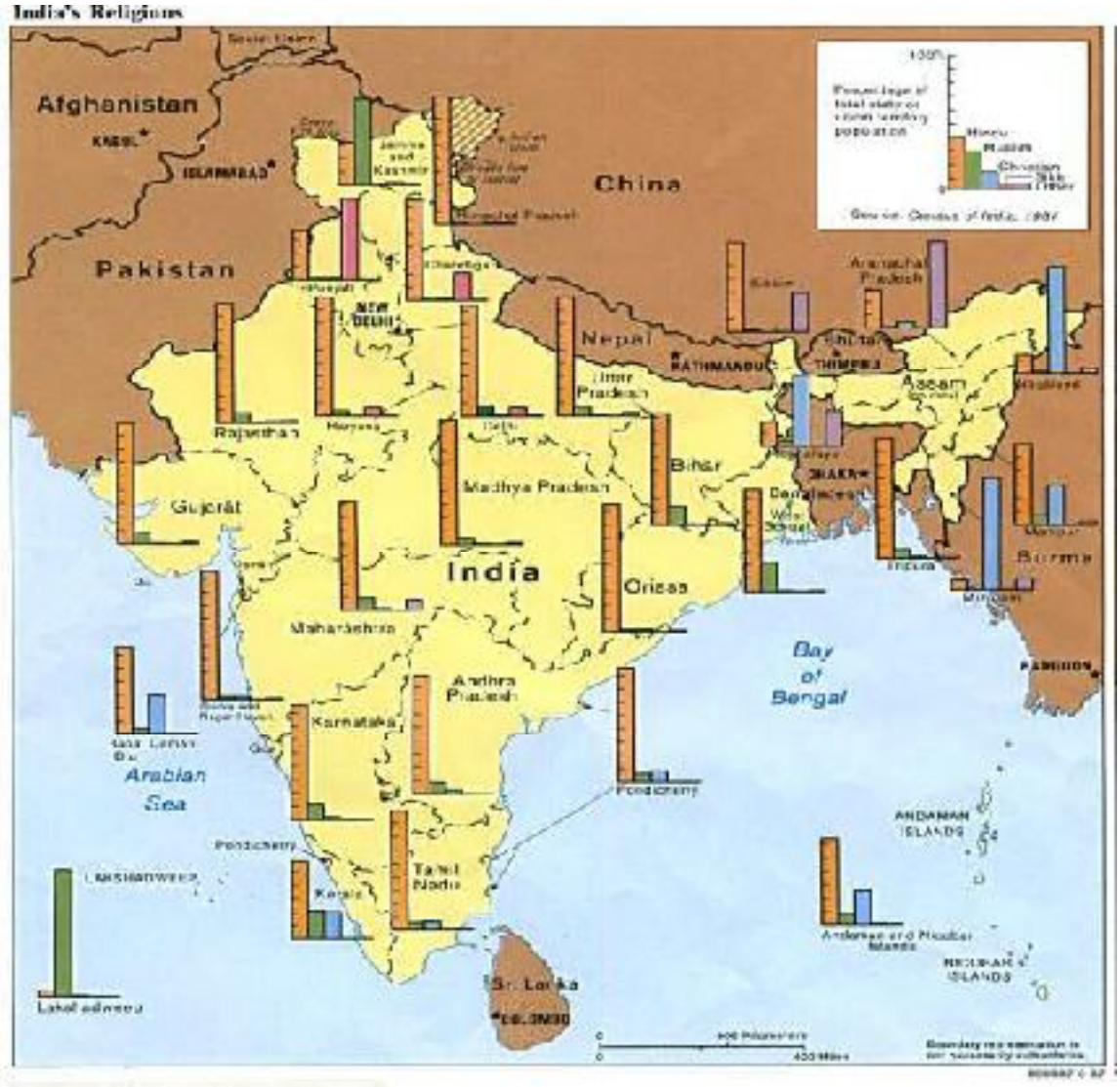
Map: Indian Population by Religion



Source, census of India

IssuesProblemsAffecting theMental Health of Minorities

Identity -Often differences in socio-cultural practices and background of minorities makes them different from the rest of the population. This gives rise to the problems of identity crisis.

Security- Given certain conditions, a distinct set of people, small in numbers relative to the rest of the society, may feel insecure about their life, assets and well being. Feeling of insecurity may get accentuated if the relations between the minority and majority communities are not cordial.

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Equity-The minority community in a society may remain deprived of the benefit of the opportunities that become available through economic development.

Problem of Prejudice and Discrimination

After independence different parts of the country have witnessed the occurrence of communal riots. These riots have not only taken number of innocent lives, damaged national and private properties but also have brought a bad name to the country. Such type of ugly incidences remains a threat to intentional relations and weakens national integration. Consequently, the prejudice is one of the contributing factor for mental health problems.

Prejudice and discrimination are found in any situation of hostility between racial and ethnic groups and divergent religious communities. The two terms are often used interchangeably in ordinary speech, but in fact, they refer to two different, but related phenomena.

The term 'prejudice' most commonly refers to a negative or unfavourable attitude towards a group or its individual members. Prejudice towards a particular group, affects the mental health of people.

Discrimination refers to action against other people on the grounds of their group membership. It involves the refusal to grant members of another group the opportunities that would be granted to similarly qualified members of one's own group.

i) "Discrimination involves treating someone differently because of his or her group membership or social status.

ii) "Discrimination refers to the "process by which a member, or members, of a socially defined group is, or are, treated differently, that is, unfairly, because of his/her/their membership of that group. A social group to be selected for less favourable treatment may be a racial group, ethnic group, gender group, or religious or linguistic group.

Prejudice and discrimination are closely linked, but they may exist separately. Prejudice is a judgement whereas discrimination is the actual practice of treating people or groups unfairly.

A person may hold a prejudice without discriminating. He may, indeed, hold hundreds of prejudices against different groups but may not act upon them. Also, some people may discriminate without feeling any prejudice.

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Problem of Preserving Distinct Social and Cultural Life

India is one among the very few nations, which have given equal freedom to all the religious communities to pursue and practise their religion. They are given the right to preserve their socio-cultural characteristics. No minority community can have a grievance against any government particularly in this matter.

In spite of the provisions of the constitutional equality, religious minorities in India, often experience some problems among which the following may be noted (PranavDua)-

1. Problem of Providing Protection: Need for security and protection, is very often felt by the minorities. Especially in times of communal violence, caste conflicts, observance of festivals and religious functions on a mass scale, minority groups often seek police protection. State governments which fail to provide such protection are always criticised.

For example, (i) the Rajiv Gandhi Government was severely criticised for its failure to give protection to the Sikh community in the Union Territory of Delhi on the eve of the communal violence that broke out there soon after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. (ii) The Gujarat State Government was criticised for its inability to provide protection to the Muslim minorities in the recent [Feb. Mar. – 2002] communal violence that burst out. (iii) Similarly, the Government of Jammu-Kashmir's inefficiency in providing adequate security to the Hindu and Sikh minorities in that State against the atrocities of Muslim extremists is also widely condemned.

2. Problem of Communal Tensions and Riots:

Communal tensions and riots have been incessantly increasing since independence. Whenever the communal tensions and riots take place for whatever reason, minority interests get threatened; fears and anxieties become widespread. It becomes a tough task for the government in power to restore the confidence in them.

3. Problem of Lack of Representation in Civil Service and Politics:

Though the Constitution provides for equality and equal opportunities to all its citizens including the religious minorities, the biggest minority community, that is, Muslims in particular, have not availed themselves of these facilities. There is a feeling among them that they are neglected.

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However, such a feeling does not seem to exist among the other religious minority communities such as the Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, for they seem to be economically and educationally better than the majority community.

4. Problem of Separatism:

Some of the demands put forward by some religious communities in some areas are not acceptable to others. This has widened the gap between them and others, Examples: The separatist tendency present among some Muslim extremists in Kashmir and their demand for the establishment of Independent Kashmir is not acceptable to others.Such a demand is regarded as anti-national. Similarly, some of the Christian extremists in Nagaland and Mizoramare demanding separate statehood for their provinces.

5. Failure to Stick on Strictly to Secularism:

India has declared itself as a "secular" country. The very spirit of our Constitution is secular. Almost all political parties including the Muslim League claim themselves to be secular. But in actual practice, no party is honest in its commitment to secularism, Purely religious issues are often politicised by these parties.

6. Problem Relating to the Introduction of Common Civil Code:

Another major hurdle that we find in the relation between the majority and the minority is relating to the failure of Governments, which have assumed power so far, in the introduction of a common civil code.

It is argued that social equality is possible only when a common civil code is enforced throughout the nation. Some communities, particularly the Muslims oppose it. They argue that the imposition of a common civil code, as it is opposed to the "Shariat" will take away their religious freedom. This issue has become controversial today. It has further widened the gap between the religious communities.

As discussed above, minorities in India facing several problems such as issues related to identity, security, equity and problem of prejudice discrimination, communal riots etcwhich directly or indirectly affects their mental health. In the following section we will discuss about the concept of mental health.

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Mental Health

Health is an indispensable quality in human being. It has been described as soilfrom which finest flowers grow. Health indicates psycho-somatic well-being of anindividualand is a broader concept which includes physical, social and mentalhealth. Mental health has been reported as an important factor influencingindividuals various behaviours, activities, happiness and performance(Gupta, Garima, Kumar, &Sushil, 2010).

Before the second half of the twentieth century, mental health was considered asthe absence of mental disease but now it has been described in its more positiveconnotation, not as the absence of mental illness **(**Rawat, 2014**)**.

As Laddell MacDonald points out 'mental healthmeans the ability to make adjustment to the environment on the plane of reality.' In thewords of Menninger, Cutts and Mosley (1941), "let us define mental health as theadjustment of human beings to the world and to each other with a maximum ofeffectiveness and happiness.It is the intelligence, socially considerate behaviour and a happy disposition."

Mental health is defined as an individual's state of well-being, when he or she realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her community (World Health Organization, 2003a, 2005).

Marie Jahoda (1958) concluded that any definition would need toinclude the following six categories:

1. How the individual perceives himself

2. The achievement of self - realization by becoming what one has the potential tobecome.

3. Integration of personality, including a purpose and meaning in life, tolerance forstress, and ability to recover from set- backs

4. A realistic perception of the world around him.

5. Self autonomy, the ability to be a part of society and still maintain individuality.

6. Ability to take life as it comes and master it.

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State of the Individual- Thus mental health is a state of the individual. As H. J.Eysenck(1972) puts it, "A state in which the need of the individual on one handand the claims of environment on the other hand are fully satisfied or the powersby which this harmonious relationships can be attained."

Wilkinson and O'Connor (1982) defined mental health as a congruent relationship between a person and his/her surrounding environments. Hales and Hales (1995) defined mental health as- "the capacity to think rationally and logically, to cope with the transitions, stresses, traumas, and losses that occur in all lives, in ways that allow emotional stability and growth."

On the other hand, mental health has been defined as the functioning of the humanpersonality showing desirable qualities**.** Hadfield (1952) has said, "Mental healthis the full and harmonious functioning of the whole personality".The definition ofmental health is terms of functioning of personality makes it relative to time,setting and circumstances of the socio - cultural group.

Core of Mental Health:A good deal has been written about the qualities of mental health. Arkoff(1968) has summarized the core of mental health in his description of four sets ofqualities required in mental health.

According to Arkoff, two qualities which are highly valued in Mental Healthare Happiness & Harmonyas he defines them, "Happiness refers to a generalsense of well being. Harmony implies a balance between personal andenvironmental demands, with each rising consideration."

A second set of qualities subsumed under the heading "Self Regard" includes self-insight (aknowledge of oneself), self-identity (a sharpened stable image ofoneself), self-acceptance (a positive image of oneself), self-esteem (a pride inoneself) and self-disclosure (a willingness to let oneself be known to others).

A third set of valued qualities has to do with 'Personal Growth, Maturity andIntegration'. While personal growth refers to realization of one's potentialities,personal maturity implies that one has realized or accomplished certain goalsspecific to one's age or stage in life. Personal integration refers to the achievementof unity and consistency in behavior, i.e. integrity.

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A final set of qualities valued in mental health includes 'Contact with theenvironment', effectiveness in the environment and independence of theenvironment. While the contact with the environment implies the ability to see theworld as other do, effectiveness in the environment means the ability to relate toothers and be productive. Independence of the environment means the ability to beautonomous and not bound by group patterns of behavior.

Mental health Problems among Minorities

The feelings of inferiority, insecurity, anxiety, feardevelop the mental health problems in minorities. The Muslims of post independence India,scheduled caste and other backward classesare living with such mental health problems. They found around them the environment charged with prejudice, communalism and discrimination. The feeling of fear and insecurity pushed them to the margin in all ways resulting into their withdrawal and shrinking into their shell (QamarHasan, 1987).

The communalization of political parties is oneof the factor responsible for frustration, discontent and alienation in Muslims. Communal tensions and communal riots are also the potent factors for making the Muslims depressed and despondent.The hostile attitude of administrative machinery all over towards the rights guaranteed to the minorities of the constitution has caused much damage to the development and progress of minorities, particularly Muslims. Thus, the inequality of opportunity and selection on the basis of sources and resources and not on the basis of abilities and capacities have compelled the community to feel helpless, powerless and deprived (QamarHasan, 1987).

Minority complex: minority status leads to a set of psychological mechanisms which are often collectively designated as minority complex. Hypersensitivity, self hatred and lowered self-esteem, helplessness and fatalism and defensive pluralism are the main components of mental health problems of minorities.

Hypersensitivity to his minority status may compel the member of minority group to interpret every injury, social rebuff, or failure as being related to this minority status in one way or the other.

Self-Hatred is another ingredient of minority complex. It is expressed in the form of accepting negative stereotypes held by the majority, particularly those implying that members of minority groups are responsible for their own suffering. Related to the phenomenon of self hatred is **lowered self-esteem** of the minority people.

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Helplessness refers to the situation where no efforts are made to escape from an aversive situation because of earlier experiences of failure.

Defensive pluralism refers to the mechanisms of meeting the discriminatory practices of out group and of warding off threat to culture identity from the pressure to assimilate in the mainstream.

Social and political mal-integration: social and political mal-integration of individuals or sub-groups is the problem encountered in almost all the multi-ethnic societies. Mal-integration of a section of population is evinced if most of its members believe that they are unable to influence the process of political decision-making and are not treated as well by government officials as others are, lack trust in the system and political authorities, remain isolated from political activities, and are not committed to the political system.

Conclusion: The need of the hour is to remove the precipitating and predisposing factors of frustration, feeling of fear, insecurity, withdrawal and alienation, with a well-planned strategy of upliftment and development of minorities such as feeling of insecurity, deprivation, fear and helplessness, so thatthese mental health problems of minorities can be alleviated. In order to help and alleviate mental health problems of minorities, health psychologists should work towards enhancing their self-concept and confidence. The development of the country can be accelerated only by utilising the potentialities and resources of energy of each member of minority community. It is truly that 'the speed of the fleet is the speed of the slowest boat in it'.

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