

Integrating Sustainable Development Goals in Youth Mental Health Services: Policy and Strategies for Indian Youth Development

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a comprehensive framework to address various global challenges including Health and Well-Being. This review paper explores the collaboration of SDGs with Services related to Youth Mental Health focusing specifically on policy and program strategies for Indian Migrant Youth. The Mental Health wants of Indian Migrant Youth are often compounded by the stressors associated with migration, cultural adaptation, and socio-economic disparities (Patel et al., 2019). It proposes a holistic approach to improve the Psychological Well-Being of Indian Migrant Youth by balancing Mental Health Services with SDGs, specifically Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities). It also highlights the gap in current policies and programs of Indian Migrant Youth. It further examines successful international models and best practices which can be adopted into the Mental Health Services associated with the Indian Migrant Youth. The study not only deals with the immediate needs of Migrant Youth but also contributes to their long-term Well-Being and social integration fostering inclusive growth, ensuring that none is neglected in the pursuit of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). The purposes of the study are, (a) to study problems faced by Indian Migrant Youth (b) to study various international policies and programs for the psychological Well-Being of Indian Migrant Youth (c) to explore the accessibility of Mental Health Services for Indian Migrant Youth in the context of SDGs (d) to suggest social work recommendations concerning the Indian Migrant Youth and integration of SDGs into Mental Health Services.

Keywords: *Indian Migrant Youth, Psychological well-being, Sustainable Development Goals, Youth Mental Health Services*

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1. Introduction

Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into Youth Mental Health Services is vital to making mental health a priority within overall well-being. Among the 17 goals, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities are particularly relevant to addressing the mental health needs of Migrant Youth (Guo et al., 2023). These goals promote universal mental health access and aim to reduce disparities, regardless of migration status.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2018) defines migrants as individuals who relocate across or within borders, regardless of their legal status or reasons. Migration often brings displacement, cultural transition, and socio-economic inequalities, which present unique mental health challenges such as trauma, identity struggles, discrimination, limited access to care, and isolation (Guo et al., 2023).

For Migrant Youth, emotional well-being means adapting to new environments, building resilience, and maintaining social connections despite these stressors. While protective factors like supportive networks and accessible care are essential, barriers such as stigma, language, and lack of awareness often hinder access (Organization, 2023).

According to WHO (2022), Migrant Youth are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, PTSD, and substance use, worsened by limited mental health infrastructure and the emotional impact of migration. In India, with about 2.5 million citizens migrating annually (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021), many young people NRIs, PIOs, and OCIs face cultural disconnect, adaptation issues, and exclusion, heightening their vulnerability. SDG 3 calls for equitable mental health care and lifelong well-being, especially for vulnerable groups like Migrant Youth, while SDG 10 emphasizes reducing disparities

by tackling systemic barriers such as cultural bias and language inaccessibility.

This paper explores how SDG-aligned strategies can bridge mental health service gaps for Migrant Youth by highlighting global best practices and recommending culturally responsive policies. With a focus on SDG 3 and SDG 10, it proposes a holistic, inclusive framework that supports emotional well-being and integration advancing sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

2. Challenges Faced by Migrant Youth

The mental health and well-being of Migrant Youth, whether students or workers, are shaped by a complex interplay of individual, socio-cultural, and systemic factors (Xu & Chi, 2013). Migration often leads to psychological distress arising from cultural adaptation challenges, discrimination, and socio-economic disparities. Nonetheless, coping strategies, social support systems, and institutional resources can significantly enhance the well-being of Migrant Youth. This review examines a range of studies focused on migrant students and workers to understand the diverse factors influencing their emotional and psychological health.

Udayanga (2024) studied Indian postgraduate students in the UK who migrated for education, work, and settlement. The findings revealed that migration does not uniformly improve well-being particularly during the transition from education to employment. Migrants frequently face involuntary immobility, unmet expectations, emotional stress, and bureaucratic obstacles. This challenges the widespread assumption that migration inherently improves quality of life, highlighting the transitional phase as a crucial determinant of subjective well-being.

Extending this analysis to Migrant Youth in the workforce, Mutharintavida et al. (2024) examined 150 international students and migrant workers. Their study found that higher acculturative stress correlated with lower bicultural self-efficacy, ultimately compromising mental health. These findings were consistent across gender, indicating that the psychological impact of cultural adaptation is universally felt among Migrant Youth. The study emphasizes the need to reduce acculturative stress and foster bicultural self-efficacy to enhance emotional resilience.

Xie et al. (2023) focused on Chinese migrant workers in Singapore, emphasizing the importance of community support and workplace mental health interventions. Migrant workers often face unsafe living and working conditions and are highly vulnerable to depression and anxiety (Business & Human Rights Navigator, 2025). The study calls for culturally sensitive counseling services, workplace-based mental health programs, and targeted community outreach.

A 2023 study further explored the moral, political, and psychological challenges of global migration. Migrants frequently suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), exacerbated by trauma, social isolation, and cultural dislocation (Xu & Chi, 2013). Cultural stigma around mental illness often prevents migrants from seeking help, despite service availability. The study recommends further investigation into how stigma and isolation affect treatment-seeking behaviors among migrants.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023) examined the impact of restrictive immigration policies on migrants' integration. Such policies create barriers to settlement and limit migrants' participation in society. Many lack access to legal representation, making them vulnerable to detention, deportation, and exploitation. Discrimination and xenophobia

further inhibit social and economic integration. The study calls for additional research into dismantling legal and social barriers to improve migrants' experiences and opportunities.

Chennamsetti and Khawaja (2022) studied Indian international students in the U.S. and identified four key coping strategies: open-mindedness, goal orientation, independence, and gratitude. These resilience factors were seen as crucial for emotional well-being. The authors suggested that educational institutions should actively promote such strategies, as they help students and potentially migrant workers adapt to unfamiliar environments.

Verelst et al. (2022) explored the impact of discrimination and social support on migrant youth in Finland, Sweden, and the UK. Migrants exhibited higher rates of PTSD and peer relationship issues than non-migrants. Discrimination emerged as a significant risk factor, while strong family and peer support provided protective effects. These findings underscore the importance of addressing social exclusion and ensuring robust support networks for migrant populations.

Florist (2022) highlighted the heightened vulnerabilities of undocumented and irregular migrants, particularly women and children. These groups are at increased risk of violence, trafficking, and forced labor, often exploited by smugglers during transit. Upon arrival, they face xenophobia and marginalization, while language barriers and fear of deportation deter them from reporting abuse or accessing services. The study stresses the urgent need for protective measures and further research on mitigating these risks.

Villalon (2022) categorized coping strategies used by migrants into individual (e.g., problem-focused or emotional coping), social (e.g., family and community support), and cultural (e.g., traditional values and practices). The effectiveness of these strategies depended on the severity of stressors, available

support, and personal resilience. The study also noted the use of maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, which can worsen mental health outcomes. This underscores the need for research on both beneficial and harmful coping patterns among migrants.

Daru (2021) examined the psychological well-being and help-seeking attitudes of Indian students in the UK. Common challenges included academic pressure, financial strain, cultural dissonance, and discrimination. Despite prevailing stigma, most students held a positive attitude toward seeking professional help. However, the study identified a gap in understanding how caste, gender, and regional origin influence help-seeking behaviours, signalling the need for targeted support strategies in higher education settings.

Warf et al. (2020) explored health disparities between migrants and native populations. Migrants face obstacles such as socio-economic disadvantage, limited healthcare access, cultural barriers, and fear of deportation, which often delay treatment. These factors contribute to both physical and mental health challenges. The study recommends structural reforms to ensure equitable and inclusive healthcare access for migrant communities.

Ahonen (2019) investigated the occupational risks faced by immigrant workers, especially in low-wage sectors. These workers often experience hazardous job conditions and labor exploitation, including wage theft, forced labor, and trafficking. Their insecure legal status makes it difficult to report abuse or access legal protections. The study calls for further exploration of workplace health risks and labor rights violations in various migrant contexts.

Pradhan (2019) explored the educational and social experiences of 24 Indian students in the UK, using structuration theory. Variables such as caste, gender, financial background, and

academic status were shown to shape their migration outcomes. These experiences were also influenced by connections to symbolic homelands and transnational identities. The study highlights the need for longitudinal research on the evolving mental health of international students.

While much of the literature centres on migrant students, the needs of migrant workers require equal attention (Business & Human Rights Navigator, 2025). Given the diversity within migrant populations, mental health interventions must be tailored to suit both students and workers. Institutional support, community engagement, and culturally responsive resources are critical to promoting the mental well-being of all Migrant Youth.

3. International Policies and Programmes on Mental Health of Indian Migrant Youth

Countries with the largest international migrant populations, such as the United States (50.6 million), Germany (15.8 million), the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Australia, reflect both global migration trends and unique national policies (Davis Jr., 2024). These nations are major destinations for Migrant Youth, who often face emotional and cultural adjustment challenges. Each country has adopted specific strategies to support the emotional and mental well-being of migrant populations, especially youth (Fang et al., 2023).

The following table presents these initiatives, comparing their approaches to integration, emotional health, and psychological support. This comparison helps identify best practices that can enhance Mental Health services for Indian Migrant Youth, ensuring they receive the support needed for successful adaptation and long-term well-being. These global models can guide inclusive, SDG-aligned policies that build resilience and promote sustainable development.

Table 1. *International Policies and Programmes*

COUNTRY	PROGRAM	BENEFICIARIES	MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OFFERED BY THE PROGRAMME OR POLICY
USA	University Counselling Services	International& domestic students	Counselling (individual and group), stress management workshops, educational guiding, Mental wellness services, crisis intervention, coping strategies (Smith et al., 2020).
USA	The International Student Office (ISO)	International students	Cultural integration support, counselling for emotional and academic challenges, social activities, peer mentoring, and adjustment resources (Brown & Thomas, 2019).
Germany	University Counselling Services	International & domestic students	Psychological counselling, therapy sessions, workshops on Mental Health, support for academic and cultural adaptation (Müller, 2018).
Germany	DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service)	International students, researchers, scholars	Counselling services for emotional well-being, support with cultural integration, workshops on personal and academic adjustment (Schneider & Pohl, 2021).
United Kingdom	UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs)	International students	Peer support programs, advice on Mental Health issues, workshops, advocacy, resources for mental well-being and stress management (UKCISA, 2022).
France	CROUS	International students in French universities	Counselling services, social activities, integration support, workshops to help students adapt to life in France (Chauvin et al., 2017).
Canada	University Wellness Centres	International & domestic students	Individual counselling, group therapy, workshops on stress management and emotional well-being, crisis intervention, Mental Health resources Lee & Gauthier, 2019).
Canada	International Student Offices	International students	Cultural integration support, counselling, information on adjusting to life in Canada, peer support programs, and workshops for new students (Johnson et al., 2020).
Australia	Mind Matters	Australian& international students	Mental Health awareness campaigns, stress reduction workshops, resources for coping with emotional difficulties, stigma reduction efforts (Williams, 2021).
Australia	University Counselling Services	International& domestic students	Counselling, therapy sessions, stress management workshops, support groups, Mental Health assessments, cultural adjustment resources (Harris & Lee, 2020).

4. Ensuring Accessibility to Mental Health Programs

Ensuring access to Mental Health programs for Migrant Youth is essential to meet their unique emotional and psychological needs amid the stress of relocation. Despite the availability of Mental Health initiatives, accessibility remains a major challenge. A key barrier is the lack of awareness, often due to language difficulties, cultural differences, and limited information on how to access support (Jones et al., 2019). Stigma around Mental Health within migrant communities further discourages help-seeking (Nguyen & Phan, 2020). Governments and institutions must therefore prioritize awareness and eliminate barriers.

Services should be offered in multiple languages, with translated materials and multilingual counsellors (Lee et al., 2021). Mental Health professionals must be culturally competent and trained to understand trauma, discrimination, and acculturation stressors (Fang et al., 2023). Cultural sensitivity helps build trust and reduce stigma.

Programs should be available in both institutional and community settings. While schools and workplaces are important, community centers and migrant support groups can reach youth outside formal systems. Peer support initiatives also improve engagement and comfort (Becerra & Varela, 2022).

Affordability is crucial. Services must be free or low-cost to avoid excluding economically vulnerable youth. Policies must eliminate financial barriers, with international cooperation ensuring equitable, inclusive, and culturally relevant support (UN, 2015). Addressing these gaps will enhance the resilience and well-being of Migrant Youth and support their integration.

5. Social Work Recommendations

To ensure Migrant Youth receive the Mental Health support they need, incorporating SDG-aligned policies is essential. Social

workers play a key role in addressing the unique challenges faced by Migrant Youth by bridging service gaps, advocating for inclusive policies, and promoting culturally competent care. The following recommendations outline how social workers can contribute:

Policy Development and Advocacy: Promote SDG-aligned mental health policies and advocate to overcome barriers such as language and stigma.

Culturally Sensitive Services: Collaborate with healthcare providers to design services that respect migrants' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

Community and Institutional Support: Establish peer networks and embed mental health services within schools and workplaces to foster inclusion and reduce isolation.

Research and Longitudinal Studies: Support long-term research to understand the evolving impact of migration on youth mental health and develop tailored interventions.

Global Collaboration: Partner with organizations like WHO and IOM to share best practices and expand mental health support globally.

Migrant Youth face complex mental health challenges, including trauma and acculturation stress. A multi-level response led by social workers through advocacy, culturally aware care, and inclusive systems is essential to meet their needs and promote long-term well-being.

6. Discussion

This study emphasizes the importance of aligning Youth Mental Health services with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), to address the unique challenges faced by Indian Migrant Youth (Fang et al.,

2023). Migrant Youth often endure high levels of acculturative stress, discrimination, and systemic barriers that impact both their mental health and access to care.

Global best practices such as peer mentoring initiatives in the UK and workplace mental health interventions in Singapore offer adaptable strategies for the Indian context. However, structural issues like stigma, language barriers, and financial limitations continue to restrict the reach and success of such interventions. Moreover, current research frequently overlooks how intersecting factors such as gender, caste, and socio-economic background shape mental health outcomes. Addressing these complexities requires longitudinal and comparative studies to examine the long-term effects of migration on mental health.

To create effective support systems, collaboration among policymakers, mental health professionals, and social workers is essential. These systems must be culturally sensitive, community-driven, and tailored to the specific needs of Migrant Youth. Global cooperation and platforms for sharing knowledge are also key to ensuring equitable access to mental health care.

By integrating SDG-aligned approaches, we can build a sustainable, inclusive framework that strengthens resilience and supports the well-being of Migrant Youth.

7. Conclusion

The evidence highlights the importance of integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially those focused on health, education, and social inclusion into policies that support Migrant Youth. A holistic approach to their Mental Health must include culturally sensitive services, community-based programs, and institutional systems that foster social integration and overall well-being.

Key recommendations for social work practice include: advocating for policy reforms that prioritize the Mental Health needs of Migrant Youth, partnering with healthcare providers to ensure culturally competent care, expanding community-based initiatives, promoting research on the long-term Mental Health effects of migration, and encouraging global collaboration to share insights and resources. These efforts not only address immediate needs but also advance broader goals such as reducing inequality and promoting social justice.

The Mental Health of Migrant Youth is an urgent issue that calls for a coordinated, multi-level response. Social workers, researchers, policymakers, and healthcare professionals must work collectively to build a support system that enables Migrant Youth to thrive. Aligning with the SDGs and implementing these strategies ensures that young migrants can overcome challenges, contribute meaningfully to society, and create brighter futures for themselves and their communities.

This paper emphasizes that safeguarding the Mental Health of Migrant Youth is both a matter of social justice and a critical step toward achieving global sustainable development and inclusion.

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