# Redefining Mental Health Education: Toward a Culturally Grounded Framework for India

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## Abstract

**Background:** The global rise of Mental Health Literacy (MHL) has catalyzed efforts to improve awareness and reduce stigma. However, its Western biomedical orientation and cognitive emphasis often fail to resonate within culturally diverse, low- and middle-income countries like India. This paper critiques the conceptual and contextual limitations of MHL and introduces a more inclusive, culturally grounded alternative—Mental Health Education (MHE).

**Objective:** To propose an operational definition of MHE that is pedagogically inclusive, emotionally resonant, and socially relevant for the Indian context, serving as the conceptual foundation for the Indian Mental Health Education Scale (IMES).

**Methods:** A funnel-structured literature review was conducted to examine the evolution of MHL, followed by a thematic analysis of qualitative inputs from mental health professionals, educators, and community health workers (n=15). These insights were triangulated to inform the construction of a culturally valid MHE framework.

**Findings:** Stakeholder responses emphasized five key dimensions of MHE: (1) holistic understanding of mental health and its cultural determinants; (2) emotional and social competence; (3) strategies for internal and external stigma reduction; (4) civic and systemic awareness; and (5) action-oriented learning. These informed the development of a multidimensional operational definition of MHE that extends beyond knowledge transmission to include empathy, agency, and contextual responsiveness.

**Conclusion:** MHE represents a paradigm shift from literacy to education, cognition to action, and individualism to collectivism. It holds promise for transforming public mental health discourse in India by informing curriculum design, community engagement, and national policy. The framework and definition presented here lay the groundwork for culturally valid assessment tools and evidence-based interventions tailored to India's unique mental health landscape.

## Keywords

Mental Health Education, Operational Definition, Culturally Adapted Framework, Public Mental Health, Stigma Reduction, Mental Health Literacy.