

THE ROLE OF NGOS IN PROMOTING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Emotional resilience—the ability to adapt and recover from adversity, stress, or trauma, has historically been nurtured through community networks, religious institutions, and kinship structures. Traditional societies emphasized collective well-being, with spiritual leaders, healers, and local councils providing emotional support, conflict resolution, and guidance. However, modernization and urbanization have weakened these informal support systems, leading to increased reliance on government-driven mental health programs. While structured interventions have improved accessibility, they often face challenges such as stigma, limited outreach, and a lack of cultural sensitivity, particularly among marginalized populations. In response, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as key facilitators of community-driven, holistic mental health solutions that integrate traditional practices with modern psychological approaches.

This study explores the evolution of emotional resilience from traditional community-based support to NGO-led interventions. Using secondary data analysis, it synthesizes insights from scholarly research, NGO reports, government publications, and case studies of successful mental health programs. The research highlights NGOs' contributions in trauma care, peer counseling, rehabilitation, and holistic healing, demonstrating their role in filling gaps left by formal healthcare systems.

Findings indicate that NGOs offer culturally adaptable, grassroots mental health solutions, incorporating alternative healing methods such as yoga, meditation, and art therapy. They also engage in advocacy and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma. Organizations like The Banyan, Snehi, Aasra, and Sangath have pioneered innovative models for mental health care, utilizing peer support networks and digital counseling services.

Despite their impact, NGOs face financial constraints, limited professional resources, and challenges in aligning with government policies. Strengthening collaborations, securing sustainable funding, and leveraging technology are essential for enhancing their effectiveness. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers and mental health practitioners, advocating for integrated, community-driven mental health strategies to ensure accessible and culturally relevant emotional support systems.

Keywords: Emotional resilience, Community mental health, modern psychological approaches, Sustainable mental health programs, Government-NGO collaboration, Digital mental health services, community-driven rehabilitation programs.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional resilience, the ability to recover from stress, trauma, and adversity, plays a crucial role in an individual's psychological well-being. It enables people to cope with life's challenges, maintain stability during crises, and adapt to changing circumstances. Traditionally, emotional resilience was nurtured within close-knit communities through social bonds, religious guidance, and collective support systems. Extended families, spiritual leaders, and village elders provided emotional and moral support, creating an environment where individuals did not have to face hardships alone.

However, with rapid modernization, urbanization, and socio-economic changes, these informal support networks have significantly weakened. Nuclear family structures, migration for employment, and the growing influence of technology have reduced face-to-face interactions, leading to increased social isolation and mental health challenges. As a result, societies have increasingly turned to institutionalized mental health services, yet these formal interventions often fail to provide culturally sensitive, accessible, and community-based emotional support.

While governments have made efforts to integrate mental health into public health policies, these initiatives frequently face challenges such as stigma, lack of resources, and limited outreach, particularly in developing nations. In this context, NGOs have emerged as key stakeholders in promoting emotional resilience by offering alternative, grassroots-based mental health support. They bridge the gap between institutionalized care and

community-driven solutions by implementing culturally relevant, holistic approaches. NGOs provide trauma counseling, peer support groups, rehabilitation services, and awareness programs to address mental health concerns in marginalized and underserved populations. Their initiatives often combine psychological first aid with traditional healing practices, such as meditation, yoga, art therapy, storytelling, and group therapy, ensuring that individuals receive care in a manner that aligns with their cultural beliefs and social contexts.

Despite their significant contributions, NGOs face several operational and financial challenges. Limited funding, dependency on donor contributions, and a shortage of trained mental health professionals hinder their ability to scale their programs effectively. Moreover, there is often a disconnect between NGO-led initiatives and government policies, leading to a lack of coordination in mental health service delivery. Given the rising mental health concerns globally, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need for further research into how NGOs can enhance their impact. Investigating sustainable funding models, exploring digital mental health interventions, and strengthening NGO-government collaborations are crucial areas for future research. Understanding these aspects will help policymakers, mental health practitioners, and researchers develop integrated strategies that ensure accessible, inclusive, and long-term support for emotional resilience within communities. This study aims to contribute to this growing field by examining the evolving role of NGOs in mental health care and proposing actionable recommendations for their continued success.

Historical Perspective on Emotional Resilience and Community Support

A. Traditional Support Systems in Ancient Societies

Before formal mental health institutions existed, emotional resilience was cultivated within close-knit communities. Ancient societies relied on religious teachings, kinship bonds, and communal practices to support individuals facing psychological distress.

Spiritual and Religious Institutions – Temples, monasteries, and ashrams provided emotional healing and spiritual guidance. For instance, Buddhist monasteries served as centers of mental healing, where monks offered counsel and meditation techniques to individuals in distress.

Kinship and Tribal Support – Extended family systems and tribal councils played a crucial role in resolving personal conflicts and provided emotional stability.

Traditional Healers and Gurus – In many cultures, healers, shamans, and spiritual guides acted as informal therapists, using rituals, storytelling, and herbal remedies to promote mental well-being.

The foundation of emotional resilience in these societies was a collective responsibility, where individuals did not face hardships alone but were supported by a network of family and community members.

B. Transition to Government-Driven Mental Health Programs

With industrialization, migration, and the breakdown of joint family structures, traditional support systems began to erode. Recognizing the need for structured mental health care, governments worldwide established mental health policies, psychiatric hospitals, and rehabilitation centres.

Some significant government-driven initiatives include:

1. National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) (1982)

The National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) was launched to provide accessible and affordable mental health services by integrating them into primary healthcare centres and district hospitals.

2. Ayushman Bharat Health & Wellness Centres (2018)

Under **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**, the Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) offer primary healthcare services, which includes mental health screenings, counselling, and referrals for specialized care.

3. Manodarpan Initiative (2020)

The **Manodarpan Initiative**, launched by the **Ministry of Education**, focuses on students' mental well-being by offering counselling services, self-help resources, and interactive webinars on stress management and emotional resilience. It includes a dedicated helpline and online mental health portal to assist students, teachers, and parents in addressing academic pressure, anxiety, and emotional distress.

4. Kiran Mental Health Helpline (2020)

The **Kiran Mental Health Helpline (1800-599-0019)** is a 24/7 toll-free helpline launched by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** to provide confidential psychological counselling and crisis intervention for individuals facing emotional distress, anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

C. The Emergence and Impact of NGOs in Emotional Resilience

NGOs have emerged as essential agents of change in **mental health advocacy and emotional resilience-building**. Their community-based models prioritize accessibility, cultural relevance, and holistic healing over purely medicalized approaches.

Key Contributions of NGOs in Promoting Emotional Resilience

1. Psychological First Aid in Crisis Situations

NGOs play a crucial role in providing immediate psychological first aid to individuals affected by **natural disasters, conflicts, displacement, and traumatic events**. Organizations such as **Doctors Without Borders (MSF)**, **The Red Cross**, and local mental health NGOs deploy trained professionals to offer emergency trauma counselling, stress management techniques, and coping strategies to affected communities, ensuring mental stability during crises. A notable example is **The Banyan (India)**, which provides mental health rehabilitation services to homeless individuals with severe psychiatric disorders, helping them regain stability and reintegrate into society.

2. Peer Counselling and Community Support Networks

Many NGOs establish peer-led support systems, where individuals with live experiences of mental health struggles provide emotional guidance, encouragement, and practical coping strategies to others facing similar challenges. **Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), NIMHANS's mental health support groups**, and grassroots NGOs help create a safe, stigma-free environment where individuals can openly discuss their struggles, fostering emotional resilience and mutual support. **Aasra** is a prime example of an NGO working in this area, operating **24/7 suicide prevention helplines** to offer immediate emotional support to individuals in distress.

3. Rehabilitation Centres for Trauma Survivors

NGOs run specialized shelters and rehabilitation centres for survivors of **domestic violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. Organizations such as **SAARTHAK, Snehi, and Shakti Shalini** provide counselling therapy, vocational training, and legal aid to help survivors reintegrate into society with confidence and independence. **Snehi** particularly focuses on providing affordable and accessible mental health care to marginalized groups, ensuring they receive the psychological support necessary for long-term healing.

4. Holistic Healing Approaches

Recognizing that mental well-being extends beyond clinical treatments, many NGOs incorporate alternative healing methods like **yoga, meditation, art therapy, music therapy, and indigenous healing practices** into their mental health programs. Organizations like **Sangath** and **The Art of Living Foundation** blend modern psychological interventions with traditional wellness practices, making mental health care more culturally relevant and widely accepted. The ****Art of Living Foundation**** integrates yoga, meditation, and breathwork into mental health care, promoting emotional resilience through programs like The Happiness Program.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Mental health issues are a growing global concern, with rising cases of stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma affecting individuals across all socio-economic backgrounds. Despite increased awareness and government interventions, mental health services remain inaccessible to many marginalized communities. The **significance of this study lies in its examination of how NGOs strengthen emotional resilience through culturally relevant, community-driven mental health programs**. While government initiatives often struggle with stigma, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity, NGOs bridge these gaps by offering holistic care that integrates traditional healing practices like yoga, meditation, and peer support with modern psychological approaches. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, mental health practitioners, and NGO leaders, emphasizing the need for stronger collaborations, sustainable funding, and digital innovations to enhance mental health interventions. By highlighting effective community-based strategies, this study contributes to more inclusive and impactful mental health policies worldwide.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The authors highlight how NGOs in India play a crucial role in bridging the mental health treatment gap by offering rehabilitation, community care, and awareness programs. Their study emphasizes the effectiveness of low-cost, replicable models in addressing mental health needs. (Thara, R., & Patel, V. (2010).

(Visalakshi S 1, 2022 Feb 24;) This study outlines how MHNGOs have significantly contributed to the history of psychosocial rehabilitation in India. It discusses their efforts in setting up halfway homes, community day-care centers, and advocating for better mental health policies.

This study explores how NGOs in Shanghai perceive the challenges and opportunities of providing community-based psychiatric rehabilitation (CBPR) services under government funding. It highlights issues such as funding constraints, policy limitations, and collaboration hurdles, while also identifying potential growth and impact areas for NGOs in mental health service. (Yao, 2 January 2025)

Here the author, Usha Priyanga examines the efforts of 25 NGOs and numerous social workers in addressing global mental health issues. It evaluates the effectiveness of their programs in raising awareness and supporting individuals with mental health concerns. The research explores their missions, services, and overall impact, highlighting key factors like funding, community involvement, and a holistic mental health approach in reducing stigma and improving public education. (Welhenage, 28th April 2023)

The author, Robert van Voren explores the significant role of NGOs in global mental health by advocating for policy changes and providing direct services. It highlights their impact on underserved populations in developing countries. (Voren)

This chapter discusses how NGOs can have both constructive and destructive influences on the development of mental health care in specific regions, emphasizing the importance of effective advocacy and training programs. (Keukens, March 2014)

This study reviews community-based interventions addressing mental health and social equity, focusing on collaborative care, early psychosis, school programs, homelessness, and criminal justice reform. It highlights the role of multi-sector partnerships and community involvement in improving mental health outcomes. (Enrico G. Castillo, March 2019)

Atmiyata, a community-led mental health initiative by the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, addresses mental health gaps in rural India through volunteer-driven psychosocial support. Operating in 645 villages across multiple districts, it tackles social determinants of mental health while facing challenges like funding and scaling quality control.

(Jayden Battey, 2022-23)

(Sten Langmann, , July 2024,)Here the author, explore how local NGOs in Tamil Nadu use emotional empowerment to build community capacity by fostering hope, self-expression, and collective action, helping marginalized groups overcome psychological barriers to change.

(Aneela Maqsood 1, 2024 Nov 4;) The author explores the **adoption of digital therapeutic care** during **COVID-19** in Pakistan, highlighting the **opportunities and challenges** of transitioning from traditional face-to-face therapy to **digital platforms** within the country's **sociocultural context** of mental health care.

(Raymond R. Bond, August, 22, 2023.) This paper discusses the integration of digital technologies into mental health services. It provides insights into how digital platforms can enhance existing mental health care systems, improving accessibility and efficiency.

(Singla, 2024 Nov 5;)This study evaluates an unguided WhatsApp-based mental health intervention for older adults in Brazil but finds no significant impact. It highlights challenges in engagement and the need for more personalized digital approaches.

(Osman, 2024) This study examines the perspectives of NGO workers and social service staff in Lebanon on mental health stigma. It explores how stigma impacts service delivery and the strategies NGOs use to address it, highlighting cultural and systemic challenges.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To evaluate the impact of NGO-led mental health programs
2. To identify the challenges faced by NGOs in mental health services
3. To explore the relationship between NGOs and government policies
4. To suggest strategies for improving NGO-led mental health interventions

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study follows a **qualitative research approach** using **secondary data analysis** to examine the role of NGOs in promoting **emotional resilience through community support programs**. The study is **descriptive and exploratory**, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of how NGOs function within the mental health sector.

Data Collection

Secondary data was collected from **peer-reviewed journal articles, NGO reports, government publications, and case studies** published between **2010 and 2025**. The sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and citation frequency in the field of community mental health.

To ensure **recency and relevance**, this study focuses on **literature, policy documents, and previous studies** that analyze the role, contributions, and challenges faced by mental health NGOs in **India and globally**. The collected data has been systematically examined to identify key themes, trends, and challenges in NGO-led mental health initiatives.

SAMPLE SELECTION FOR SECONDARY RESEARCH

For selection of sample, a total of 25 sources were selected to ensure a comprehensive analysis of NGO-led mental health programs. This range was chosen to achieve a balance between global and Indian perspectives while maintaining depth in analysis. The inclusion of global studies provides insights into international best practices, while Indian studies focus on context-specific challenges and solutions.

Category	Number of Studies	Selection Criteria	Example Sources
Global NGOs & Mental Health Advocacy	5	NGOs involved in global mental health advocacy and services	Voren (n.d.), Castillo (2019), Welhenage (2023), Keukens (2014), Osman (2024)
Indian NGOs & Mental Health Services	7	NGOs working on mental health in India, including community-based models	Thara & Patel (2010), Visalakshi (2022), Battey (2022-23), Langmann (2024)
Community-Based Mental Health Interventions	4	Real-life examples of NGO-led mental health programs	Atmiyata (India), Shanghai CBPR Model (China) - Yao (2025), Langmann (2024), Castillo (2019)
Digital Mental Health Interventions	5	Studies on digital transformation in mental health services	Bond (2023), Maqsood (2024), Singla (2024), Osman (2024)
Mental Health Stigma & Policy	4	Studies on stigma, policy impact, and NGO advocacy in mental health	Osman (2024), Keukens (2014), Yao (2025), Visalakshi (2022)
Total Sample Size	25	Mix of research papers, NGO reports, and case studies	-

Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of NGOs in promoting emotional resilience, it has certain **limitations** due to its reliance on **secondary data sources**:

- Data Availability** – The study is dependent on **existing literature, reports, and case studies**, which may not always provide comprehensive or up-to-date information on recent NGO initiatives.
- Regional Focus** – The findings primarily reflect the **Indian context**, with limited generalizability to other countries where NGO operations and policies may differ.
- Variations in Study Methodologies** – Different studies included in the analysis may have used **diverse research designs, data collection techniques, and evaluation criteria**, leading to potential inconsistencies in comparative insights.
- Lack of Primary Data** – Since the research does not include direct fieldwork, interviews, or surveys, it **relies on interpretations from existing studies**, which may introduce **biases or gaps** in understanding the real-time impact of NGOs.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

1. Impact of NGO-led Mental Health Programs (objective-1)

NGOs **fill gaps** in mental health services where governments have limited reach. (Thara & Patel, 2010). Community-driven programs (e.g., **Atmiyata, The Banyan, Snehi**) have proven cost-effective. Global studies (Castillo, 2019) ensure that **NGO-government collaboration improves accessibility**.

2. Challenges Faced by NGOs (objective-2)

Funding constraints: NGOs struggle with limited and inconsistent funding, affects long-term sustainability (Welhenage, 2023).

Policy limitations: Government regulations, such as the Mental Healthcare Act 2017, create both opportunities and barriers for NGO-led initiatives (Visalakshi, 2022).

Stigma and social barriers: Despite awareness efforts, mental health stigma remains a significant challenge, particularly in rural and underprivileged communities.

3. Relationship Between NGOs and Government Policies (objective-3)

Studies from Shanghai (Yao, 2025) and India (Visalakshi, 2022) reveal that **government collaboration** is essential but complex.

Policy changes can improve NGO functioning, but bureaucratic delays and compliance requirements often hinder their effectiveness.

NGOs working **independently vs. under government contracts** face different sets of challenges and opportunities.

4. Strategies for Improving NGO Impact (objective-4)

Strengthening **NGO-government partnerships** for better funding and policy integration.

Expanding community-driven models, such as Atmiyata, which leverage volunteer networks to provide low-cost mental health support.

Encouraging **cross-sector collaborations** (private sector, academia, health institutions) for better impact.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Standardized assessment tools should be developed to measure the long-term impact of NGO-led emotional resilience programs.
2. NGOs should expand peer support networks to enhance community-based mental health interventions.
3. More government funding and policy support are needed to sustain and scale NGO mental health initiatives.
4. Training programs for volunteers and community workers should be improved to ensure quality mental health support.
5. Collaboration between NGOs, healthcare institutions, and policymakers should be strengthened for better service integration.
6. Digital platforms can be used to increase accessibility to mental health support in remote areas.

CONCLUSION

- **NGOs are indispensable** in mental health care, especially in **bridging service gaps** where government resources are limited.
- **Funding and policy barriers remain major challenges**, requiring better governmental and private sector support.
- **Community-led models show high effectiveness**, but scalability and quality control need further research.
- The study highlights the **need for integrated mental health strategies** where NGOs, government policies, and community participation align for long-term impact.

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