

Authors: John K George¹, Prof. Dr. Basudeb Das², Prof. Dr. Rajesh Sagar³, Anita Rego (PhD)⁴

Institutional affiliation: ¹ FAIRMED India, K-194, Ground Floor, South City - 1, Gurgaon - 122 007, Haryana, India. (Phone: +91 124-2581224. Email: john@fairmedindia.in); ² Director, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi, India (Email: basudebdas@cipranchi.nic.in), ³ Professor, Department of Psychiatry, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (email: rsagar29@gmail.com), New Delhi, ⁴ Independent Consultant (Email: anitarego77@gmail.com)

Introduction:

Mental Health (MH) of people affected by leprosy is an understudied topic and hence a priority. It's critical to understand the mental health status of people affected by leprosy as it significantly contributes to their well-being. People affected by leprosy often share their negative experiences due to visible leprosy related disability that creates fear and finally results in discrimination and their exclusion from the mainstream. There is an urgent need to attend to the mental health well-being of people affected by leprosy as they endure stigma & discrimination during their lifespan coupled with life-style diseases/Geriatric issues experienced by senior people. This study was carried out with timely support from WHO India.

Objectives:

1. To develop a review paper on the mental health challenges experienced by people affected by Hansen's disease and their families in India.
2. To develop a policy paper on the organizational structures/competencies and policies/points of linkages between the NLEP & NMHP at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of health care.
3. To explore opportunities for synergy and integration between the NLEP & NMHP

Methodology:

Extensive desk research was carried out firstly to derive a common understanding about the various services being offered by 2 national programs namely the National Leprosy Eradication Program (NLEP) and the National Mental Health Program (NMHP), and also at the same time identify the gaps and to address them. Program Managers from both the NLEP & NMHP were contacted to understand and build synergies between the 2 programs so that the patient receives the services right at their place of residence.

Gaps & Challenges:

- Strengthen integration of services with the general healthcare.
- Monitoring & supervision is the key especially while integrating the services

Recommendations:

- Strategic plans to be developed that integrate and promote convergence of both NLEP & NMHP
- Operationalising by improving cross referrals

Conclusion:

The study highlighted 2 important aspects that will further improve the services for people affected by leprosy. Firstly, integration and complimenting the services offered by the 2 programs will facilitate the service delivery at the doorstep of the person. Lastly, developing strong referral mechanism between the 2 programs will only strengthen and promote the utilization of services by people affected by leprosy who require a host of mental health services for their overall physical and mental health well being.