



## Uniformed Forces and Mental Health

**For Mains:** Mental Health Issues in the Uniformed Forces, Government Policies & Interventions

### Why in News?

The **government needs to take immediate action** to address mental health issues in the uniformed services.

### What are the Reasons for the Prevalence of Mental Health Issues in the Uniformed Forces?

- **Tightly Structured Hierarchy:**
  - **Uniformed forces are tightly structured** with a command-and-control hierarchy system.
  - A **senior officer is the reporting authority for his immediate junior** and this junior has to fulfil their tasks with manpower under his/her command.
  - The **hierarchy is rarely breached** and the system ensures discipline, clarity of roles and accountability.
  - However, **it tends to become inhuman**, especially to those who cannot communicate their personal issues in an appropriate forum.
- **Stress is not Addressed:**
  - Uniformed forces showing signs of **mental stress are** not given enough attention.
  - Those who **express the problem are termed as weak** and are seen as shying away from the rigours of life.
  - In a uniformed setup, **subordinate staff do not want to appear weak** as the “macho man” stereotype weighs them down.
- **Less Recognition for their Achievements:**
  - The **constabulary accounts for around 85% of state police** and CAPFs.
  - These **personnel perform their duties** as directed by their seniors.
  - They **mostly remain in the background of the organisation** with less recognition for their achievements and more frequent persecution for failure.
- **Tend towards Alcoholism:**
  - To cope with the difficulty of the types of setups, **personnel often resort to alcoholism and drug abuse.**
  - In the latter cases, **defaulters are punished as per the law** and suitable departmental action is also taken.

### What can be the impact of the Rising Mental Health issues among the forces?

- **Discourage Younger Generation:**
  - Despite the good image that the armed forces have, and the fact that it is a very respectable job, **rising mental health issues among the forces can discourage the younger generations from joining.**
- **Demoralize the Forces:**

- Increasing mental health issues among the forces can discourage them and negatively impact their daily operations.
- **Rising cases of Suicides:**
  - **Suicides, fratricides and untoward incidents are causing more Army personnel to lose their lives** than any enemy or terrorist activities, according to the findings of a study by United Service Institution of India (USI).

## Way Forward

- **Good Working Conditions:** Working conditions, leave, allowances, and housing should be provided as entitlements.
- **Identify Underlying Issues:**
  - **Bad apples should be eliminated** but those with underlying issues must be identified and a different approach adopted.
  - This is where the role of the police leadership comes into the picture.
  - The need is to **strive to create a working environment that provides personal fulfilment to personnel** and reduces the chances of mental stress and illness.
- **Proper Communication Mechanism:**
  - As police leaders, the **need is to increase communication with all the ranks.** The **enforcement of discipline has to go hand-in-hand** with concern for staff well-being.
  - Regular sampark sabhas need to be conducted where personnel can air their grievances and proper follow-up action must be taken on all possible issues.
  - The senior's office should be open to all ranks 24/7.
  - Additionally, **during random inspections on the field**, friendly communication with personnel on duty does not hurt discipline — it only increases his trust in the leadership and dedication to duty.
- **Reward and Recognition:**
  - Reward and recognition act as big motivators. Often, the incentive system is at the whims and fancy of the head of the organisation.
  - It **has to be formalised in every setup** and it has also been established that sports and cultural programmes increase bonhomie and create bonds between personnel, who support each other during crises.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q.** A positive attitude is considered to be an essential characteristic of a civil servant who is often required to function under extreme stress. What contributes to a positive attitude in a person? **(2020)**

**Q.** "We can never obtain peace in the outer world until and unless we obtain peace within ourselves."- Dalai Lama **(2021)**

**Source: IE**