



**SHREEMATI NATHIBAI DAMODAR THACKERSEY COLLEGE OF ARTS  
& SHREEMATI CHAMPABEN BHOGILAL COLLEGE OF  
COMMERCE & SCIENCE FOR WOMEN**

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NAAC B+ Grade (With CGPA 2.68)

**Summary Report of the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Suicide Prevention Conference**

SNDT College, Churchgate

9<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

On account of the International Suicide Prevention Day which is observed on 10<sup>th</sup> September every year, a Conference was organized by The Sisters Living Works Organization (SLW) in the SNDT College of Arts and S.C.B. College of Commerce and Science. The SLW is a nonbenefit organization dedicated to suicide prevention in India. The program commenced at 9:20 am with Meenakshi Nagwekar Madam addressing the dignitaries present on the stage. She introduced the commendable work that their organization has been doing to raise awareness and start a conversation about suicide prevention. The Conference was further hosted by Dia Mehra, a psychologist working with SLW. The respected dignitaries were called upon the stage to light the lamp to start the conference on an auspicious note followed by everyone standing up for The University Anthem and The Maharashtra Song. Later Dr. Vandana Sharma, the Principal of the college felicitated Ujjwala Chakradev Madam, the Vice Chancellor of the College, Gayatri Datta Madam, Founder of SLW and Meenakshi Nagwekar Madam, the Director of SLW. The Vice Chancellor felicitated Dr. Harish Shetty and the Director of SLW felicitated the principal.

Esteemed Dr. Vandana Sharma, the Principal of the SNDT College of Arts and S.C.B. College of Commerce and Science gave a very warm welcome speech emphasizing the importance of mental wellbeing in today's times especially post pandemic when a lot of people experienced unemployment. She acknowledged the importance of both men and women's mental health and suicide prevention. She thanked everyone from the bottom of her heart for being present for such an important and sensitive conference, assuring that everyone will be benefitting from it.

Respected Gayatri Datta Madam, the pillar behind the entire SLW organization spoke about her heartfelt journey of losing her loved ones to suicide and how much the silence around the topic bothered her. She was determined to destigmatize the taboo around mental health and building a space for people to be heard non judgmentally. They work towards being proactive and implementing preventive measures. She quoted, "Every 40 seconds we lose someone to suicide but it is preventable if you take the right action on time." SLW encourages 'help seeking' behavior and is contributing towards normalizing taking medication for when one does not feel mentally well. She educated the audience with how they can contribute towards suicide prevention by just being there for the ones suffering and the bereaved families of suicide victims. As a society we perceive death by suicide very differently as compared to death by other reasons and that proves to be scary when the statistics state that India has one of the highest numbers of suicide cases in the world.

Honorable Ujjwala Chakradev Madam, the Vice Chancellor gave a very insightful example of "Manache Shlok", a composition of the respected Marathi poet, Ramdas. The poem teaches us that life does not stop for anyone and especially for you until you want it to stop. One should live life full of joy, enthusiasm and splendor in a way that everyone is spellbound and anyone under your spell will never think of doing anything wrong to them. She believes that each one of us is made up of many things but there are some intangible parts of us which no one can see and they only reveal themselves with time.



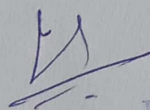


She advised us to peep into ourselves and to truly understand who we are and only then can we help others around us. She remembered the teachings of the Great Swami Vivekanand who said that someone who is in complete discipline is someone whose mind, heart and intellect are all in sync and Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve who defined girls as "Sanskrita", meaning women who are enlightened.

The event was proceeded by a Vote of Thanks presented by the Head of the Psychology Department of SNTD college, Mrs. Sonali Deshbratar Madam. She expressed her heartfelt gratitude towards the honorable dignitaries, SLW team for organizing a conference on such an important and sensitive issue and everyone who made it a point to come and participate in the conference. She gave way to the Four Esteemed Guest Speakers who have been an integral part of the field of psychiatry and the community to share their contribution in this Conference.

First Speaker was someone who did an excellent job in explaining such a grave topic with light humor and impactful message: Dr. Harish Shetty, one of the well-known Psychiatrists in Powai, Mumbai has been a practicing Psychiatrist for 33 years. He studied and completed MD - Psychiatry, MBBS. He is currently practicing at Dr. L H Hiranandani Hospital in Powai, Mumbai. Dr. Shetty discussed adolescents' mental health and suicide through various examples. He expressed that mental health disorders are overlapped with complex situations which in clinical terms is known as complex psychopathology. Further, he made aware of why these complex situations are present where he mentioned topics like rapid social change, disconnection from others, poor awareness, and many other factors. He also stated that family conversations have been reduced, which affects the sharing of general emotions on a daily basis and that togetherness in every social setting is very important. This topic was further continued with preventive measures like reconnection, building support systems, being interactive and vocal about your mental health, engage in active listening, encourage empathy and compassion. Various other trends or causes recorded for suicide are suicide cluster, unable to fight shame, mental blockage towards seeking help, addiction of games and social media, lack of education etc. Educating parents, screening students from time to time, helpline numbers, efficient stress management are few ways to prevent adolescents from taking such a gruesome step as per Dr. Shetty. He reiterated to the attendees of the conference that, "How you look does not define how you feel but how you feel surely defines how you look." Throughout his years of valuable experience, he has seen a lot of adolescents being bothered by the way their peers or partners perceive them and at times like these its very important for each one of us to prioritize self-love, self-respect and draw a boundary between friendships and relationships. He explained how 'love has birth, growth and death' and each one of us has to celebrate while we pass through all these milestones. He also recommended good reads for the audience to educate themselves on this topic. Dr. Shetty strongly believes that attempted suicide is an accident of the mind and it is about a state of mind and not about courage or cowardice. Statistics say that the girls' suicide rate is much higher than boys' suicide rate. He recommended few ways to build emotional resilience in children by helping them share bad news, promoting togetherness in their surroundings, helping them realize that one single healthy parent is enough rather than two unhealthy ones and many more. He advocated that stress can very quickly escalate into forcing people to take extreme steps like suicide but interventions by approaching the appropriate professional can help create pitstops and thus prevent suicide. It has now been supported with evidence that the age of onset of every issue has gone down so psychological autopsies for young patients is very important to prevent further damage.

Next on stage came Dr. Kersi Chavda, the past president of the Bombay Psychiatry Society, consultant at the PD Hinduja National, Hinduja Healthcare and the Sir H N Reliance foundation hospitals. He has been chairperson of the task force of the Indian Psychiatric society (IPS) dealing with school psychiatry and counselling. Currently, chairperson of the IPS Task Force dealing with school Psychiatry as well as



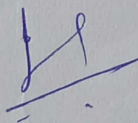
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the advisor to the committee dealing with college Psychiatry of the Indian Association of Private Psychiatry. He has been working for more than 35 years. He spoke about the Men's Mental Health Scenario in India and Suicide Rates in Men which is a very unpopular topic keeping in mind the image of masculinity that we are conditioned to believe. Some of the reasons that he highlighted on as to why it is important to talk about men's mental health are men don't talk about it themselves, they fear not being in control, they looking less manly, they think this might look like they can't be the bread earner of the house and carry the responsibility as it might portray them as weak. In order to prevent this, we need to normalize talking about it and seek the appropriate treatment. Dr. Kersi advocated, "Take an intervention right at the start of a mental issue rather than waiting for it to reach its pinnacle." Few very commonly spotted symptoms in men as per him which help us realize the sufferings of men are; aggression and physical violence, severe change in mood, appetite, sleep, energy, somatic symptoms, difficulty concentrating, engaging in high-risk activities, unusual thoughts and behavior, thoughts or attempts of suicide and many more. It is advised that on encountering any of these symptoms for a prolonged period of time, one should reach out to a professional and get the required help. Highest suicide rates in India are in the age group of 15 – 29 years and a rather shocking fact unveiled by Dr. Chavda was that a greater number of women attempt suicide but a greater number of men succeed. He helps throw light on the causes of poor mental health amongst men which are substance abuse, chronic illnesses, being single, sexuality confrontation, death of a loved one, retirement or unemployment, etc. When one tries to observe suicide cases in order to prevent further ones, we need to take into consideration four factors while doing so: what happened, when did it happen, why did it happen, and how did it happen.

Dr. Anjali Chhabria, a leading psychiatrist and psychotherapist in India, is recognized for her outstanding contribution to the field of mental health. She has graced the panels on various television shows like Satyamev Jayate and has spoken at TEDx Christ University and TEDx Youth SIS Mumbai. She conducts workshops on mental health and emotional hygiene across schools, colleges, institutions, and corporate houses. Dr. Chhabria is the author of the book "Death Is Not the Answer," which breaks the taboo on discussing the sensitive subject of suicide and provides readers with ways to prevent it. She emphasized more on importance of Women's Mental Health and what revolves around it. For example, stereotyping, body shaming, work pressure, female feticide, infanticide, family pressure, and many more. She beautifully stated a very important fact that is generally overlooked when trying to search for the root cause of attempting suicide that women's mental health issues starts when the girl child is in the womb. In a patriarchal society like India, there is a tremendous amount of pressure on Indian women to bear a male child. Addressing body shaming, she quoted that "The possibilities of changing one thing about self which could be weight, height, or any other thing and that exact thing could be one what so many other females wish to have." She also addressed the changes in adolescents with their age and the aspects to which they are exposed to anxiety, mood, attention and behavioural disorders, isolation and cyberbullying, academic pressure, personal and peer relationships, and many more factors. Also, she talked about sensitizing kids about addressing their emotional problems like anxiety and the need for awareness about sexual abuse in both genders, especially in girl children. She believes that sensitizing kids at a young age would prevent further emotional damage and them taking extreme steps to cope with it. Continuing with the criteria where women face hardships, one of them is their workplace, good supportive workplaces are hard to find. Generally, there are a lot of stereotyping statements and discrimination faced by women in the workplace. It also concerns the pregnancy because they have to choose between one. Choosing both comes with tremendous stress and hardships. She affirmed that "Get angry enough due to all these hardships and injustice to do something about it but not get so upset about it to let it bring you down." The statistical data on suicide between housewives and farmers shows that the percentage of housewives' suicides is 25% more than farmers but it isn't spoken about. In order to prevent any mishap because of the numerous problems



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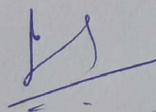


faced by women and nowhere to go for them he added that mental health awareness starts when an individual starts prioritizing themselves. Reaching the solution needs to address both sides of the problem. To cope with these situations, she suggests that be friends with as many people as you can build connections with. In work settings, set boundaries and stand for yourself, set realistic expectations, break the tasks into manageable steps, and reach out to anyone if you notice unusual behaviour, look out for everyone.

After a wonderful talk about adolescents, men and women's mental health, came Dr. Milan Balakrishnan who is a licensed psychiatrist with over 15 years of experience in the field of mental health. Dr. Milan is trained in both general psychiatry and child and adolescent psychiatry. Throughout his career, Dr. Milan has provided compassionate care to patients across the lifespan, from children to older adults. Dr. Balkrishnan enlightened us on important statistics concerning mental health and suicide in India. Further, he talked about the National Mental Health Survey of India year 2015-16. The results show very concerning criteria and a number of substance abuse and suicide all over India. The statistics show that every year about 2,00,000 people die because of suicide and that is a very concerning number. Adding to that Sir talked about the Mental Health Care Act which was passed in April 2017. It is one of the major preventive measures nationwide. Like every Coin has two sides. The passing of acts and government programs are not enough and its execution is equally very important. In our country Mental health care is not sufficient enough. He stated "Mental health is too important to be left to mental health professionals alone. It should be everyone's business." Only 60% percent of mental health professionals are in the city. Urban Fast life is a root cause of many mental health disorders and the number of required forces to tackle this problem is not enough that is why it is important that non-psychiatry doctors are educated and made aware so that they can prescribe the right treatments to patients. Further, he continued with solutions that are helpful to suicide prevention wherein he mentioned reducing access to harmful objects and training the youth to be gatekeepers and educating others. An example of a safe peer-based community built for Bipolar patients is called 'Bipolar India' which meets fortnightly and involves suicide watch for patients who have either attempted suicide previously or might be experiencing suicidal ideations. He also talked about suicide red flags like distributing possessions, paying loans, meeting family, sending gifts at unusual points, talking about death, sharing poetry on death on social media, and searching for ways which notifies the people around to help the one in trouble.

Post the detailed explanation by the esteemed guest speakers of various aspects of mental health and suicidal ideations faced by all genders and age groups, there was a very informative panel discussion uncovering the numerous psychological facts in front of the audience. The panel included Nidhi Sharma Madam, Counselling Psychologist, life and career coach, behavioral facilitator, Anuradha Karegar Madam, Counselling Psychologist, Suman Khanna Madam, Psychotherapist and founder of Mind Unwind, Madhura Koparkar Madam, Psychologist and Psychotherapist. The discussion was hosted by Sanjeevani Sonawane who proceeded by addressing the initial questions to Suman Madam. On being asked to define mental health, she said that it involves describing three aspects of an individual's life – cognitive health, emotional health and behavioral health. She elaborated on the negative aspects of social media on mental health by stating that social media is two faced and if used in our favor then it can truly prove as a blessing for the mankind. We as humans have been at two extremes, with mental health being a taboo previously to now everyone very casually terming mental disorders on the internet. It is everyone's duty to use it very responsibly and mindfully.

Madhura Madam was posed questions about how can one identify depression by highlighting its early signs and what can a person do and not do to help someone diagnosed with depression. To this she gave a very structured answer enlisting the symptoms of depression being shift in mood, appetite, energy, sleep, repetitive and racing thoughts, fear of being judged, lack of interest in pleasurable



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activities, etc. We also need to keep in mind to engage in active listening and not giving any advices unless asked for it by the patient, being non-judgmental, validating their feelings, acknowledging the patient's problem while dealing with people diagnosed with depression.

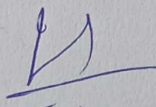
Navigating the discussion towards a more common form of mental health issue faced by all of us on a daily basis, Anuradha Madam was asked to enlighten the audience on the leading factors of stress and how can one overcome the mental blockage of sharing emotions. She interacted with the audience to ask for their views regarding the same and concluded that stress is nowadays caused due to breakdown of joint family systems, lack of communication, fast life, racing thoughts, unable to express, stigma around the mental health issues, etc. We are conditioned in a way to have self-doubts, self-limiting beliefs, fear of being judged when trying to express emotions which complicates a person's mental health.

The last questions were posed to Niddhi Madam to explain as how can one develop emotional independence and what exactly is meant by psychological safety. Based on the rich experience she possesses, she defines emotional independence is when we identify, recognize and manage our emotions irrespective of what others say. One cannot be fully emotionally independent but one can at least identify and shape our emotions a little by practicing mindfulness and listening only to oneself. Psychological safety is aimed at only after our basic needs are met and it involves interpersonal risk. It is achieved only if we are emotionally independent so that we don't navigate our interpersonal relationships through someone else's point of view. She quoted, "Psychological Safety is where I can express whatever I want to without being judged, bullied, ridiculed for it."

The panel discussion was succeeded by Meenakshi Nagwekar Madam explaining the importance of being the first – responder to suicide prevention. A first – responder is someone who is a good listener, careful observer and the one that proves to be a pillar of unwavering support for the victims. She stated that SLW has trained many volunteers to make them efficient enough and these volunteers have been given resources to execute everything needed to tackle a potential attempt of suicide. These efforts help the victims remember that someone cares and SLW has been bringing hope to people who are at the brink of despair since many years. Their motto has always been to not let anyone feel alone in their struggle and help remind each one of us that it is our collective responsibility to be there for each other and offer a compassionate ear to someone in need.

The audience was in awe of Sharvari Prabhu Madam's talents and her wonderful showcase of poem and songs. She is a clinical psychologist who is also a freelancing lyricist and music composer now. She took the stage by her enthralling idea of spreading awareness about mental health issues via her beautiful compositions.

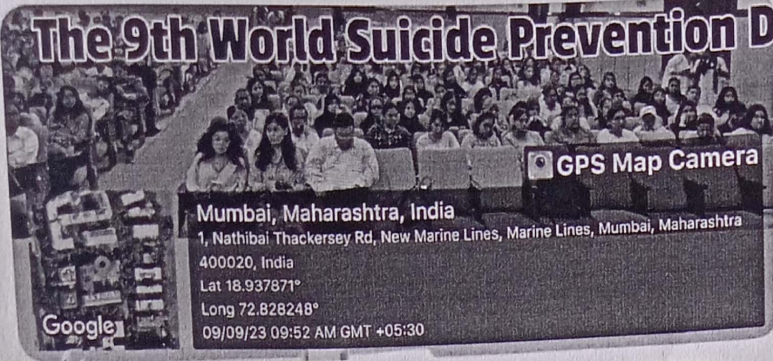
Dia, concluded the conference and handed over the floor to Kritika Kalia, SYBA psychology student to present the Vote of Thanks. She expressed her immense gratitude to each guest speaker for enlightening everyone with their experiences and valuable time, SLW team for their groundbreaking work to build a safe space, SNTD college for providing the opportunity, Panelists for sharing their immense wisdom and patiently answering all the questions posed by the students, Volunteers for their relentless hard work , Patkar Hall Team for providing the space to conduct the conference and the participants who attended with such vigor for enabling a smooth progression of the entire event. The conference ended at 2:30 pm and everyone went back with great knowledge and a zeal to help contribute something to build a safe community and look out for mankind.



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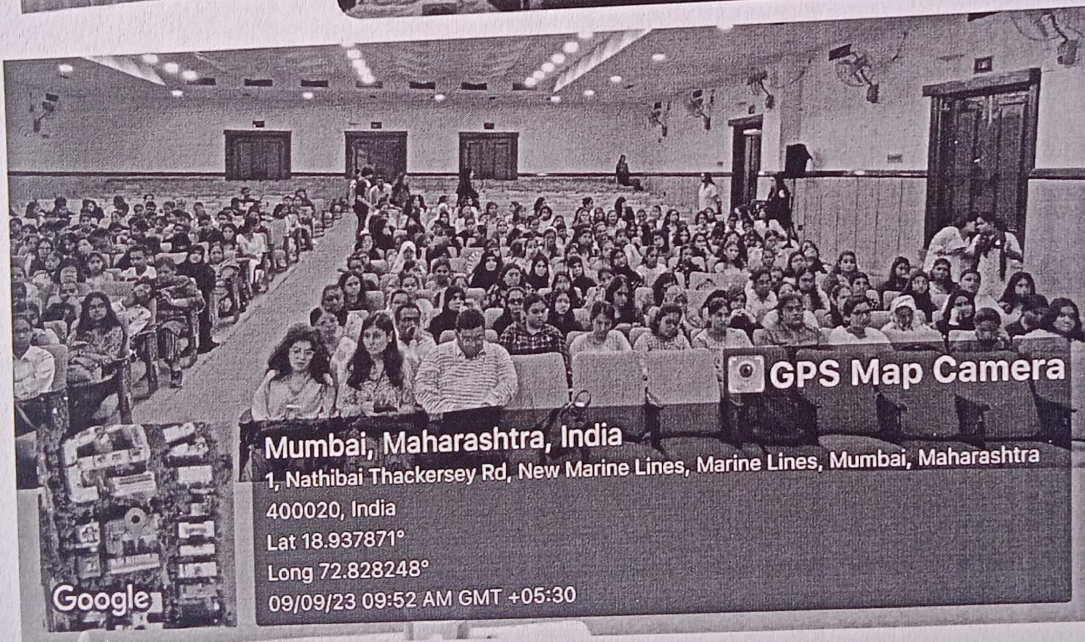
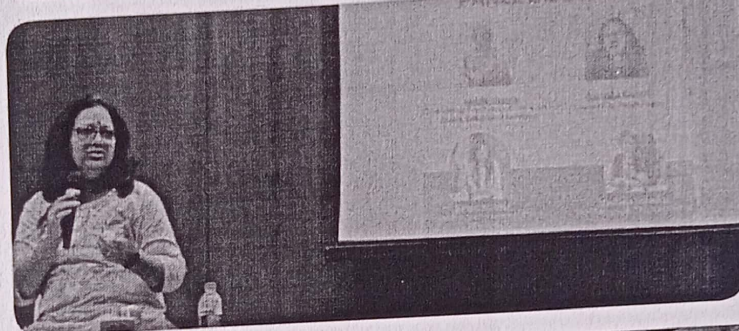


# The 9th World Suicide Prevention Day Conference



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