

REPORT ON THE MENTAL HEALTH SYMPOSIUM

ABSTRACT: This event was conducted by the legal aid volunteers and Para-Legal Volunteers from Legal Aid Centre, S.L.S. - Noida. Celebrating World Mental Health Day on 10th October, a symposium on young people and mental health issues in a changing world was organized. Dr. Madhuker Sharma, Deputy Director felicitated the guest and Mr. Ankur Sharma, Head LAC gave the vote of thanks. Keeping in mind the taboo associated with the topic of mental health the objective of the symposium was to concentrate on spreading awareness the theme was decided as 3A's to fight Mental Health Issues, Awareness, Acceptance, Assurance: the three essential aspects that are required to fulfill the goal. In order to handle such a sensitive issue with proper care, experts from the field of psychology were invited to enlighten the young minds as to how take proper mental care, effective steps that can be taken to develop a strong mind. The recent legislation passed by the parliament on mental health was also discussed in a great length, highlighting and emphasis on the rights that are now available to people suffering from mental illness. Critical analysis and ways to improve the legislation was also discussed.

**Conducted By:
Legal Aid Cell,
Symbiosis
Law School,
NOIDA Under
the Guidance
of Mr. Ankur
Sharma, Head
L.A.C.**

**Drafted by
Jayanti Mishra
& Amira
Dhawan**

1. Concept Note :

The legal aid centre of Symbiosis Law School, Noida strongly believes that there is a lot more to one's health than simply the basic physical health. While physical health is important and often a part of discussion what is left out is one's mental health. Invisible but an essential part of one's existence it is often neglected and put under the category of a taboo. With hush references and not many people coming forward to discuss it, the legal aid centre took an initiative to break this taboo and put mental health on the forefront. The Legal Aid Centre (hereafter referred to as LAC) along with the help of Symbiosis Centre for Emotional Well Being organized a symposium on 'Symposium on Young People and Mental Health Issues in a Changing World: 3A's to Fight them (Awareness, Acceptance, Assurance)' the vision behind this being sensitizing the students of the prevalent mental issues that exists in the society and in the due process breaking the social stigma that is attached to this. Also inculcating and addressing the problems that are faced by law students and giving them practical solution that can be used in our daily lives to cope with the various factors that tend to deteriorate our mental health. For this very purpose the LAC had called experts in the field of psychology who have prior experience in dealing such matters and with their vast knowledge base could enlighten the young impressible minds, helping them on finding the right way in times of difficulty. The panel that had been called comprised of Dr. Ritu Bhasin, child and human development professional and Ms Shreya Verma, Psychological Counsellor at Symbiosis Centre for Emotional Well being (SCEW). The symposium

also highlighted and discussed the recent Mental Health care Act 2017, elaborating on the various new aspects that it included one of them being the rights of persons with mental illness. The theme of the symposium was 3A's to Fight Mental Health Issues, ' Awareness, Acceptance, Assurance'

Keeping in mind the objective of the session, that is to sensitize the law students of the prevailing mental health issues that exists in the society while at the same time breaking the stigma associated with it, this theme fulfills the issue.

It highlights three essential aspects that are required to fulfill the goal. First, spreading awareness regarding what is mental health ? what are the issues faced regarding mental health ? Spreading awareness, informing them about the importance of a sound mental health and the consequences of ignoring ones mental health.

At the same time , being simply aware of the problem is not enough, acting in the required direction to solve the problem is equally crucial. Highlighting the second term, that is, *acceptance*. *Accepting* that mental disorders are prevalent and actually exist in the society. Even a so called happy looking person can be suffering from anxiety and facing difficulties in managing stress. Acceptance needs to take place in a two fold manner. First that even one self can be suffering from a mental issue and secondly, your friend or family member can also be a victim. Living in denial will only make the problem worse.

This brings us to the third term: *assurance*. People suffering from mental issues need reassurance and faith that they are not alone. Assurance is needed that they won't be discriminated against and also to those who are yet to confess their own problems.

2.OBJECTIVE

The primary objective behind this session is to sensitise the young law students of the prevailing mental health issues that exist in the young people while at the same time breaking the stigma associated with it. The secondary objective were as follows :

- i. To spread awareness regarding what is mental health, what are the issues faced regarding mental health , spreading awareness regarding the importance of sound mental health.
- ii. After knowledge, comes the ability to implement and solve the persisting problem. Acceptance is the first step towards this. Acceptance should takes place in a twofold manner.
- iii. To assure people who are suffering from mental illness to come forward and share their stories and enable them to seek proper medication and help to overcome the illness.

3.PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS

To execute the objectives of the event, legal aid volunteers along with para-legal volunteers:

- Made vibrant and colorful posters to attract the attention of the students.
- Made badges from green ribbon, a symbol of mental health organization.
- Read and did a thorough analysis of the Mental Health care Act, 2017
- Invited experts from the field of psychology, selecting the right resource person.
- Prepared various presentations to be showcased highlighting the various nuances of mental health.

Various topics were assigned to the volunteers, and each took turns to present their assigned topics.

4. CONDUCTING THE EVENT

The event was conducted in the seminar hall of Symbiosis Law School, Noida. The main focus was to target the law school students and equip them with the ability to take care of their mental health even under difficult circumstances. First , a list of cohesive topics were laid down, keeping in mind the age and understanding of the target audience, the list included major depression, impact of social media on teenagers and highlighting the issue that even celebrities suffer from mental illness. These issues were presented by legal aid volunteers, during the informal session. A small informal session was held before the discussion to lighten the atmosphere and to

make the audience comfortable before the actual discussion. Legal aid volunteers presented these issues, in the form of verbal as well as visual representation. The informal session was succeeded by the formal discussion for which we had called experts from the field of psychology. Resource person Dr. Ritu Bhasin and Shreya Verma highlighted the nuances and intricacies which are often overlooked by the students and people in general regarding mental health. Such issues if handled at early stage, can prevent a major harm from happening. Various signs of mental illness were also discussed. The audience was enlightened by discussing various practical steps that can easily be inculcated in ones daily lives to combat stress and prevent mental illness from settling in. Not only were the psychological aspects discussed but the symposium also included a discussion on the recent legislation that was passed by the parliament, the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. a small presentation regarding the same was prepared by the para-legal volunteer Tanya Jaani. She discussed the various aspects included in the act with special emphasis on the advance directives and the rights that are available to people suffering from mental illness. These discussions gave way to a Ms Neelu Mainwal , the Civil Judge Senior Division & Secretary DLSA explaining the new features of this legislation. The symposium ended with a question answer session where a few students asked questions regarding the problems they faced, seeking measures as to how to solve them. A few courageous learners recited their own experiences enriching others in the process.

5. RESPONSE OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Initially the team members found it difficult to get the audience to participate. But likely such a reaction was already anticipated from the audience. Therefore before the discussion by the resource person, an informal session was held to make the audience comfortable and to lighten the atmosphere. The presentation made by the volunteers included asking question from the audience and taking their perspective about various aspects. The questions were duly answered by the members of the audience and enhanced the communication between the volunteers and the audience. Helping the audience to open up to the issue of the mental health. Some of the member of the audience came forward with their own experiences of times when they had faced a mental health issue. This helped in sensitising the audience that anybody can suffer from mental health problem, helping in fulfilling the third objective of the symposium. At the end, a question answer session was conducted in which the students actively participated, some of them were also able to solve their problem.

6. FUTURE PLAN OF ACTION

The team would suggest that such symposiums should be a quarterly affair if not monthly. Workshops with experts coming and discussing various aspects of mental health are very important. The workshops will be organized in smaller batches as to give more safe

and secure environment to the students, which will further encourage them to share their experiences.

7. SUGGESTIONS/FEEDBACK

Issues like mental health are grave in nature and need to be handled with care and only under the supervision of experts. Such symposiums should not be a onetime affair and rather should be held regularly from different batches and smaller groups so that people are able to come and discuss such issues freely. Knowledge of such topics should be discussed by the experts as to erase any confusion in the young minds. More time should be given to question - answer session or one can even conduct an open house sessions where anyone interested can walk in and benefit from such a symposium.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The volunteers along with the audience were educated upon the various measures that one can take to maintain life -work balance, effective steps to understand the circumstances when one starts feeling low and how to combat them. Overall, the topic of mental health was discussed freely, many students from the audience also participated, sharing their own experiences. This fact highlights that the symposium was successful in breaking the taboo associated with mental illness.

Moments Captured





