



MEHELP INDIA
FOUNDATION



MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONSHIP PROGRAMME

(For Schools and Colleges)

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MEHELP INDIA FOUNDATION

(Registered charity in Kerala, India)
Promoting mental health literacy and
substance abuse awareness programme in
schools and Colleges.



CHAMPIONSHIP PROGRAMME

(FOR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES)

AIM

This is a unique programme aimed at developing a whole school and college approach on mental health, wellbeing and resilience in students and teachers in Schools and Colleges in Kerala. Our aim is to enable and enhance mental health literacy and substance abuse awareness using a whole school/college approach and to build mental health and well-being champions. The rationale for our focus on Kerala is based on the higher prevalence of mental ill-health (14.4%), suicide (12.5%) and higher prevalence alcohol and substance abuse in the state.

CONTEXT

Evidence shows that one in every five students in the 12-19 age group in Kerala suffer from psychological distress, based on various studies from across the state. Children and young people are also vulnerable to being bullied, sexually assaulted and to the widespread use of psychoactive substances.

The World Mental Health Report 2022 (WHO, 2022) highlight the need to transform our attitudes, actions and approaches to promote and protect mental health and to provide and care for those in need. Despite the high literacy rate in Kerala, mental health stigma is widespread in the State.

METHOD/ APPROACH

MeHeLP Mental health (MH) championship programme will engage with selected students and teachers in schools and colleges with a 12-week learning programme using creative methodology for learning engagement. MeHeLP mental health champions (students and teachers) will engage with other students and teachers using a peer-learning model through a mental health and wellbeing forum set up in schools and colleges. This will be a rolling programme where senior students and teachers will engage with junior students, and the wider teaching and support staff, thus creating a whole school approach for developing mental health literacy (including substance abuse awareness) and behaviour change for wellbeing and resilience. Our pilot MH championship programme in selected schools and colleges will be conducted systematically using pre and post base-line measurements of mental health literacy and substance abuse awareness, with monitoring of attitude and behaviour changes at regular intervals over a period of twelve months from the start of the programme. Our MH championship programme will have international engagement with Indian and UK based academics and mental health experts. We will conduct evaluations with teachers and mental health champions (group and individual meetings as appropriate) to explore teachers' and students' perspectives, role in the school, their work, and to explore key individual and collective strengths and benefits, risks and needs and any further support requirements. We will follow ethical and safeguarding policies and measures for working with students and teachers with the necessary approvals (with parents) and regular feedback to school heads/ leaders.

OUTCOME

The key outcome of MeHeLP MH championship programme is the creation of knowledgeable students and teachers on mental health literacy (including substance abuse awareness), equipped with the ability to promote self and others' mental health, well-being and resilience. The MeHeLP MH championship programme provides added value to the educational ethos of the schools and colleges in developing socially responsible citizens with sound knowledge of mental health and wellbeing in their life journey.

IMPACT

MeHeLP MH championship programme will have a lasting impact on the school or college students, staff, and the environment by creating an interrogative space that brings together student/ teacher/ support staff attitudes, in the understanding of mental health, wellbeing and substance abuse awareness, in a way that allows schools and colleges to collectively imagine possible solutions for eliminating mental health stigma and promote help seeking and support. MeHeLP MH Championship programme will facilitate the development of fearless mental health and wellbeing dialogues and, explore novel initiatives for improving the education, health and living conditions of many young people and their families in Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that,

THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH!

The MeHeLP school mental health championship programme aims to build a task force, called mental health champions, with teachers and students to enable them to understand about mental health and wellbeing, and to recognize signs and symptoms of mental distress and illness. The students who receive the training will acquire the knowledge about their own mental health and wellbeing; and to recognise and support someone in need due to mental distress. Our programme focus on developing a healthy life style and will provide knowledge on creating a mentally healthy life style by highlighting the risks and dangers of stress, alcohol and substance abuse. This will also enable students and teachers to gain more knowledge its impact on mental health and wellbeing; and develop self-help approaches for reducing mental distress for maintaining good mental health and resilience. They will also gain good understanding of the kind of help that are available, and also ways of reducing mental health stigma. Our aim is to promote sustainable knowledge transfer through enabling mental health champions in schools through peer group learning, and senior group students being responsible for knowledge exchange to junior year groups.

Mental health is one of the most important determinants of our health and wellbeing. It influences the way we think, feel, learn, behave, work and interact with our family and friends.

According to the World Health Organisation mental health is not just the absence of any mental illness. Rather it is a state of mind in which we are able to recognise our abilities, strengths and weaknesses and use them wisely to deal with various life stressors and lead a productive and functional life contributing to self as well as the community.



WHY IS MENTAL HEALTH IMPORTANT?

Good mental health helps us to overcome and manage our stress, tension, anxiety, anger and aggression, our sadness and feelings of depression as well as negative thinking and emotions that affect our everyday life. Good mental health helps us to create that inner strength and capacity in ourselves to support self-awareness, understanding and development of our abilities to withstand the stress and tension and all the negativity that affects us, not just in our personal lives, but in our family, work and social life as well. 1 in 7 people in India are affected by one or more mental health conditions (mainly anxiety and depression). Mental health and mental illness are frequently used in our everyday conversations and life as if they mean the same thing. In the course of our lifetime, not all of us will experience mental illness, but all of us struggle at some point or at many times in our lives with stress and tension, sadness and anxiety and other events happening around us which **challenge our mental wellbeing**. This is just like the challenges on our physical health and wellbeing. So, when we talk about our mental health, we are talking about our mental wellbeing: our emotions, our thoughts and our feelings, our ability to learn and solve problems in our everyday life. Mental wellbeing also means how we overcome difficulties, overcome substance abuse, how we deal with our social connections and our understanding of the family, friends and the world around us. People from all sections of society including people from rural and urban communities, and people from minority communities have the ability to create this mental well-being.

CONTEXT

Evidence shows that one in every five students in the 12-19 age group in Kerala suffer from psychological distress, based on various studies from across the state. Children and young people are also vulnerable to being bullied, sexually assaulted and to the widespread use of psychoactive substances. The World Mental Health Report 2022 (WHO) highlight the **need to transform our attitudes, actions and approaches to promote and protect mental health and to provide and care for those in need**. Promoting better mental health is each and everybody's responsibility, and not just for the health care systems or Governments.

The National Mental Health Survey of India 2017 shows an overall weighted prevalence for any mental morbidity of 13.7%. This survey also shows that residents from urban areas had a greater prevalence of mental health disorders and highlights that people from lower income quintiles also had a greater prevalence of one or more mental disorders. Kerala, with an estimated population of 36 million, is home to almost 3% of India's population and its land is three times more densely settled than the rest of the country. Kerala has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.79, which is "very high" and the highest of any state in India. It has the highest literacy rates among all Indian states at 98.9%, and a life expectancy of 74 years which is among the highest in the country.

Kerala has one of the lowest fertility rates in India, which has caused a demographic shift as seen in many developed countries with 12% of its population over the age of 60.

Despite the health advances in Kerala, 14.4% of population aged 18 and above experience mental ill-health once in their lifetime, with 12.5% of individuals with suicidal risk. This is the highest of all the states of India and is almost twice the national rate of 6.4%. This elevated rate is attributed to the high number of people suffering from depression in the state. Mental health experts link the rise of depression to Kerala's fast socioeconomic transformations. These have coincided with decline of the joint family system, discrepancy between high standards of education and low employment, and labour migration to the Gulf States, resulting in "gulf depression" of these migrants and of the women left behind. Moreover, the gap between high expectations, and often harsh socioeconomic realities, the heavy consumption of alcohol, and pressure exerted on children by the school system, also reportedly contribute to depression. In a state well known for its health care and general high development indicators, depression is a challenge. Rates of suicide and depression show the shortcomings of the "Kerala model" and indexes the disappointment over the unfulfilled political and social promises in the face of reality.

Kerala has already demonstrated many community-based models in mental health and anthropologists have documented the range of psychiatric, biomedical, ayurvedic, and religious healing practices available. However, despite the psychiatric pluralism, the richness of mental health services and the high HDI, stigma about mental illness is still widespread. In response to societal stigma, people with mental ill-health can internalise public perceptions and become reluctant to approach mental health facilities. In some cultural contexts, stigma is so intense that mental illness is viewed as reflecting poorly on family lineage and creates challenges for marriage and economic prospects for self and others in the family. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop mental health literacy programme that are responsive to the local cultural, economic and social contexts.

The critical challenge to the Health and Education policy-makers in Kerala (and in India) is to identify and promote a policy response to the social, environmental and economic determinants of health, which requires a multisectoral approach with health as a human rights perspective. Given the vulnerabilities of school and College students, school teachers and college leaders will have to take on the task of tackling and managing the mental health and wellbeing of teenagers.

Moreover, the adolescent and young adulthood period is a valuable opportunity to facilitate a deepened understanding of mental health and mental ill-health issues, the life threatening dangers of substance abuse, and to build resilience and tackle stigmatising attitudes to mental distress. MeHeLP mental health championship programme therefore is designed to enable a whole school and College approach to meet these challenges.

The World Mental Health Report 2002 highlighted that promotion and prevention interventions work by identifying the individual, social and structural determinants of mental health, and then intervening to reduce risks, build resilience and establish supportive environments for mental health.

Prevention and intervention should be seen as two sides of the same coin, as it is the key requisite for promoting better mental health of children, teenagers/ young people, adults and older people. Infancy, childhood and adolescence are ages of both vulnerability and opportunity in mental health. **Nurturing, caregiving and supportive learning environments can be hugely protective of future mental health.** On the other hand, adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of experiencing mental health conditions.

Two key factors improving mental health literacy of young people consist:



Implementing school and college-based programmes, including anti-bullying interventions.



School and college-based social and emotional learning programmes which are among the most effective promotion strategies.

AIM

To enable and enhance mental health literacy and substance abuse awareness in adolescents and young adults using a whole school and college-based approach to develop mental health and well-being champions.

OBJECTIVES

- Impart knowledge on mental health, substance abuse awareness, wellbeing and resilience
- Enhance mental health literacy and substance abuse awareness among school students, teachers and support staff.
- Enhance mental health literacy and substance abuse awareness among college students, academic and support staff.
- Develop mental health champions through sharing of knowledge and practices through peer learning workshops.
- Enable students to act as mental health champions and to train junior batches
- Establish mental health and substance abuse awareness Forum in Schools and colleges.
- Enable teachers and support staff to train and support other teaching and support staff in schools and colleges.
- Integrate mental health literacies and the health risks of substance abuse in the school/ college curriculum.

MEHELP MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONSHIP PROGRAMME



In the school context our plan is to focus on students from class 7 to 10 (11 to 15/16 years of age). In colleges we will explore first Year Undergraduate or first year PG programme students. MeHeLP Team will train, assist and facilitate the formation of mental health and substance abuse awareness champions through:

- Workshop sessions on mental health literacy and substance abuse, which will be conducted for a group of self-selected/ nominated students, teachers and support staff.
- A 24-hour face to face/ online learning programme facilitated by the MeHeLP team. The 24-hour program will be divided into ten two-hour interactive workshop sessions through each week over a period of 12 weeks.

SELECTION OF STUDENTS AND DEVELOPING OF MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS

We will work with school and college authorities about providing the information about Mental Health Championship programme to students and teachers. We will then ask students who are interested to be involved in the mental health championship programme to volunteer/ nominate themselves. We will hold a meeting (with the Headteacher, Heads of Departments, and /or their representatives) about the operationalisation of developing mental health champions. Information letters will be sent to parents through the institution to obtain consent of student participation in the championship programme. The selected students and trained teachers will together form the participants for mental health championship programme. We anticipate that this will consist of a gender balanced group of students (n=20) and teachers/ support staff (n=20) per institution. The numbers may vary depending on the interest and size of the institution.

MEHELP MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

A combination of face to face/ online training program will be provided for students. We will plan 24 hours session in total, with each session covering various dimensions of mental health literacy, substance abuse awareness, mental health, well-being and resilience. We will conduct the workshop programme using creative and engaging methodologies such as films, storytelling, music and others. These will be interactive sessions with real opportunities to connect with their awareness, knowledge, cultural heritage, local norms and practices. The Mental health Champions will be encouraged to train the next batch of students in the coming years to ensure the sustainability of the 'expert' student mental health champions and integration of this model to the school vision and strategy. MeHeLP Team will facilitate and support this activity to build capacity of the Mental health champions. Teachers will be encouraged to train other teachers and support staff in schools and colleges. Teachers and students who have undertaken the mental health championship programme will be able to reflect, understand and work with practices for developing wellbeing thoughts and behaviours, as well as understanding thoughts and behaviours of distress.

Information letters for self-selection of students from schools and colleges will be sent to parents through their institutions. We will only include students whose parents have given consent for them to be in the MH championship programme.

Refresher Program: We will offer a refresher programme for students and teachers as required after discussion and agreement with the school or college.



DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS

The trained teachers and students will act as champions/ "buddies" to other students, teachers and support staff. They will have to take initiative in interacting with students and identifying vulnerable ones. The identified students have to be given extra care and support from the teachers through regular contact and mentoring. If any mental health issues are identified MeHeLP team will signpost to appropriate professional help and support as required.

Each year as new students join; the existing team will organise and deliver the mental health championship programme to the new group. This will enable the school/ colleges to develop this as a citizenship programme on mental health, using a whole school/college approach promoting citizenship and wellbeing of its staff and students. Such an approach will ensure sustainability of mental health championship programme in the school/ college using innovative activities for mental health promotion.

Schools/ Colleges should set up a Co-ordinator/ Resource person who will be the main point of MeHeLP team contact for communication and co-ordination of the programme in the institution. The Co-ordinator will oversee the operationalisation of the MH championship programme with the Head or Principal of the institution.

EVALUATION

We will conduct quarterly meetings with teachers and mental health champions (group and individual meetings as appropriate) to explore teachers' and students' perspectives, role in the school, their work, and to explore key strengths, risks and/ needs and any further support requirements. All champions will be asked to keep a narrative diary/ photos/ stories/ object of their work for feedback in the weekly championship programme, and quarterly meetings.

This will be evaluated at the end of 12 months to explore its impact on:

- (1) attitudes and support models adopted by teachers
- (2) the perspectives and wellbeing of the MH champions
- (3) how the champions have provided support to other pupils in the school
- (4) work by the teachers and MHL champions to the wider community
- (5) effective training and sustainability of this model in the school.

We will use Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLq) for pre and post-assessment with teachers and students.



OUTCOMES

The MeHeLP School mental health championship programme will enable and empower students and teachers with:

- Up to date knowledge and practices for promoting mental health and wellbeing, and to abstain from drug abuse (self-development and supporting others)
- Equipping students and teachers with self-help practices to promote mental health and wellbeing.
- Identifying vulnerable children, identify early warning signs to support them with teachers and their parents.
- Being a 'beacon school/ college through student and staff centred leadership programmes on mental health and wellbeing.
- Create dialogues with parents and parental groups about mental health and wellbeing.
- Eradicate widespread and deep-rooted mental health stigma, and create individual and collective understanding of mental health, illness and help seeking.
- Enable the monitoring of 'fit for purpose' support and help for vulnerable students and staff.
- As each year a new batch of students are trained, over a period of years there will be a large group of youth who will be mental health champions, promoting better mental health, wellbeing and resilience.
- Supporting a whole school approach to promote mental health literacies, substance abuse awareness, and mental health champions.
- Award of mental health championship participation certificates and awards. Recognition through badges and the organisation of peer group engagement events.
- Continuous evaluation of mental health championship and mental health literacy programme.

For schools and colleges, MeHeLP mental health championship programme will enable it to be a 'gem' and a 'leader' in promoting the mental health of its students and staff, thus promoting it as a caring and wellbeing school - as mental health champions.



OUTPUTS

At the end of the programme, we will produce:

-  Named MH champions (students, teachers and support staff) with good knowledge and understating of mental health literacy and substance abuse awareness who can play an active role in facilitating mental health and well-being in the institution.
-  Summary report of the activities and the evaluations of the programme in the institution.
-  Creative outputs by the participants in the form of digital stories, blogs/ written materials/ painting or other artefacts.
-  Academic publication of the programme in peer reviewed Indian and international journals in Education, Psychology, Sociology, and mental health.
-  Wider public and scholarly engagements through MeHeLP India foundation website, newsletters, conferences and news events.

CONTRACTS AND PAYMENTS

Upon approval, we will set up a contract with the Head of the School or/ College with the details of the cost, programme, payment and delivery dates.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,

Contact

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