

The Burdened State of Indian Minds


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India is defined by many identities — religion, caste, creed, and a host of other markers that shape its social fabric. Yet, some challenges cut across these divides. One of the most pressing, and yet most invisible, is the **mental health crisis**: a struggle that quietly shapes the lives of millions, while too often being overlooked or dismissed.

The scale is staggering. It affects every segment of society, from the classroom to the workplace.


Crisis	Scale
Indians living with mental disorders	1 in 7 (197.3M) As per national estimates 
Adolescents (13–17) diagnosed with a mental disorder	7.3% NMHS findings 
Adults diagnosed with a mental disorder	10.6% NMHS findings 
Lifetime prevalence of any mental disorder	13.7% NMHS findings 
Require active mental health intervention	150 million+ Derived from NMHS data 

However, the gap between need and care is vast. Between **70 and 92 percent** of people with mental disorders receive no treatment. This shortfall is compounded by the acute shortage of trained professionals—India has only **0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 people**.

WHO projections estimate USD 1.03 trillion lost between 2012–2030 due to mental health conditions.


The Urban and Rural Divide:

Mental health is a universal concern, touching both urban and rural populations alike. However, access, awareness, and stigma shape how the crisis unfolds differently across these geographies.



Region	Prevalence
Urban Metropolitan	13.5% As per NMHS
Key Characteristics	
High-stress, some access; private mental health market emerging	

Region	Prevalence
Rural	6.9% As per NMHS
Key Characteristics	
Hidden, no access; stigma and near-total absence of infrastructure	




A 2024 Ipsos survey found that **mental health is the third-highest health concern** for Indians (26%), after cancer and obesity. Notably, concern for mental health has surged by **7%** since **2023**, indicating a growing public awareness of the issue.

From Classrooms to Workplaces: Mental Health Across Everyday Life

The Childhood Toll: Pressure in the Classroom & Beyond

India’s youth face high mental health risks, driven by academic pressure, social comparison, and stigma.



Anjali, 15, Tier-2 City

“My parents want me to be a doctor. My friends post perfect lives online. My exams are everything. Sometimes, it’s too much to handle, but who do I talk to?”

Key Facts

Depression is the most prevalent among school children

As per 2024 systematic review

Behavioural problems and anxiety follow closely

Only **41%** youth (15–24) believe seeking help is useful


As per UNICEF & Gallup survey

13,089 student suicides in 2021 & 7.6% of all suicide in 2022.

As per NCRB

The Workplace Weight

The workforce is experiencing unprecedented levels of burnout, anxiety, and depression.



Mayank, 35, Mumbai

“I feel like I’m running two full-time jobs. At work, I have to be 100%. At home, I have to be 100%. The guilt of not doing enough for my family or my career is constant. I feel mentally exhausted.”

Key Facts

80% of workforce faces mental health challenges

As per Deloitte 2022 survey

57% feel overworked and burnt out

As per Microsoft India report

38% of urban working women face anxiety or depression

As per UNICEF & Gallup survey

The Staggering Cost of Inaction

The failure to address India's mental health crisis imposes staggering costs on the economy, society, and individuals. These costs are not abstract; they manifest in lost productivity, strained public resources, and immense human suffering, making a compelling business case for urgent and strategic intervention.

Economic Costs

The economic fallout from poor mental health is immense and multifaceted.

Productivity Loss

The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that the cumulative economic loss to India due to mental health conditions between 2012 and 2030 will be **USD 1.03 trillion**. This loss stems from reduced productivity at work (presenteeism), increased absenteeism, and higher employee turnover. Globally, depression and anxiety alone are estimated to cause the loss of **12 billion workdays each year**.



Household Financial Burden

The cost of care, when sought, falls heavily on families. The NMHS found that the median out-of-pocket expenditure for families on mental healthcare was **₹1,000–₹1,500 per month**. For households with lower incomes, this expenditure can be catastrophic, often driving them into poverty and exacerbating the very economic stressors that contribute to poor mental health.



Social Costs

Beyond the balance sheets, the social fabric is frayed by the pervasive impact of untreated mental illness.

Pervasive Stigma

A national survey revealed that **71% of respondents used stigmatizing terms** like "crazy" or "mad" to describe mental illness.



Impaired Social Functioning

Mental health conditions directly impact an individual's quality of life, making it difficult to maintain relationships leading to social isolation, which in turn worsens mental health outcomes.



Intergenerational Impact

Research shows that a parent's untreated depression can have a negative impact on their children's development and human capital investment.



The Evidence-Based Solution: The Promise of SEL

In the face of India's complex mental health challenges, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) offers a proactive, skills-based, and universally applicable solution. It is not a therapeutic intervention for a few, but a foundational educational approach for all.

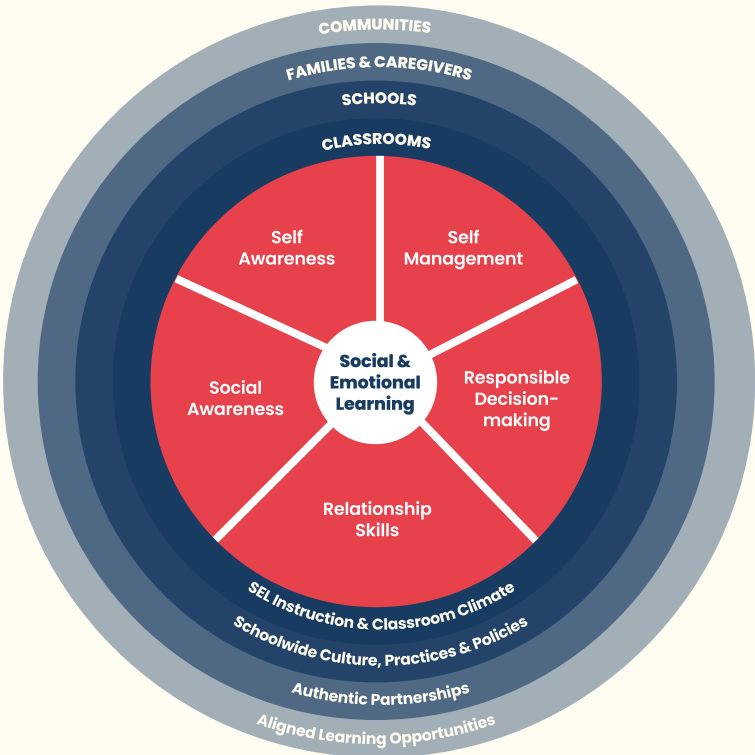
SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to



Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Wheel

The most widely recognized framework for SEL comes from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which organizes these skills into five core, interrelated competencies. These skills are not innate traits but can be taught, practiced, and developed over a lifetime.

The Outer Rings: Key settings for SEL development surrounding the central wheel are four distinct sections or rings: classrooms, schools, families, and communities.



The Inner Wheel: Core social and emotional competencies at the centre of the framework is a wheel divided into five sections. Each section represents one of the SEL competencies.

The Transformative Impact of SEL: A Proven Pathway to Success

The benefits of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) are well-documented across hundreds of rigorous global studies. The evidence shows that SEL improves academic performance, behaviour, mental health, and long-term life outcomes, creating healthier individuals and more supportive communities.

Academic Boost

Evidence links SEL directly to measurable academic gains.

Outcome	Impact
Academic achievement gain	+11 percentile points for students in SEL programs vs peers without SEL
Long-term academic benefit	+13 percentile points maintained years after SEL participation
Comparability	Effect size on par with academic-only programs, showing emotional well-being underpins learning



Behavioral Improvement

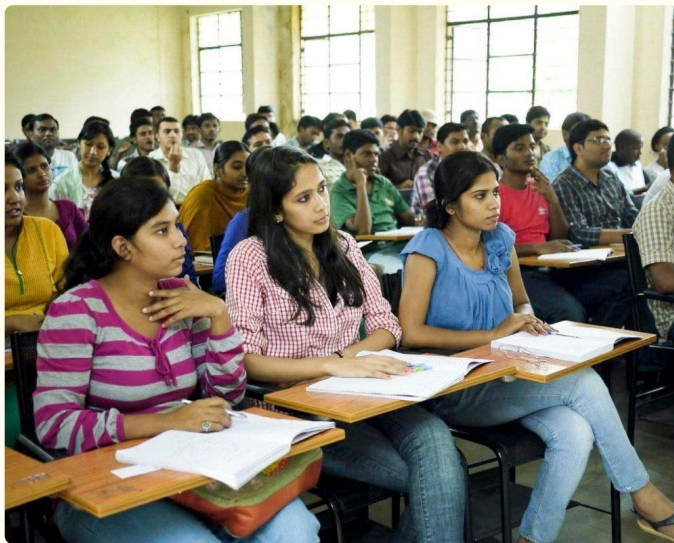
SEL fosters a safer, more constructive school climate.

Outcome	Evidence
Bullying reduction	SEL linked to consistent reductions in bullying and aggression
Classroom behaviour	Fewer disruptions, better conflict resolution, improved peer relationships
Safety & climate	Decrease in disciplinary cases, improved sense of belonging

Mental Wellness

SEL addresses root causes of emotional distress.

Outcome	Evidence
Emotional distress	Significant decrease in emotional distress among SEL participants
Mental health conditions	Reduction in depression and anxiety levels
Coping skills	Increase in resilience, emotional regulation, and stress management skills



Future Readiness

SEL skills align with 21st-century workplace demands.

Long-term Outcome	Evidence
High school graduation	Higher graduation rates for students with stronger SEL skills
Postsecondary completion	Greater likelihood of completing higher education
Employment stability	Increased rates of full-time, stable employment up to 18 years later

The Indian Context

India's experience confirms SEL's adaptability and impact.

Metric	Result
Schools studied	55 schools implemented SEL curriculum
Students assessed	11,280
Skill improvement	85% improved social and emotional skills
Classroom improvement	85% classrooms improved in curiosity, participation, collaboration
Academic link	SEL improvements correlated with higher academic performance



The Compelling ROI: Why Investing in Well-being is Smart Economics

SEL delivers both social impact and strong financial returns, making it a strategic choice for CSR leaders and philanthropic investors.

Proven ROI

Finding	Value
Average ROI of SEL programs	\$11 for every \$1 invested
ROI drivers	Higher lifetime earnings, better health, reduced crime, lower welfare dependence



SEL offers a rare blend of high ROI and an urgent need. Early CSR investment can shape the sector’s future, building scalable infrastructure and multiplying impact nationwide.

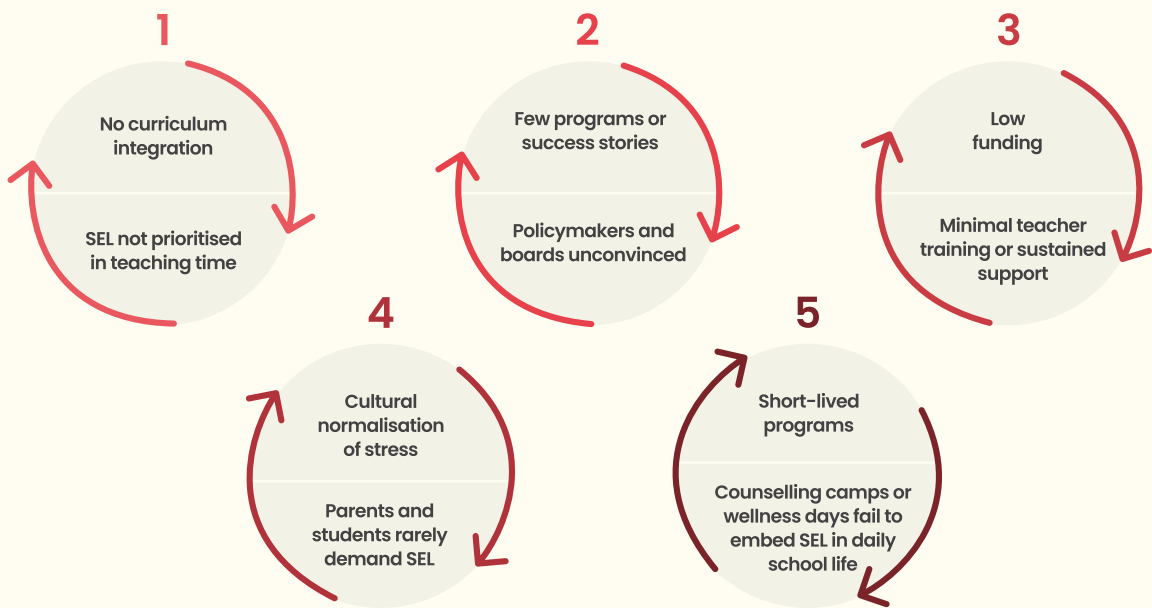


The SEL Implementation Maze in India: Barriers and Feedback Loops

Why Isn't SEL Everywhere? Four Key Blockages

Barrier	What's Happening	Why It Matters
Resource & Infrastructure Constraints	Many public schools, especially rural, lack basics like desks, internet, and adequate staffing.	SEL gets deprioritised; rollout delayed.
Teacher Training & Support	Teachers often unprepared, overburdened, and lack SEL training or support.	SEL is sidelined in favour of administrative and exam-focused tasks.
Policy & Coordination Issues	No unified SEL policy; initiatives remain pilot-level or extra-curricular; weak enforcement even with mandates.	SEL delivery is inconsistent, especially in higher education.
Attitudes & Stigma	SEL/mental health seen as personal or family matters; stress is normalised.	Emotional needs go unaddressed; behaviour issues persist.

The Vicious Cycle of Inaction



The Ecosystem in Action

Who's Driving Change?

Government of India

NEP 2020 emphasises,
“social, emotional and ethical capacities”
of learners.

In theory,
30,975 CBSE-affiliated schools cover these skills.

NEP 2020 in Action:

Initiative	Description
Manodarpan	Psychosocial support services for students, teachers, families
Tele-MANAS	Free, accessible mental health counselling and care services
National School Health and Wellness Programme	Active in rural schools across aspirational districts, teaching life skills and emotional health



State Government Initiatives

State	Program	Coverage
Delhi	Happiness Curriculum	Classes K-8 ~ 1,000 govt. schools
Uttarakhand	Anandam Pathyacharya	Classes 1-8 ~ 18,000 public schools
Tripura	Saharsh	Classes 1-8 ~ all 4,000 public schools
Jharkhand	Harsh Johar	Classes 1-12 ~ 140 model schools across five districts

Source: oecd-opsi.org/innovations/the-happiness-curriculum-inculcating-mindfulness-and-social-and-emotional-learning-amongst-students-every-day

Private Sector Initiatives

SEL industry revenue:

USD 104.3M
(2023)



projected

USD 676.5M
by 2030

(CAGR: 30.6%)






India
=

3.7% of global
SEL market
(2023)

Key providers:

Positive Action,
7 Mindsets,
PlayWorks,
TEAMology,
Persona Life Skills,
Extramarks,
LEAD School

Prominent On-Ground Champions

Organisation	Focus
 Labhya Foundation	Partners with states to co-create in-school SEL
 Slam Out Loud	Arts-based SEL for creative confidence among marginalised youth
 Akanksha Foundation	Academic rigour + SEL in government schools
 Apni Shala Foundation	Direct, experiential SEL for children
 Indian Mental Health Alliance	National alliance building capacity, knowledge, and cross-sector collaboration for mental health

CSR Investors

Organisation	Focus
 Mahindra & Mahindra	Via Live Love Laugh Foundation – mental health programs in schools
 DLF Foundation	Financial aid + integrated SEL/counselling for disadvantaged students
 realme	In partnership with Bhumi – SEL for emotional intelligence, resilience, life skills
 Piramal Foundation	Implements SEE Learning® curriculum; trains teachers & principals as SEL facilitators

Opportunities: Strategic Ecosystem – Building Initiatives

Key Levers	Opportunity	Strategy	Key Areas to Fund
Empowering Educators	Teachers are key to scaling SEL but lack training/support	Shift to continuous professional development and wellbeing support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SEL for teachers 2. In-class coaching 3. Peer learning platforms 4. Digital training modules
Bridging the Home–School Divide	Parent–teacher disconnect limits SEL impact	Scale models raising parental awareness and engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness campaigns 2. Parent workshops 3. Low-tech outreach 4. WhatsApp SEL activities)
Creating a ‘Made for India’ SEL Toolkit	Need culturally relevant frameworks/tools	Multi-stakeholder co-creation of open-source SEL resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curriculum development 2. Assessment tools (ISELF, CHISSEL) 3. Digital SEL library
Seeding Tech-for-Good in SEL	EdTech sector misses SEL opportunity	Fund/incubate SEL-first ventures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SEL-first platforms 2. Integration grants for existing EdTech 3. School board partnerships

The Time to Act is Now

The **challenge of mental health** and the promise of Social-Emotional Learning represent a defining opportunity for our generation. Let's start a conversation about how we can partner to build a more emotionally resilient and prosperous India.



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