

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & IIT HYDERABAD

# 1st National Wellbeing Conclave 2024

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9th – 10th November 2024

## Report



భారతీయ సాంకేతిక విజ్ఞాన సంస్థ హైదరాబాద్  
भारतीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान हैदराबाद  
Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad



Department of Higher Education  
Ministry of Education  
Government of India  
सत्यमेव जयते

## Executive Summary

Aligned with the Ministry of Education's *Integrated Approach to Promoting Positive Mental Health, Resilience, and Wellbeing*, the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education in collaboration with IIT Hyderabad organised the 1<sup>st</sup> National Wellbeing Conclave 2024 on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November 2024. This two day event brought together over 350 stakeholders from nearly 100 centrally funded institutions of higher education to discuss and develop actionable strategies, and share best practices for promoting mental wellbeing across campuses.

The Conclave featured a dynamic mix of panel discussions, interactive sessions, workshops and an exhibition, providing a unique platform for institutions to showcase their emerging good practices, share innovative wellness initiatives, and collaborate on building a supportive ecosystem for mental health in education. The event also featured engaging activities designed to deliberate on creating a culture of mental and emotional wellbeing, and consider factors such as academic pressures and environmental factors, and technology and social media. The Conclave thus focused on adopting a holistic approach to student wellbeing, encompassing psychological, emotional, physical, and social health.

Key highlights from the inaugural session included insights from distinguished speakers like Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor, who emphasized the critical link between mental health and national development, Shri K. Sanjay Murthy, Secretary, Higher Education, who highlighted the role of diversity of experiences on campus, and Prof. B. S. Murty who advocated for integrating cultural practices like Yoga for mental resilience.

The recommendations emerging from the Conclave emphasize a multi-faceted and integrated approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing across HEIs in the country.

**Comprehensive Mental Health Policies:** Institutions should develop and implement mental health policies that focus on prevention, early intervention, and on-going support for students and staff. These policies should align with both national and global best practices while being sensitive to local cultural and institutional contexts. Alongside these policies, holistic wellbeing programs that address not only mental health but also physical health, social wellbeing, and academic success should be introduced. These programs could include stress management, life skills training, mindfulness practices, and peer support systems to help students navigate challenges.

**Integrated Mental Health Services:** Institutions must ensure the availability of integrated mental health services on campuses, where medical, psychological, and social support services are easily accessible. A key goal should be achieving a student-counsellor ratio of 1000:1 to ensure timely and effective interventions.

**Faculty and Staff Engagement:** Faculty and staff play a crucial role in supporting mental health initiatives. Institutions should prioritize faculty wellbeing by offering training in stress management, emotional intelligence, and resilience-building. Faculty members should also be trained as mental health first responders to identify early signs of distress in students and provide appropriate support or referrals. Establishing alumni mentorship and peer support programs can also enhance the network of support for students, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

**Expanding Access to Digital Mental Health Resources:** The use of digital mental health solutions, such as virtual counselling sessions and mental health apps, should be expanded to make mental health support more accessible. Campuses should also establish dedicated Mental Health Counselling and Wellbeing Centres staffed with trained professionals to provide immediate support and referrals for specialized care.

**Fostering a Supportive Campus Culture:** Institutions should encourage open dialogue about mental health and actively work to reduce the stigma around it. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns and regular events focused on mental wellbeing. Additionally, promoting community-building activities through social clubs, wellness events, and group activities will help reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen the campus community.

**Collaboration across Stakeholders:** Successful mental health initiatives require collaboration between educational institutions, mental health experts, and external organizations. Institutions should also engage parents through orientation programs, educating them on how to support their children's mental health. A multi-stakeholder approach involving government bodies, mental health organizations, and NGOs will be critical to creating a unified framework for mental health support across educational institutions.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular mental health screenings and wellness check-ins should be conducted to identify at-risk students and provide early intervention. Institutions should also establish feedback mechanisms for students to voice their concerns, ensuring mental health programs remain responsive to their needs. Data-driven decision-making will help assess and refine mental health programs based on their effectiveness.

**Raising Awareness and Mental Health Literacy:** To reduce stigma and improve understanding, institutions should conduct awareness campaigns and organize activities such as essay, quiz, and painting competitions to encourage open discussions about mental wellbeing. Moreover, mental health education should be integrated into academic curricula to equip students with the tools to manage stress, build resilience, and maintain their wellbeing throughout their academic journey and beyond.

The National Wellbeing Conclave 2024 has laid a strong foundation for on-going efforts to promote mental health and wellbeing in institutions of higher education. It has sparked a national conversation about the pivotal role of mental health in education and underscored the need for continued collaboration and innovation in this field. The Department of Higher Education together with other participating institutions is committed to sustain the momentum created at this conclave and build an ecosystem that not only prioritizes academic excellence but also supports the emotional and psychological wellbeing of students and faculty, ensuring a healthy, resilient future for the academic community.

## **Introduction**

The 1<sup>st</sup> National Wellbeing Conclave 2024, held at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad on November 9th and 10th, 2024, marked a significant milestone in the effort to promote mental health, resilience, and wellbeing within academic settings across India. This two-day event was organized in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, as part of its 'Integrated Approach for Promoting Positive Mental Health, Resilience & Wellbeing'. The conclave saw participation of over 350 stakeholders, including students, faculty members, and institutional leaders from nearly 100 centrally funded higher education institutions (HEIs) across the country. The conclave's primary goal was to initiate a nationwide dialogue around creating a sustainable culture of mental wellbeing within the higher education system.

## **Overview and Objectives**

Thematically, the conclave emphasized the importance of adopting a holistic approach to student wellbeing, one that considers the psychological, emotional, physical, and social aspects of health. Central here is the belief that students in institutions of higher education ought to be provided with environments that cater to varying needs on the mental health spectrum. The need for mental health support systems within educational institutions is more pressing than ever, with students grappling with a variety of stressors, ranging from academic pressures to social and digital influences.

Through expert-led panel discussions, interactive workshops, and a vibrant exhibition of emerging mental health practices at various institutions, the conclave served as a platform to showcase innovative initiatives, exchange best practices, and identify collaborative solutions to promoting mental wellbeing on campus. A significant focus was placed on the role of faculty, administration, and institutional leadership in cultivating an environment that supports mental health and resilience across campuses.

The two-day event featured a rich program with diverse activities, which fostered both academic engagement and practical skill-building. It was designed not just to be an intellectual exchange but to offer actionable strategies that participants could implement on their campuses. The event brought together a wide range of stakeholders—academic leaders, mental health professionals, student representatives, and policy-makers—to deliberate on the key issues related to mental health in higher education.

## **Inaugural Session Highlights**

The inaugural session of the conclave set the tone for the discussions that followed. The event commenced with a welcome address by Dr. Somnath Maji, Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry and Faculty In-charge of Sunshine at IIT Hyderabad. Dr. Maji highlighted the importance of creating a collaborative platform for the emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of students and faculty members. He stressed that mental health should be a central priority in academic environments and must be integrated into the daily life of the institution. He underscored that the pillars of mental health should include support and personal growth. He called on institutions to adopt a comprehensive, integrated approach that recognizes the complexity of student well-being and supports both their academic and emotional needs.

Following this, the Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India, Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, addressed the gathering through his video message. His message highlighted the interconnectedness of mental health and national and economic development. He made the point that if India as a nation is to thrive, it must place greater importance on nurturing the mental health of its youth. Mental health should not be seen in isolation but as a critical driver of individual success and societal progress.

Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Sr. Psychiatrist and Programme Director, Expressions India, offered insights into the psychological challenges faced by young people today. He emphasized that mental health is just as critical as physical health. He further delved into the importance of self-awareness and empathy, encouraging students to engage in mindful self-compassion and to foster a positive relationship with themselves. He concluded his address by advocating for the active celebration of wellbeing that is visible, tangible, and measurable — a sentiment that resonated with many in the audience.

Prof. B.S. Murty, Director, IIT Hyderabad, also shared his thoughts on the subject. Drawing upon ancient Indian scriptures and practices, He emphasized the relevance of techniques like Yoga and Samadhi (balance) in fostering mental resilience. He focused on the idea of maintaining a balanced life, rooted in both spiritual well-being and physical health, as the foundation for enduring mental wellness. He also touched upon the cultural shift occurring at IIT Hyderabad, where there is a growing emphasis on the integration of Liberal arts and Creative expression as part of the academic curriculum, which he believes contributes to a joyful and mentally healthy campus environment.

Shri. K. Sanjay Murthy, Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Union Ministry of Education, furthered the conversation by discussing the role of diversity in creating effective mental health support systems. He noted that the rich diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives among students and staff can be a source of strength. By embracing this diversity, institutions can create more inclusive environments that promote empathy and collaboration. He also shared insights from the wellbeing programs conducted at IIT Gandhinagar, which focused on the integration of mental health initiatives with the broader academic and social structures of the campus.

The inaugural session concluded with a vote of thanks by Smt. Rina Sonowal Kouli, Joint Secretary, Higher Education, Union Ministry of Education. She emphasized that promoting mental health is key to the overall development of students and faculty alike. She reaffirmed the need for institutions to continue their efforts to provide a comprehensive framework for mental health and wellbeing.



*Release of the compendium for 1<sup>st</sup> National Wellbeing Conclave by Hon 'ble secretary, Department of Higher Education, MoE, Shri K. Sanjay Murthy (in the middle), Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education, MoE, Smt. Rina Sonowal Kouli (2<sup>nd</sup> R-L), Director IIT Hyderabad, Prof. B,S Murty (2<sup>nd</sup> L-R), Sr. Psychiatrist, Programme Director, Expressions India ; Dr. Jitendra Nagpal (1<sup>st</sup> L-R) and FIC Sunshine counselling Cell, Dr. Somnath Maji (1<sup>st</sup> R-L).*



*Inauguration of Exhibition stalls by Hon 'ble Secretary, Department of Higher Education, MoE, Shri K. Sanjay Murthy.*



*Glimpse of Exhibition stalls*

Symposium I:

Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing Challenges - Evolving a 21st Century Paradigm

Moderator: Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Sr. Psychiatrist, Programme Director, Expressions India

Panelists: Prof. Namita Ranganathan, Delhi University

Prof. Nishant Goyal, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi

Dr. Gauri Shankar Kaloiya, Professor of Clinical Psychology, AIIMS, Delhi



***Right to Left: Dr Jitendra Nagpal, Dr. Namita Ranganathan, Dr. Nishant Goel & Dr. Gauri Shankar Kaloiya.***

The panel discussion on Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing Challenges was moderated by Dr. Jitendra Nagpal who kicked off the discussion by asking “*What vision do we aim for in addressing youth mental health in this conclave?*” The panellists responded with insightful perspectives on the evolving paradigms surrounding mental health, wellbeing and resilience among young people, with particular emphasis on education, institutional support, and community-building.



## **Transitioning from School to College**

Dr. Namita Ranganathan highlighted the lack of preparation and strategic planning to ease the transition from school to college. She emphasised that this phase which she referred to as 'emerging adulthood', is particularly vulnerable. Students face new emotional and social challenges related to friendships, romance, family relations, and several adulthood responsibilities. To address these complexities, she advocated for the development of structured programmes that could support students in navigating this critical life transition.

Prof. Ranganathan also pointed out the dangers of tuning into mental health solely when a problem appears. She urged the need to maintain a keen eye on the overall wellbeing of students, even when issues are not very apparent. This can be institutionalised if we focus on the holistic wellbeing of students rather than merely assessing their academic achievement. Addressing mental health proactively, rather than reacting to it after issues have escalated, is crucial for ensuring mental wellbeing among students.

Prof. Ranganathan also stressed that institutions cannot solely rely on psychiatrists to provide mental health support. While acknowledging the critical role that in-house psychiatrists and counsellors play in the campus life of an HEI, she urged faculty to become reflective practitioners, embracing a more humane approach to teaching and mentorship, fostering an environment that prioritizes the mental wellbeing of all individuals involved.

## **Building Resilience in Youth**

Dr. Nishant Goyal focused on the importance of resilience in the mental health discourse. He proposed a shift from compartmentalised approaches in education and mental health to a more integrated, holistic framework. By incorporating emotional and psychological support into the core of education, institutions could encourage students to not only focus on academic success but also develop essential life skills such as stress management, emotional regulation, and adaptability in the face of failure.

Dr. Goyal also underscored the alarming rise in mental health challenges, particularly depression, among students. He argued that depression is not an isolated issue but rather a reflection of broader emotional, cognitive, and social resilience deficiencies. Therefore, creating a supportive, collaborative environment - one that includes not just professional help but also peer support, familial understanding, and institutional safety - is essential for fostering holistic wellbeing.

## **Navigating Change**

Dr. Gauri Shankar Kaloiya addressed the psychological dynamics of change and adaptation, which are central to understanding how individuals respond to shifts in their environment. He emphasised that mental health issues often arise in the context of various forms of change - be it developmental (linked to childhood and identity), situational (changes in academic and personal circumstances), transformational (a deep shift in a worldview), or therapeutic (resulting from the healing and recovering processes). Each of these presents its own challenges and opportunities for growth.

He encouraged educators and mental health professionals to support young people through these changes by identifying cognitive conflicts, offering emotional support, and promoting

self-efficacy through role-modelling, social persuasion, and managing emotional states. He also stressed the need to cater to the mental health and wellbeing of educators themselves, as their emotional and psychological health is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment.

**Key takeaways from the session:**

- Students require structured programmes to transition from school to university.
- Teachers should mentor with empathy, balancing academic and mental health support.
- Emotional and psychological skills must be integrated into education for stress management and resilience building.
- Educator wellbeing and mental health must be prioritised to create a positive learning environment.



*The facilitation of moderator and panellists by Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Union Ministry of Education, Smt. Rina Sonowal Kouli.*

Panel Discussion I:

Thriving the Academic Accomplishment: Strengthening Lifelong Functionality

Moderator: Dr. Padmaja, Head, Centre for Health Psychology, School of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad Central University

Panellists: Ms. Geeta Mehrotra, Faculty, University & School Life Skills, Mental Health & Wellbeing

Dr. Priyanka Shrivastava, Associate Professor, Coordinator for Student Wellness Cell, IIT Hyderabad.

Ms. Namrata Vora, Chief Impact Officer, Krushal Visiting Faculty, IIT Madras



***Right to Left: The moderator, Prof. Padamaja, the panellists- Dr Priyanka Srivastava, Ms. Namrata Vora, Mrs. Geeta Mehrotra.***

The panel discussion entitled Thriving Academic Accomplishment: Strengthening Lifelong Functionality, explored the current landscape and emerging needs in higher education, the overarching challenges to fostering wellbeing on campus and strategies for advocacy and awareness.

Ms. Geeta Mehrotra addressed the state of higher education institutions (HEIs) in India, emphasising both the challenges and the opportunities that lie within this rapidly evolving field. She noted that India is home to the world's largest youth population, with 35.6 crore people aged 18-29. This demographic, she said, is crucial for the nation's growth and prosperity, provided that adequate investments are made in education, health, and overall wellbeing. She highlighted that today's youth are tomorrow's innovators and leaders, underscoring the necessity of supportive infrastructure to help them succeed.

She outlined several emerging needs within HEIs, such as:

- **Curriculum Overhaul:** Shifting from knowledge-heavy courses to skill-based programmes that prioritise employability and essential soft skills, including communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional regulation.
- **Technology Integration:** Utilizing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other educational technologies to enhance learning experiences.
- **Practical Training:** Bridging gaps in industry expertise through hands-on and experiential learning opportunities.
- **Faculty Development:** Ensuring that faculty members receive professional training and advocacy to align with the evolving educational landscape.
- **Cross-Cultural Competencies:** Promoting awareness of cultural diversity, physical fitness, self-care, and aesthetics.
- **Digital Tools for Counselling:** Creating and using digital tools to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling programmes, promoting the holistic health of both students and faculty.
- **Resilience Building:** Encouraging strategies to help students manage stress and adapt to changes effectively.

Dr. Priyanka Srivastava addressed the overarching challenges to creating happy, healthy, and harmonious universities. She began by discussing the concerning prevalence of mental health issues among students. A significant portion reported facing mental health struggles, with 33.6% experiencing moderate to severe symptoms of depression and 23.2% dealing with moderate to severe anxiety. Additionally, 18.8% of students had considered suicide at least once in their lifetime, with 12.4% having suicidal thoughts in the past year and 6.7% attempting suicide at least once.

Dr. Srivastava elaborated on the multiple factors influencing mental wellbeing, categorising them into individual, social, and institutional levels. Individual stressors include academic pressure, career uncertainty, and poor coping strategies. Social factors encompass peer pressure, social isolation, and the stigma surrounding mental health, while institutional factors highlight inadequate mental health services and barriers to wellbeing within educational settings.

She stressed the importance of awareness and support programmes, such as interactive workshops and psychological first aid, to create a supportive environment. Regular peer group initiatives and community-building efforts were recommended to help foster a sense of belonging and mutual understanding among students. She also proposed a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming the university experience into a more supportive and harmonious one.

Ms. Namrata Vora focused on advocacy and awareness programmes and shared insights from her work at IIT Madras. She highlighted the success of the 'Happiness, Habits and Success'

course, which has gained significant popularity for addressing the root causes of mental health issues and fostering open discussions. This course has been offered in various formats - workshops, short courses, and orientation programmes - demonstrating its flexibility and broad appeal. The curriculum emphasises happiness and mental wellbeing, equipping students with techniques for handling life's challenges while normalizing mental health conversations.

The panel concluded with several key takeaways:

- Acknowledging the need for a paradigm shift in aligning educational objectives with both global trends and parental expectations, which should be reflected in curriculum design.
- Balancing knowledge-based and skill-based learning to create an enriching academic experience.
- Ensuring educational environments promote safety, happiness, health, and sustainability.
- Equipping students to navigate challenges effectively and maintain productive lives while in university.
- Prioritizing the removal of institutional barriers, including inadequate health and wellness services, and implementing community-oriented care programmes such as psychological first aid and suicide prevention training.
- Creating academic accommodations for students requiring additional support and considering arrangements for those impacted by academic challenges, such as low scores or language skills.

In summary, the session emphasised the importance of holistic development in higher education, advocating for a strong foundation in both academic and personal growth, supported by innovative programmes, community initiatives, and a culture of awareness and empathy.

[Key takeaways from the session:](#)

- HEIs must address individual stressors, social factors, and institutional barriers to improve students' wellbeing.
- HEIs must encourage community building and peer support through interactive workshops, peer initiatives, and support programmes to foster a sense of belonging and mutual understanding.
- Combine knowledge-based and skill-based learning for a comprehensive academic experience that prepares students for both academic and life challenges.
- There need to be provisions for students needing extra support, such as those facing academic challenges, due to low scores or language barriers.
- Regular programmes on mental health awareness on campus normalise mental health discussions and teach students practical coping techniques.



*Panellists and moderators ongoing discussions*

Panel Discussion II:  
Faculty & Students as Sentinels of Wellbeing

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Moderator: Prof. Nishant Goyal, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi

Panellists: Prof. Mahati Chittem, Department of Liberal Arts, IIT Hyderabad

Prof. Santanu Misra, IIT Kanpur

Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Senior Psychiatrist & Programme Director, Expressions

India



*Top panel (Right to Left): Prof. Nishant Goyal, Prof. Mahati Chittem, Prof. Santanu Misra.  
Bottom panel: Prof. Mahati Chittem presenting the talk*

The panel discussion entitled Improving Faculty and Students as Sentinels of Wellbeing, centered on strategies to address barriers and stigma related to mental health, enhance the connection between faculty mental health initiatives and student support and identify key performance indicators for university counselling and wellbeing programmes.

Prof. Mahati Chittem opened the session by discussing the barriers and stigma that impede mental well-being among faculty and students. She described common issues faced in professional and personal spheres. Faculty and students often strive for consistent

performance, positive reviews, and upward progress in their academic and professional lives. Personal expectations include adhering to societal norms, maintaining connections, and projecting a "balanced" lifestyle. This constant pressure can prevent individuals from expressing vulnerability, foster feelings of shame and guilt when they fall short, and lead to a lack of basic help-seeking skills, ultimately resulting in deep dissatisfaction and disconnection.

To address these challenges, Prof. Chittem proposed several strategies to support both students and faculty:

### **Supporting Students:**

- Treat students with respect and understanding.
- Communicate concerns in a direct and honest manner, providing specific feedback.
- Listen attentively, demonstrate empathy, and offer support without judgment.
- Clarify the limits of assistance, such as time constraints and professional boundaries.
- Be prepared for potential defensive reactions and respond with non-judgmental suggestions.

### **Supporting Faculty:**

- Implement wellness programs designed specifically for faculty.
- Offer empathy training, including active listening, observing, and asking thoughtful questions.
- Foster a collaborative and supportive environment.
- Create opportunities for social engagement through extracurricular activities, such as team gatherings or sports events.
- Encourage faculty mentorship and peer support.
- Teach fundamental self-care practices such as mindfulness, exercise, deep breathing, massage, and positive self-talk.

Prof. Santanu Misra then shifted the focus to connecting faculty mental health initiatives with student well-being. He introduced safety risk indicators that might signal mental health concerns, such as inappropriate anger, hostility, aggression, or signs of suicidal thoughts and self-injurious behaviour. Academic indicators, he noted, included sudden drops in academic performance, frequent absences, concerning content in assignments, and a shift toward seeking personal support over academic assistance. Physical indicators involved noticeable changes in appearance, hygiene, weight, fatigue, or signs of intoxication. Psychological indicators, which are critical for timely intervention, included sharing personal distress related to family, financial issues, depression, or thoughts of self-harm, as well as disorientation, unusual behaviour, and expressions of distress by peers.

To respond to these indicators, Dr. Misra suggested a series of strategies:

- **Assess:** Evaluate the level of risk and use distraction techniques while remaining non-judgmental.
- **Probing:** Gather information through active listening and open-ended questions.
- **Assurance:** Offer validation and demonstrate genuine care and support.
- **Interpretation:** Help the individual understand the nature and implications of their situation.



- **Advice:** Recommend resources and referrals as needed.

Prof. Misra emphasized that these strategies should be tailored to promote safety and support, ensuring a proactive approach to mental well-being.

#### Key takeaways from the session:

- Respect, concern, and a supportive campus culture are essential for faculty and student well-being.
- More "buddy programs" should be implemented to encourage peer support among both students and faculty. These programs should emphasize active listening, observation, and the ability to ask questions.
- A focus on self-talk is crucial for building resilience in both students and faculty.
- Recognizing and understanding the potential disconnect between faculty intentions and student reactions is important, with the goal being to guide students through their emotional ups and downs.
- Universities should create environments where students are allowed to make mistakes and acknowledge their feelings, reinforcing the idea that it is okay to not be okay.
- Addressing academic, physical, and psychological indicators should be a priority for effective mental health strategies.
- Greater awareness needs to be fostered among stakeholders, with mechanisms in place to manage misbehaviour and reduce stressors in the university environment.

This session underscored the importance of integrated mental health support systems, highlighting the role of both faculty and students in fostering a culture of well-being within universities.



Symposium II:  
Early Identification and Intervention of Psychological Concerns

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Moderator: Dr. Amita Deb, Department of Liberal Arts, IIT Hyderabad

Panellists: Ms. Ila Sinha, Head, Counselling Life Skills & Mental Health, ODM Group of Educational Institutions, Ranchi

Dr. Sunyana Swain, Assistant Professor, In-Charge, Counselling Centre, TISS Hyderabad

Dr. Nida Fatima Hazari, Lifestyle, Nutrition & Wellness Expert, Hyderabad



*Ms. Ila Sinha during an activity*

The second symposium focused on the importance of establishing ‘mind-spaces’, the significance of resilience-building and stress mitigation strategies, and the interplay between lifestyle, nutrition, and overall wellness.

Ms. Ila Sinha began by discussing the importance of establishing *mind spaces* and celebrating fitness domains such as mindfulness and self-care. She explained that mind space refers to the mental bandwidth we use to manage our thoughts, skills, tasks, emotions, knowledge, and memories. The core question she posed was, “How aware are we of our mind space, and how

much control do we have over its abilities?” Sinha emphasized that skill development—whether physical or mental—results in changes to our brain chemistry. She noted that over 80% of high-achieving individuals incorporate meditation into their daily routines to manage stress and enhance decision-making.

To illustrate best practices, Sinha highlighted several examples of effective mental well-being programs at universities:

- Kent State University offers a dedicated *Mind Space*, a peaceful area for meditation and personal reflection.
- The University of California, Santa Barbara promotes wellness through its UCSB Wellness Challenge and Happiness Challenge, encouraging students to prioritize well-being.
- The Colorado State University Student Resolution Center offers conflict resolution programs to manage interpersonal challenges.
- The University of California's Healthy Campus Network focuses on individualized wellness plans, addressing areas such as stress management, resilience, gratitude, self-compassion, sleep, nutrition, exercise, and time management.

Ms. Sinha concluded by emphasizing the positive outcomes of increasing one’s mind space, encouraging the production of "happy chemicals" such as serotonin, dopamine, endorphins, and oxytocin to foster a more proactive and fulfilling lifestyle.

Dr. Sunyana Swain spoke about resilience-building and stress mitigation strategies. She began by posing the question, “Is stress bad?” and explained that not all stress is harmful; at optimal levels, stress can be beneficial. She highlighted the importance of resilience in developing essential 21st-century skills like problem-solving, emotional management, and critical thinking. Dr. Swain elaborated that resilience supports various aspects of life, from personal well-being to handling emerging challenges and fostering positive relationships.

Dr. Swain outlined several approaches for maintaining resilience and managing stress:

- Expressive arts and mindfulness practices
- Positive self-talk and establishing daily routines
- Social support and spending time in nature
- Seeking help when needed

These techniques help build emotional strength and enable individuals to cope with stress effectively.

Dr. Nida Fatima Hazari discussed the link between lifestyle, nutrition, and wellness, focusing on biological resilience—the body’s ability to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of stress. She underscored the profound connection between the mind and body, noting that mental and physical states are interdependent, with one influencing the other. She outlined the three core pillars of resilience:

She also stressed the importance of sleep and exercise in maintaining mental and physical stability and shared a practical formula for fostering biological resilience:

1. Lifestyle adjustments: Set regular sleep and study times and manage screen time.

2. Nutrition: Focus on nutritious meals, staying hydrated, and practicing mindful snacking.
3. Wellness practices: Integrate small relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and positive social interactions into daily routines.

**Key takeaways from the session:**

- The significance of establishing *mind spaces* and prioritizing fitness, mindfulness, and self-care.
- Managing stress effectively through resilience by maintaining a balance between beneficial stress and distress. This includes promoting positive contextual, social, and individual factors.
- Focusing on three primary aspects—lifestyle, nutrition, and wellness—to build and sustain resilience.
- Incorporating activities like guided meditation into academic curricula to support mental well-being.
- Recognizing the legal and ethical responsibility of educators to nurture the psychological and emotional growth of students.
- Integrating insights and practices from the Indian knowledge system to enrich psychological and wellness-based initiatives.

The discussion emphasized a holistic approach to mental and emotional well-being, integrating practical strategies that students and educators can adopt to create a supportive and resilient campus environment.



*Top Panel (Right to Left): Dr. Nida Fatima Hazari, Dr. Amita Deb, Dr. Sunyana Swain, Ms. Ila Sinha*

Panel Discussion III:  
Collaborative Mental Health Framework and Trainings

Moderator: Prof. Namita Ranganathan, University of Delhi

Panellists: Shri. Sridhar Boovaraghavan, Guest Faculty, IIT Madras

Dr. Neeraj Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of Liberal Arts, IIT Hyderabad



*Left to Right: Dr Neeraj Kumar, Mr. Sridhar Boovaraghavan and Moderator Dr. Namita Ranganathan*

In the third panel discussion, the panellists emphasised the importance of developing collaborative and comprehensive mental health frameworks within educational institutions and the necessity of training for faculty and staff to support these initiatives effectively.

Shri. Sridhar Boovaraghavan highlighted the significance of building partnerships within the campus community and leveraging allied support resources to foster a thriving mental health environment. He underscored the role of initiatives like the “Happiness, Habits, and Success” program at IIT Madras in shaping a proactive approach to mental wellness. He recommended continuing awareness campaigns through word-of-mouth, media coverage, and workshops and stressed the importance of involving alumni as mentors and facilitators. Additionally, he

suggested expanding such initiatives by piloting workshops and courses at other institutions through conferences and outreach events. He advocated for assembling a team of passionate advocates who believe in the mission and can amplify the message of mental wellbeing across campuses.

Dr. Neeraj Kumar focused on implementing evidence-based research and development initiatives as a cornerstone for building resilient mental health frameworks. He presented examples of global innovations in student wellness, such as the University of Michigan's Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS), which provides integrated medical, psychological, and social services, and Berkeley's virtual support services that make mental health professionals more accessible through apps and chat platforms. He also pointed to Harvard's use of peer counsellors in their "Room 13" initiative and Yale's regular mental health screenings to identify at-risk students.

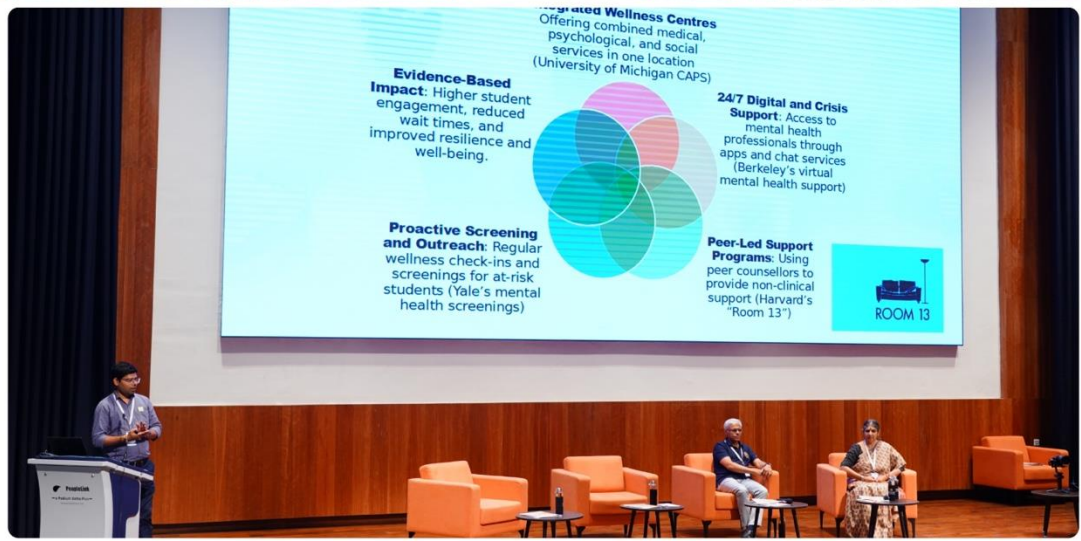
Dr. Kumar shared key components of effective wellness programs, emphasizing accessibility, early intervention, peer support, a holistic approach, skill-building, and cultural relevance. He also outlined several opportunities for advancing student wellness, including expanding digital interventions, fostering collaboration between universities and health institutions, and creating culturally tailored resources. He called for annual wellness screenings and regular parental orientation sessions to involve parents in the mental health dialogue.

#### Key takeaways from the session:

- Adapting evidence-based practices to align with cultural and institutional contexts can greatly enhance student resilience and mental health.
- Proactive, inclusive, and easily accessible mental health programs are fundamental for promoting the wellbeing of current and future student populations.
- Institutions must have a robust framework that allows flexibility and autonomy to collaborate with public and private partners effectively.
- Collaborative efforts require all stakeholders — students, faculty, administration, and alumni — to commit to building a supportive and inclusive environment.
- Alumni engagement is crucial as they can relate to contemporary challenges and offer valuable perspectives and support.
- Initiatives should be structured, yet adaptable, incorporating flexible components like mentorship programs that can be tailored to different needs.
- Parental orientation should include information on mental wellbeing, ensuring they are part of the supportive network.
- Drawing on global best practices can enrich existing frameworks and inspire new approaches to student wellness.

This session underscored that a collaborative and comprehensive mental health approach, when supported by a committed community of educators, students, and external partners, can pave the way for a resilient and well-equipped student body.





## Day Two: Concluding Panel Discussion & Open Interaction

Moderator: Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Sr. Psychiatrist & Programme Director, Expressions India  
Panellists: Shri. Devendra Kumar Sharma, Director, Department of Higher Education, Union Ministry of Education  
Prof. Vikas Chowdhary, NIT Kurukshetra  
Dr. Payal Chandel, Central University, Haryana



The concluding panel discussion, moderated by Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, brought together esteemed experts to address the key aspects of mental health support in higher education institutions. The audience also interacted in an open question-answer session as part of the discussion.

Shri. Devendra Kumar Sharma opened the session by highlighting the Ministry of Education's Integrated Approach to Promoting Positive Mental Health, Resilience, and Wellbeing. He informed that this initiative includes a range of activities such as the Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme, online capacity building sessions for faculty, exemplary visits to trailblazing HEIs in the field of mental health support, and events like this conclave, which aim to foster mental health awareness on national and regional levels. The primary objective is to create an enabling environment in HEIs that supports mental health

and resilience, with teachers at the forefront of this initiative. While teachers are essential in identifying and responding to student mental health issues, it is crucial to acknowledge that they are not trained counsellors; rather, they are the first responders or ‘first aiders’.

Prof. Vikas Chowdhary highlighted that teachers need to adopt the role of a mentor or friend to their students. He pointed out that teachers serve as a vital link between students and their families while they are away from home. He also stated that continuous efforts are necessary to build awareness and empower faculty to support both their own wellbeing and that of their students. ‘

Dr. Payal Chandel emphasised the significance of peer support for students in HEIs. Drawing on her own experience of bringing her daughter to the conclave as a student participant, Dr. Chandel shared the camaraderie that her daughter had built with fellow students during the two-day conclave. Coming from different institutions from across the country, the students were able to engage in profound discussions on mental health struggles on campus and share experiences of overcoming these. Such events, big or small in scale, offer students the opportunity to open up to each other and seek peer support when required.

Prof. Navel Iqbal, Jamia Milia Islamia, emphasized the importance of recognizing the diverse stressors affecting young people, noting that teachers who are aware of these pressures can better support students during times of distress. Such awareness helps identify vulnerable students and empowers faculty to respond appropriately.

Prof. Namita Ranganathan, University of Delhi, discussed the varied nature of stressors impacting students, including academic demands, social life, and personal challenges. She stressed the importance of sensitising educators to understand and relate to students’ experiences and to recognise signs of distress. Additionally, she noted that the wellbeing of faculty members themselves play a significant role in creating a positive mental health environment on campus.

The discussion also touched upon practical initiatives, such as the government’s ‘tele-MANAS’ programme, which provides tele-counselling services to support mental health across the country. Expanding such services in regional languages, with chat facilities, could prove beneficial for both students and faculty. During the discussion it was also shared that IIT Kanpur hosts regular orientation sessions to inform new faculty members about available mental health resources with dedicated counselling support services for faculty and staff.

A recent trend noted was that faculty members often face similar stressors as students, including the pressure of project rejections, stalled promotions, and other professional challenges. This recognition highlights the need for empowering faculty not only to assist students but also to prioritise their own mental health. Developing a ‘faculty brigade’ focused on promoting a positive mental health culture on campus was suggested as an essential step forward.

Finally, the University Grants Commission has issued guidelines mandating the presence of counselling systems in HEIs to promote mental wellbeing. However, it was reiterated that the responsibility for mental health goes beyond the counselling system itself; faculty members play a crucial role in fostering a culture of mental health awareness and support.

### Key takeaways from the session:

- Teachers are vital first responders for mental health issues among students but are not professional counsellors.
- Awareness of the various stressors affecting students can empower teachers to better support them.
- Faculty wellbeing is integral to overall mental health initiatives in HEIs.
- Continuous education and resources are necessary for faculty to maintain their own wellbeing and effectively assist students.



### *Hands-On Workshop – Life Skills Based Wellbeing Enrichment*

The second day also featured various student-led activities focused on wellbeing, including street plays (Nukkad Natak), panel discussions, songs, and dance performances. Students were divided into five colour-coded groups each tasked with performing activities centered on a specific theme using debate, role-play, drama, and dance.



*Activities presented by the participant students*

### **Summary of Group Presentations:**

The teams comprised 10 students from diverse central universities, creating a heterogeneous group that represented varied geographical locations, academic backgrounds, gender, and fields of study. The presenters provided an overview of the program, highlighting different sessions and exhibitions. They shared their observations from various university exhibition stalls and engaged in discussions on key questions, such as the connection between mental health and academic performance and lessons learned from the stalls. The presenters noted best practices like gratitude walls and acknowledgment boards and highlighted that many institutions conduct events and talks before exams, which help maintain mental well-being.

A notable realization among the students was that while these programs often have unique names, the core ideas were consistent and converged across universities. This reflection inspired the presenters to consider implementing similar programs at their own institutions. They also experienced a sense of belonging and commitment toward fostering students' well-being in their universities.

The session concluded with audience feedback, where participants shared their experiences and insights from the discussions. One key takeaway was the openness of universities to share ideas and best practices, fostering a sense of collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual support. Interestingly, students found parallels between their challenges and those faced by faculty, enhancing the feeling of collaborative learning.



The following recommendations emerged out the discussions at the National Wellbeing Conclave 2024:

### 1. Institutional Frameworks for Mental Health Support

- **Develop Comprehensive Mental Health Policies:** Institutions should create clear, institution-wide policies for mental health and wellbeing that include strategies for prevention, early intervention, and support. These policies should be aligned with national and global best practices while taking cultural and institutional contexts into account.
- **Holistic Wellbeing Programmes:** Wellbeing Programmes should be multidimensional, addressing not only mental health but also physical health, social wellbeing, and academic success. Programmes should include stress management, life skills training, mindfulness practices, and peer support systems.
- **Integrated Mental Health Services:** Mental Health services should be easily accessible within the campus, offering a combination of medical, psychological, and social support services at one location.
- **Student-Counsellor Ratio:** HEIs should aim for a student-counsellor ratio of 1000:1 in every institute to ensure effective therapeutic intervention and mental well-being management.
- **Preparation for Higher Education:** Students entering centrally funded institutions (CFIs) should be prepared for the advanced teaching and academic practices expected at these institutions.

### 2. Strengthening Faculty and Staff Engagement

- **Faculty Wellbeing Programmes:** It is crucial to include faculty well-being in the institutional framework. Faculty should be given access to stress-management workshops, emotional intelligence training, and resilience-building programs. Regular mental health workshops and support programs will ensure that faculty can better identify and respond to student mental health issues.
- **Training Faculty as Mental Health First Responders:** Faculty and staff should be trained to identify early signs of distress in students and to offer appropriate support or referrals. This can be achieved through basic counselling skills workshops and training on understanding mental health concerns in the context of academic pressures.
- **Faculty-Student Bonding:** HEIs should actively promote meaningful interactions between faculty and students through initiatives like mentorship programmes, informal meetups, and shared projects to strengthen their bonds.
- **Alumni Mentorship and Peer Support Programmes:** Establishment of alumni mentorship programs can help provide a support network for students, as alumni who have gone through similar challenges are better positioned to offer guidance. Peer support systems, where students are trained to assist each other, can be an effective model.

### 3. Expanding Access to Mental Health Resources

- **Digital Mental Health Solutions:** Expand the use of digital platforms that allow students to access mental health resources, such as virtual counselling sessions, mental

health apps, and online peer support groups. This can help bridge the gap for students who might not otherwise seek help in person.

- **On-campus Mental Health Counselling and Wellbeing Centre:** Campuses should have a dedicated Mental Health Counselling and Wellbeing Centre where students, administrative and professional staff can access mental health support services. These centres should be staffed with trained professionals who can offer immediate counselling and referrals to specialized care when necessary. Sound ratio of the Counsellors and total population of the students may be considered.
- **Peer Counselling Programmes:** Institutions should implement and train peer counsellors to offer non-clinical mental health support. Peer counsellors can help in normalizing conversations around mental health, reduce stigma, and act as intermediaries between students and professional mental health services.

#### 4. Creating a Supportive Campus Culture

- **Encourage Open Conversations About Mental Health:** Institutions must foster an environment where mental health can be openly discussed without fear of stigma. Building an inter-university consortium, periodically organising National Wellness Conclaves for sharing best practices to promote mutual growth and development in the area of mental wellbeing, should be prioritised. Awareness campaigns, regular mental health events shall empower and equip the students and staff to create a co-dynamic ecosystem of resilience and strong mental health.
- **Establish ‘Mind Spaces’ for Reflection:** Dedicated quiet spaces on campus, free from academic pressure, can offer students the opportunity to practice mindfulness, engage in self-care, or simply have time away from the demands of study. These spaces allow students to take a break, centre themselves, and practice stress-relieving activities like meditating, napping, or just being alone. Also known as a ‘wellness rooms’ or ‘mindful rooms’, these dedicated spaces are built with one purpose in mind: helping higher education students relax, practice self-care and manage burnout.
- **Building a Sense of Community:** Developing programs that encourage community-building, such as group activities, social clubs, or wellness events, can help students feel more connected and supported, reducing feelings of isolation.

#### 5. Collaboration between Stakeholders

- **Collaboration with External Mental Health Experts:** Educational institutions should build partnerships with mental health research and care establishments to improve the quality of services offered. This collaboration can also enhance professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.
- **Collaborating with Parents and Family:** Orientation programs for parents should be introduced at the beginning of each academic year to ensure they understand how to support their children’s mental well-being. Educating parents about the signs of mental distress and ways to offer support can make a significant difference.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** Educational institutions, government bodies, mental health organizations, and NGOs should collaborate to build a nationwide framework for mental health support in educational institutions. This could involve shared resources, cross-institutional workshops, and collaborative research initiatives.



## 6. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

- **Regular Mental Health Screenings and Wellness Check-ins:** Mental health screenings should be conducted regularly to monitor student well-being. These screenings can be used to identify students at risk and to intervene early, before problems escalate. Additionally, institutions should hold annual wellness check-ins to assess the effectiveness of current programs.
- **Feedback Mechanisms and Student Involvement:** To ensure that mental health initiatives remain relevant and effective, institutions should have regular feedback mechanisms where students can express their concerns or provide suggestions. Students should also have a voice in the development of mental health programs, ensuring that their needs are addressed.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Institutions should conduct research on the effectiveness of mental health initiatives and use data to continuously refine their programs. Evidence-based practices should be regularly assessed and adapted to the specific needs of the student population.

## 7. Raising Awareness and Promoting Mental Health Literacy

- **Awareness Campaigns on Mental Health:** Educational institutions should conduct regular awareness campaigns that promote mental health literacy. These campaigns should focus on reducing stigma, educating students and faculty on the signs of mental distress, and providing information about available support services.
- **Essay, Quiz and Painting Competitions:** Regularly organizing essay and painting competitions on mental health can help reduce stigma and promote open conversations on mental wellbeing among students.
- **Incorporate Mental Health Education into the Curriculum:** Mental health education should be integrated into academic curricula, providing students with the knowledge and skills to manage stress, build resilience, and maintain their well-being throughout their studies and beyond.