

Authored by Dr. Neerja Aggarwal, Co-Founder & CEO, Emoneeds & Nilaya Varma, Group CEO & Co-Founder, Primus Partners

Published in BWellbeingWorld

October 10, 2025

## Corporate Social Responsibility In Mental Health: The Missing Link in India's Nation Building Strategy



Read on: <https://www.bwellbeingworld.com/article/corporate-social-responsibility-in-mental-health-the-missing-link-in-india-s-nation-building-strategy-575027>

### Article Content:

***Corporate-led mental health initiatives like Project Manas are transforming rural India, proving that mental health CSR is vital for national development***

In remote villages of North Sikkim, the nearest psychiatrist is 400 kilometres away. Dolma, a 23-year-old mother, received her first mental health consultation through a digital platform funded by corporate social responsibility. Six months later, she had returned to work, was actively parenting two children, and had become a peer counsellor. Her transformation was not just personal; it showed a shift in how we view corporate responsibility and national development.

This powerful story is just one example. To understand its broader significance, we must examine how mental health CSR fits into the larger context of India's development.

### The Hidden Infrastructure Crisis

While India's corporate sector invests approximately Rs 35,000 crores annually in CSR activities, less than 2 per cent of this is allocated to mental health initiatives. This is despite mental health disorders accounting for an estimated 20 per cent of India's total disease burden. Such allocation represents one of the most significant misuses of social capital in recent Indian history.

An estimated 150 million Indians currently live with mental health conditions. The national mental health treatment gap, the proportion of those who need care but do not receive it, is between 70 per cent and 90 per cent. In some rural areas, this gap is as high as 95 per cent, leading to what economists describe as "psychological poverty," or the lack of access to mental health services necessary for full social and economic participation.

Through Project Manas, mental health services are being extended to semi-urban and rural India through telepsychiatry and digital therapy. The project has so far reached more than 1,000 outpatients and provided comprehensive treatment to nearly 700 individuals across over 150 locations. It has established service networks in Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, North

Sikkim, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, and Ladakh regions where mental health resources have historically been scarce. The initiative demonstrates verifiable improvements in patient functionality and accessibility through a technology-enabled care model that substantially reduces treatment barriers and costs.

#### The Nation-Building Multiplier Effect

Corporate mental health CSR creates capability cascades, meaning interventions that address several human development challenges at once. For example, every one rupee invested in rural mental health CSR generates an estimated Rs 4.20 in economic returns, through channels such as increased productivity, reduced healthcare expenditures, and improved community participation. One result of these interventions is social capital: mental health efforts help train local community members. In Project Manas, 40 per cent of those receiving services became peer supporters. These supporters then maintain health support networks even after the formal program period ends, ensuring long-term benefits.

Mental health initiatives also support gender equity. Approximately 68 per cent of rural beneficiaries are women. Data collected after participation shows significant gains in their involvement in family decision-making and economic independence.

#### The Corporate Enlightenment

Forward-thinking companies see mental health CSR as addressing market failures that limit national development. Tata Group's collaboration with our platform is an advanced model. It invests in scalable digital systems that serve many beneficiaries and maintain clinical quality. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has begun to adopt CSR-funded mental health innovations into national frameworks, as these corporate-driven pilots provide evidence of scalable models. For example, our relapse rate of just 3.5 per cent is comparable with international gold standards for mental health interventions.

#### The Demographic Dividend Connection

India's demographic dividend is closely tied to the psychological well-being of its workforce. Our CSR programs show that mental health interventions targeting those aged 21–30 have the highest rates of engagement and sustained positive outcomes, directly impacting the segment of the population most vital to economic progress. Corporate mental health CSR should be seen not as charity but as a long-term investment in human capital. Each young adult potentially contributes more than 40 years of higher economic productivity to national development.

#### The Road Forward

To provide universal basic psychological security, India requires Rs15,000 crores annually in CSR investment targeted specifically at mental health. Corporations must approach mental health CSR as essential infrastructure development, rather than a form of charity. Dolma's story proves that corporate mental health CSR builds the psychological foundation crucial for a thriving nation. It's time for India's corporations to act decisively: prioritise mental health CSR today or risk undermining our nation's future.