

India's mental health database launched in Bengaluru to decode psychiatric disorders

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Bengaluru: CALM-Brain, a first-of-its-kind, large-scale indigenous mental health research database released Wednesday, has begun to offer new insights into how psychiatric illnesses develop, overlap, and respond to treatment — potentially reshaping how such conditions are understood and managed in the future. The initiative of Rohini Nilekani Centre for Brain and Mind (CBM), underway since 2017, brings together researchers from Nimhans and the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS). It has a cohort of 4,000-5,000 individuals, with detailed data from around 2,500 participants already part of the first phase of the database. The longitudinal study focuses on five disorders — addiction, bipolar disorder, dementia, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and schizophrenia — with plans to expand further.

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Dr YC Janardhan Reddy, CBM coordinator at CBM-Nimhans, said, "We used multiple methods of inquiry — extensive clinical data, neuroimaging, neuropsychology, electrophysiology, genetics, cell lines, and environmental factors such as childhood adversity. This combination is what makes the dataset unique." In neuroscience, while significant progress has been made in understanding how molecules, cells, circuits, and brain structure contribute to function, integrating these layers remains a challenge.

"CALM-Brain was conceived as a method to assemble data from multiple scales of analysis of brain structure and function on a single platform. We believe the application of modern methods of data analysis to this dataset will help bridge the gap between these scales of analysis," said Prof Raghu Padinjat, CBM coordinator at CBM-NCBS. Participants undergo extensive assessments spanning two to three days, with each individual spending close to 10 hours in total. These include clinical evaluations, cognitive and memory tests, MRI scans, EEG recordings, and biological sample collection. Researchers plan to follow up with participants over the next 20 years. "Such follow-up can help identify biomarkers of vulnerability to mental illness, distinguish clinical phenotypes, and understand treatment responses," Dr Reddy said. Dr Biju Viswanath, professor of psychiatry at Nimhans, added the study includes not just patients but also their family members — both affected and unaffected. "In several cases, entire families with multiple affected individuals participate in the study," he said. Emerging technologies developed as part of the project may also help address a longstanding challenge in psychiatry — predicting which treatment will work for which patient. Early lab-based models suggest it may soon be possible to test drug responses using patient-derived cells, reducing reliance on trial-and-error prescriptions. However, researchers acknowledged several challenges. Dr Janardhan Reddy noted many individuals are hesitant to participate in research, especially when there are no immediate benefits. He also pointed out that data sharing at both national and international levels continues to face regulatory hurdles.

Second national mental health survey nears completion

Times News Network Bengaluru: The National Mental Health Survey-2 (NMHS-2), one of the largest mental health studies in the world launched in 2025, is nearing completion, with over 2.5 lakh interviews conducted so far across the country. The survey is led by Nimhans in Bengaluru and supported by the Union health ministry. The survey aims to generate nationally representative estimates of mental health disorders across age groups, including adults, adolescents, and, on a pilot basis, children. It also examines care-seeking behaviour, socio-economic impact, caregiver burden, and gaps in mental health services. The study uses a stratified, multi-stage sampling method based on the NITI Aayog's multidimensional poverty index to ensure diverse representation. The national report of NMHS-2 is expected to be released on Oct 10 this year, coinciding with World Mental Health Day, while individual state and Union Territory reports will be released before Dec 31.

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