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# Inside out on urban loneliness

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**Mental Health is a multi-faceted domain be it biological, psychological, social, cultural, ethnic etc.**



Loneliness or social isolation is a new age epidemic and is prevalent worldwide. But its presence is more visible and palpable in urban pockets. There are various reasons which leads to loneliness especially in Indian urban cities like large scale migration to seek job opportunities, changing family structures, low social cohesion, social discrimination, uprooting of pre-existing support systems like friends and family, increase of addiction behaviors, pre-existing physical and mental health problems, poor work-life balance, etc. The phenomenon of urban loneliness is prevalent across socio economic strata and age groups from youngsters to elderly population having their children migrated abroad seeking better economic and social opportunities.

As a result of social drift, technological advancements, changing human interactions and work style approaches contributing to social isolation, the rate of prevalence of mental disorders like depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, adjustment disorders, suicidality, psychosis are increasing at an alarming rate. Among these, suicide needs special mention as every incident of suicide brings in close contact the mental burden being endured by everyone and reminds us of our collective failure as a society.

Mental Health is a multi-faceted domain be it biological, psychological, social, cultural, ethnic etc. With advancing technology and access to information in the digital era, the need to exercise critical thinking, logical reasoning and informed decision making is necessary especially in tech driven times to build right opinions, beliefs and practices. The use of latest technological advancements in various health apps, like online resource material for awareness, online support groups, online consultations, counselling sessions can help in better access, weed out stigma and help in psychological first aid preventing potential suicide.

The younger generation is more vocal, opinionated, seek to have their own experience and also express better openness towards mental health issues. But the true challenges lie in fighting the barriers of seeking professional help when they truly need one. There is widespread belief system that seeking help from mental health professionals is mark of weakness or a character flaw, the stigma of labeling with mental illness, probability of being on medications for lifetime, serious side effects of medications and getting addicted to them etc. These beliefs are a direct result of lack of awareness, social stigma and incomplete information about mental illnesses and the treatment options available.

Also, being in the information era where we are bombarded with information about anything to everything at a click, it is difficult to decide what is relevant and what is true. This makes lot of people stay ignorant to their problems and struggle to find the right ways of resolving them.

In order to handle loneliness, there is a need to bring changes at multiple levels in the society. In the recent years, countries worldwide are paying attention to social isolation and identifying it as a public health hazard leading to huge economic loss. The Britain government has even initiated to tackle this by creating a ministry for loneliness to tackle the epidemic. But countries like India has to go a long way to build the much-needed resources given the health care expenditure is very low of which mental health gets only a miniscule of it. Nevertheless, these measures taken globally, conveys the significance of it, emphasize the need to address loneliness as a disease and towards making policies for better health and economic growth.

The first step towards fighting loneliness is definitely being self-aware. One needs to build a strong support system not only in personal life but also at workplace. It is essential to find the right work-life balance, prioritize face-to-face interaction than the virtual communication, invest in your family and children for better quality time and parenting practices and finally, healthy lifestyle practices like physical activity, yoga or meditation. It is impossible to disengage from social media usage completely, but inculcating healthy disciplinary use, to identify social events happening in the city like biking/trekking exercise, attending music event with friends to fulfill the affiliation needs.

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