Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction (CoDRR) Workshop-11

Navigating Post- Disaster Mental Health #CalmAmidChaos

NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY
& MoFHW

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

UNICEF

APRIL 16-17, 2025

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1. Introduction

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), headed by the Prime Minister of India, is the apex body for Disaster Management in India. The setting up of NDMA and the creation of an enabling environment for institutional mechanisms at the State and District levels is mandated by the Disaster Management Act of 2005. NDMA is mandated to lay down the policies, plans, and guidelines for Disaster Management. India envisions the development of an ethos of Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, and Response.

The Indian government strives to promote a national resolve to mitigate the damage and destruction caused by natural and man-made disasters through sustained and collective efforts of all Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, and People's participation. This is planned to be accomplished by adopting a Technology-Driven, Pro-Active, Multi-Hazard, and Multi-Sectoral strategy for building a Safer, Disaster Resilient, and Dynamic India.

Recognizing the critical importance of mental health in disaster situations, NDMA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), is implementing the **National Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programme (NMHPSP)** across all states and union territories. This programme aims to integrate comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support services into all phases of disaster management—preparation, response, and recovery—using evidence-based approaches with the following objectives:

- ✓ Minimizing psychological distress and preventing long-term mental health disorders following disasters

- ✓ Building resilience among vulnerable populations through targeted psychosocial interventions

- ✓ Establishing standardized MHPSS protocols for different disaster scenarios

- ✓ Strengthening the capacity of frontline responders in delivering psychological first aid

- ✓ Creating sustainable community-based mental health support systems in disaster-prone regions

2. Background

"Whether an illness affects your heart, your arm, or your brain, it's still an illness, and there shouldn't be any distinction. We would never tell someone with a broken leg that they should stop wallowing and get it together. We don't consider taking medication for an ear infection something to be ashamed of. We shouldn't treat mental health conditions any differently. Instead, we should make it clear that getting help isn't a sign of weakness — it's a sign of strength — and we should ensure that people can get the treatment they need."

— Michelle Obama

In India, disasters leave a lasting psychological impact on millions, yet mental health remains a neglected aspect of disaster response. Studies reveal alarming rates of PTSD, depression, and anxiety across disaster-affected populations—ranging from 14-27% in flood-hit regions to 45-60% in conflict zones. Industrial disasters like Bhopal have shown transgenerational trauma, while events like the Kerala floods (2023), Balasore train accident (2023), and Wayanad landslide (2024) exposed critical gaps in mental health support during emergencies. Despite this burden, fewer than 10% of those affected receive timely psychosocial support due to a shortage of trained professionals, weak coordination between agencies, and a lack of culturally adapted intervention models.

Recognizing these gaps, NDMA has been working to integrate mental health into disaster management, notably through the **National Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Disasters (2021, revised 2023)**. A game-changing opportunity has emerged with the **Manas Swasthya Abhiyan**, launched in 2025, which expands mental health services through Arogya Mandir centers nationwide. This ₹2,500-crore initiative can serve as a backbone for disaster mental health interventions, especially in underserved areas. To operationalize these efforts, NDMA is hosting a **2-day national workshop, 'Navigating Mental Health in Disasters: #CalmAmidChaos,'** bringing together policymakers, mental health professionals, and disaster experts to drive actionable strategies for strengthening mental health resilience in disaster-prone regions.

3. <u>Objectives</u>

The workshop aims to enhance India's disaster mental health response through five key objectives. It will **examine the psychological and neurobiological impact of disasters**, focusing on stress responses and differential vulnerabilities across populations, especially children and adolescents. Strengthening **inter-ministerial collaboration** is a priority, ensuring seamless integration of mental health services across MoHFW, MoWCD, MoE, MoSJE, and MoYAS, while leveraging programs like Ayushman Bharat and the Manas Swasthya Abhiyan.

The event will also **develop standardized trauma-informed counselling and Psychological First Aid (PFA) protocols**, culturally adapted for India's diverse population. A crucial focus will be on **state-level mental health response SOPs**, establishing tiered intervention frameworks for immediate, short-term, and long-term care. Lastly, the workshop will explore **technological advancements in MHPSS**, including AI-driven distress detection, VR-based PTSD therapy, and mobile mental health applications. These objectives will be addressed through expert-led technical sessions, driving evidence-based and scalable solutions for mental health resilience.

4. Workshop Technical Sessions

This workshop aims to address disaster mental health challenges and MHPSS strategies through five technical sessions. These are:

a) Day -1

Technical Session 1: Sensitizing Stakeholders to NDMA & MoHFW Guidelines on Post Disaster Mental Health

- Objective: This session will provide in-depth technical orientation to NDMA & MoHFW MHPSS framework, highlighting implementation science approaches for effective operationalization.

- Key Topics:
  - Technical components of NDMA's three-tiered MHPSS intervention model (community-level support, focused non-specialized interventions, and specialized services)
  - Deliberation on MoHFW's established protocols and best practices for mental health and psychosocial support
  - Trauma responses of Survivors-Victims and implications for intervention timing and approach
  - Detailed protocols for psychological triage in natural disasters outbreak
  - Integration mechanisms for MHPSS within existing State Disaster Management Plans
  - Technical criteria for culturally adapted interventions across India's diverse contexts

- Expected Outcome: Enhanced technical understanding of MHPSS implementation mechanisms and capability to integrate these into existing disaster management frameworks.

Technical Session 2: Enhancing Synergy Between NDMA (Apda Mitra Initiative), MoHFW, and NDRF: Best Practices to Optimize Disaster Mental Health Response

- Objective: Strengthen coordination among NDMA, MoHFW, and NDRF by sharing best practices and case studies to streamline efforts, prevent duplication, and enhance disaster mental health response.

- Key Topics:
  - NDMA's Apda Mitra Initiative – Role of trained volunteers in disaster response and mental health integration.
  - MoHFW's Role in Disaster Mental Health – Key initiatives, emergency response strategies, and mobilization.

- NDRF's Experience in MHPSS – Psychological First Aid (PFA) and case studies from past responses.

- Optimizing Coordination – Role clarity, standardized response frameworks, and leveraging state disaster authorities.

- Expected Outcomes

- Stronger Inter-Agency Coordination – Clearer role delineation and collaboration.

- Standardized Best Practices – Documented models for effective disaster mental health response.

- Optimized Resource Utilization – Efficient deployment of personnel and services.

- Stakeholder Awareness – Better alignment on initiatives and responsibilities.

Technical Session 3: Data-Driven Disaster Mental Health Planning – Using AI and Evidence-Based Models

- Objective: This session will explore advanced technological tools, ethical considerations, and data analytics for mental health needs assessment, intervention planning, and outcome monitoring in disaster contexts. The discussion will emphasize ensuring privacy, ethical AI applications, and integration with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies

- Key Topics:

- Developing an integrated SOP for disaster-affected states to ensure uniformity, ethical integrity, and accountability in Disaster Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) response.

- Identifying and leveraging existing infrastructure (hospital networks, crisis helplines, digital health platforms, and AI-driven chatbots) while maintaining data privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent.

- Sharing best practices from various ministries and agencies to optimize rapid response mechanisms while addressing ethical challenges such as AI bias, misinformation risks, and equitable access to services.

- Ensuring multi-sectoral involvement in scaling MHPSS implementation for maximum impact, inclusivity, and equitable access to mental health services while aligning with DRR principles.

- Addressing ethical and privacy challenges in AI-based MHPSS, including data ownership, risk of surveillance, patient autonomy, and transparency in AI-driven decision-making.

- Preventing duplication of efforts and ensuring efficient, ethical resource allocation through AI-driven needs assessment and equitable service distribution.

- Expected Outcome: Enhancing technical and ethical capacity for implementing AI-

powered, data-driven MHPSS planning and monitoring systems. The session will focus on maintaining privacy, mitigating ethical risks, and ensuring that digital innovations align with DRR frameworks and human rights standards.

Technical Session 4: Advanced Trauma-Informed Counselling and Psychological First Aid (PFA) – Clinical & Field Applications

- Objective: This session will provide technical training in evidence-based trauma intervention protocols specifically adapted for disaster contexts in India.

- Key Topics:

  - Best practices in Psychological First Aid (PFA) tailored for large-scale emergencies.

  - Field-based approaches for rapid crisis intervention, including mobile mental health units.

  - Training models for frontline workers on neurobiological impacts of trauma and structured intervention techniques.

  - Addressing burnout and secondary trauma among first responders and mental health professionals.

- Expected Outcome: Enhanced technical capacity among participants to implement evidence-based trauma interventions appropriate for disaster contexts.

Technical Session 5: Creating a National MHPSS SOP and Infrastructure Utilization Strategy

- Objective: This session will focus on developing standardized operational protocols for mental health response across different disaster phases and contexts.

- Key Topics:

  - Technical specifications for MHPSS deployment timelines and triggers

  - Human resource allocation matrices for different disaster scales and contexts

  - Integration mechanisms with Emergency Medical Teams and other first responders

  - Technical utilization frameworks for existing infrastructure (telemedicine, mobile health units)

  - Inter-agency communication and coordination protocols for seamless MHPSS delivery

  - Monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms for MHPSS interventions

- Expected Outcome: Draft National SOP for MHPSS implementation with technical specifications for different disaster scenarios and phases.

b) Day -2

Technical Session 6: Live Case Study Model – Learning from Experience

- Objective: This session will present in-depth technical analyses of MHPSS implementations in recent disaster contexts in India, highlighting challenges, innovations, and lessons learned.

- Key Topics:

  - Technical assessment of TISS intervention model in Sikkim: specialized counsellor networks and community resilience building

  - Intervention efficacy analysis from Kerala (Wayanad): outcomes of integrated MHPSS approaches

  - Odisha (Balasore Train Incident) response evaluation: technical critique of acute intervention strategies

  - Bihar UNICEF Collaboration: specialized intervention protocols for children with disabilities in disaster contexts

  - Comparative analysis of intervention outcomes across different disaster and cultural contexts

- Expected Outcome: Evidence-based recommendations for context-specific MHPSS adaptations based on real-world implementation experiences maximising State-participation.

Technical Session 7: Financial Strategies for Disaster Mental Health & Psychosocial Support

- Objective: To explore sustainable financing mechanisms for disaster mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), ensuring long-term resource allocation and integration within broader disaster risk reduction frameworks.

- Key Topics:

  - National and international funding mechanisms for MHPSS in disaster response and recovery.

  - Role of multilateral organizations (World Bank, UNDP) in supporting financial sustainability.

  - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and private sector engagement in funding MHPSS programs.

  - Budgeting and cost-effective strategies for integrating mental health support into disaster preparedness and response plans.

- Outcome: Identification of sustainable financing models for disaster MHPSS & strategies

for leveraging international and private sector funding. Policy recommendations for institutionalizing financial support for MHPSS in disaster management frameworks

5. <u>Expected Outcomes</u>

- **Enhanced Awareness & Capacity Building:** Train a skilled workforce across sectors for evidence- based MHPSS interventions in disasters.

- **Collaborative Frameworks:** Establish multi-sectoral coordination with clear roles, communication channels, and operational links.

- **State-Level MHPSS SOPs:** Develop detailed guidelines for disaster mental health response, covering activation, deployment, and monitoring.

- **Scalable & Tech-Driven Models:** Design AI-based risk prediction, digital platforms, tele-psychiatry, and mobile mental health units.

- **Research & Policy Recommendations:** Form a national advisory body to drive research, innovation, and policy for disaster mental health.

6. <u>Conclusion and Way Forward</u>

This national workshop marks a strategic step toward integrating mental health into India's disaster management framework. By convening experts from mental health, disaster management, technology, and policy domains, it aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that MHPSS becomes a core component rather than an afterthought. With disasters becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change and urbanization, investing in mental health resilience is both a humanitarian necessity and an economic imperative. The workshop's outcomes will operationalize NDMA's mental health guidelines, fostering standardized protocols, capacity building, and technological innovations to extend mental health support to even the most vulnerable communities. Its timing aligns with the Manas Swasthya Abhiyan, offering an unprecedented opportunity to embed disaster mental health preparedness into India's expanding healthcare network. By leveraging this momentum, India can establish a world-leading disaster mental health response system, ensuring that recovery encompasses both physical and psychological well-being. #CalmAmidChaos.