

Draft

**Best Practice PAHUNCH: Support for Haryana Students During COVID – 19
Pandemic**

PAHUNCH: Support for Haryana Students During COVID – 19 Pandemic

With the largest youth population in the world, India has a large human resource in the form of students which needs to be handled with extreme responsibility and care. Due to the sudden drastic changes in their lives, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, there was uncertainty in the minds of young students belonging to lower middle classes and economically weaker families regarding their future. These students were the most affected, as they had a more uncertain future as compared to their counterparts belonging to better-off families. The impact had created greater stress in their already tough lives. There were multiple other external factors at play which further aggravated the problem:

1. The changed familial structure, from joint - families to nuclear ones, has already shrunk the emotional support-system at homes.
2. At this age, they go through physiological and hormonal changes in their bodies which increase their desire and urge to experiment new and the prohibited things.
3. Their move from schools to colleges puts them in a transition phase and most of them are not able to handle this newly acquired freedom.
4. Peer pressure induces in them a false sense of esteem and pressure to live up to it.
5. There is lack of discretion in using and watching the vast unwanted material available online. Their tender age cannot take the right decisions, most of the time.

State Initiative to address the concern

The UGC issued a letter to Vice-Chancellors of all universities (appended below) of the country to protect mental health and well-being of students during and after the Covid-19 outbreak. They recommended the following procedures:

1. Set up help-lines for mental health, psychological concerns and well-being of students in the universities and colleges.
2. Create help-groups of students headed by senior faculty to help students in need.
3. Regular interaction and mentoring of students by the universities and colleges.

Implementers and Collaborators of the Program

The Department of Higher Education, under the guidance of the University Grants Commission (Ref: D.O. No Secy (HE) / MHRD/ 2020 dated 4th April, 2020), was the key implementer in this program. The Department of Higher Education collaborated with YourDost Counselling Helpline and Touchbase.live Web portal to implement the program.

The letter from University Grants Commission on Mental Health & Well-Being of Students during and after the Covid-19 outbreak:



प्रो. राजनीश जैन
सचिव
Prof. Rajnish Jain
Secretary



विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग
University Grants Commission
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F. No 1-1/2020(Secy)

5th April, 2020

Subject: Mental Health & Well-Being of Students during and after COVID-19 outbreak.

Ref: D.O. No Secy(HE)/MHRD/2020 dated 4th April, 2020

Dear Madam/Sir,

The University Grants Commission has been issuing regular advisories requesting HEIs to take all possible preventive and precautionary measures to ensure the safety and security of students, whether on campus in hostels or outside, as we confront the COVID-19 outbreak. During the period of national lockdown, it is equally important to address any kind of mental health and psychosocial concerns of the student community during and after COVID-19.

Therefore, in order to reassure the student community to avoid any kind of stress or panic in the prevailing situation vis-a-vis their studies, health and related issues, Universities and Colleges are requested to take the following measures for the mental health, psychosocial aspects and well-being of the students:

1. Set up help lines for mental health, psychosocial concerns and well-being of students in Universities / Colleges. To be regularly monitored and managed by Counsellors and other identified faculty members.
2. Regular mentoring of students through interactions, and appeals/letters by the Universities/Colleges to remain calm and stress free. This can be achieved through telephones, e-mails, digital and social media platforms.
3. Form COVID-19 help groups of students, headed by hostel wardens / senior faculty who can identify friends/classmates in need of help and provide immediate necessary help.

4. Share the following video links of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/> on your University/College website, and with students and faculty via e-mail, through social media like Facebook, WhatsApp and twitter etc.:

- Practical tips to take care of your Mental Health during the Stay In <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qH83WJslD8w&feature=youtu.be>
- Minding our minds during the COVID-19 <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/MindingourmindsduringCoronaeditedat.pdf>
- Various Health Experts on how to manage Mental health & Well Being during COVID-19 outbreak <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inKhtSchn24&feature=youtu.be>
- Behavioural Health: Psycho-Social toll free helpline - 8804611007

The implementation of the above measures may be regularly monitored and actions taken in this regard may be submitted on the University Activity Monitoring Portal of UGC at ugc.ac.in/uamp.

Stay Indoors. Stay Healthy. Stay Safe.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



(Rajnish Jain)

To

The Vice Chancellors of all the Universities

The Principals of all the Colleges

The Department of Higher Education, Haryana realized the urgency and quickly responded to the program. Students were feeling mental anxiety and stress which had emanated from the increased uncertainty due to the discontinuation of their studies. The youth in colleges belong to a critical age-group and, their psychological problems, if left unaddressed in this impressionable age, could lead to development of unwholesome personalities. Hence, it was imperative for them to get a safe and secure system to share their anxieties and psychological situations. A helpline for the psychological assistance and humane empathy, through networked counseling, was created by the department and rightly named it 'Pahunch'.

With due observance of Social-distancing during this period, Shri Kanwar Pal, Education Minister, Haryana launched a 24x7 helpline, PAHUNCH, via video conferencing from his residence, for the students of higher education to cope up with stress and other mental issues that had cropped up due to Covid-19 crisis. Shri Ankur Gupta, Principal Secretary Higher Education and Shri Ajit Balaji Joshi, Director General Higher Education, Haryana along with the 180 Psychology Professors were also present through video conferencing. PAHUNCH is an online facility that provides the youth, connectivity with over 200 psychological counselors/teachers of Haryana. The students can avail the facility from the safety and comfort of their homes.

Through Touchbase.live web portal, the college students could also get in touch with mental health counselors through video calling or voice calling at the YourDost Counseling Helpline and openly discuss their problems and seek guidance.

The program was started on 9th April, 2020. The program covers whole of Haryana, with counselors from all the districts and is headquartered in Panchkula.

Govt. of Haryana **DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

TouchBase Live

Feeling stressed or have queries or uncertainty ?

Keep your **COVID-19 anxiety** at bay with Haryana Government's Web and Tele-counseling solutions
YourDost & TouchBase.live

Now connect remotely with about 200 psychological counsellors/teachers of Haryana, from the safety and comfort of your home.

Get in touch with credible mental health counsellors through video call on the **touchbase.live** web portal or call at **YourDost** Counselling Helpline.

So what are you waiting for?

Register online at
<https://touchbase.live/> or call at 1800-313-2023

Solution provided by Findability Sciences, YourDost

Department of Higher Education, Haryana

FOLLOW
@highereduhy

It will be pertinent to mention that the department had piloted a Counseling Helpline with M/ s Your Dost in four government colleges to address the increasing incidence of mental health issues, stress, anxiety, depression, dissatisfaction and lack of motivation amongst students. But during this period of national lockdown, it was decided to extend the services of helpline for all students of colleges in Haryana. Today this program is giving support to 157 government colleges, 97 aided colleges and 88 self-financing colleges covering more than 3,00,000 students in the state.

While no formal data is available, the helpline is being used by many students every day, and the program appears to be a big success. Hundreds of students have received counseling already, and will continue to do until required. There are minimal resource implications as the professors/teachers who are counseling are not preoccupied with their regular teaching. They are highly educated and have a lot of experience to handle and understand the mental situation of the students.

Results of the Practice

This helpline is already being used extensively by the students. Psychological counseling is provided round the clock, which is helping in mitigation of stress and anxiety among the students. It is also helping them in career guidance.

1. The results have directly benefitted by reducing mental stress, anxiety, and other mental illnesses among the most important section of our society – the youth.
2. It has provided an anonymous and less stigmatizing platform for students to address rather sensitive issues.
3. There are indirect benefits also such as spreading awareness amongst the community about mental-health issues.
4. This program has helped in fostering a better relationship between students and their mentors.
5. It has empowered students and taught them to tackle with their problems, be they mental or physical.

Lessons Learnt

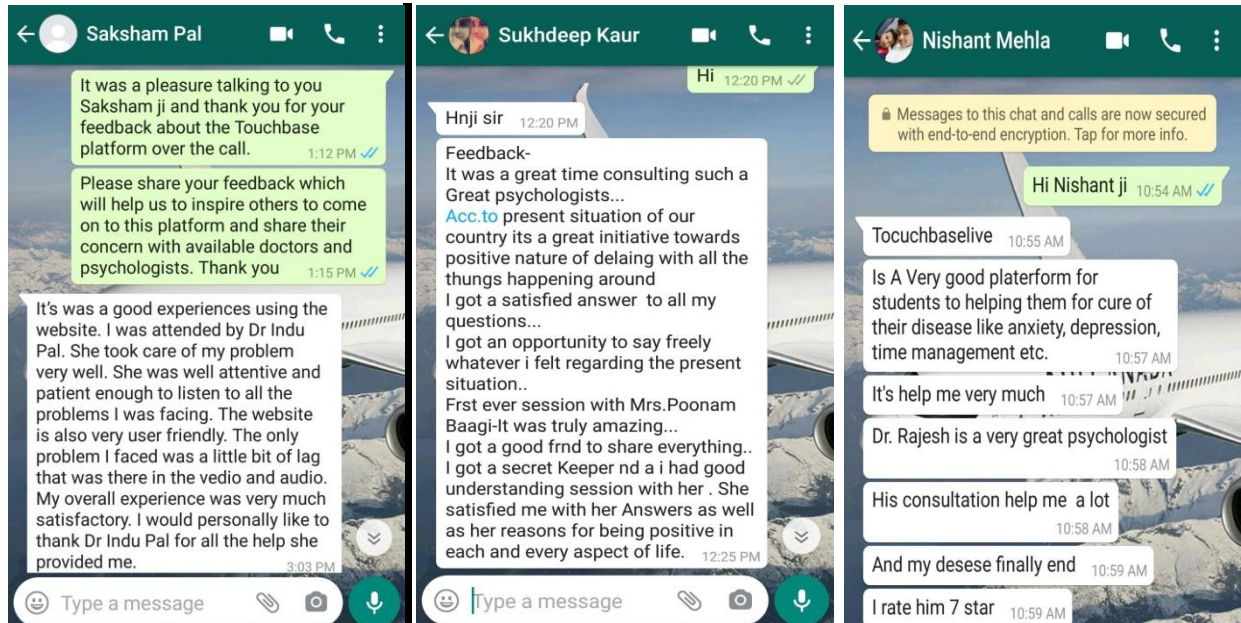
Discussion of psychological problems is still considered a taboo and is unknowingly associated to mental illnesses due to which the youth sometimes feel hesitant to share their anxieties and problems with anyone. So, they needed the assurance that their problems would be dealt discreetly. This on-line counseling service guarantees them a platform to share their fears and anxieties without any hesitation.

Despite the guarantee of privacy, not all the students going through stress call the helpline may be due to lack of confidence or for a feeling of guilt and shame about their problems. This suggests that those who actually need guidance the most, might not be calling.

1. This practice is worth emulation because it provides the confidence to the youth that they are the most important asset for their families as well as the nation.
2. Psychological problems are common and can affect anyone.
3. There are solutions to every problem.
4. There is always someone to help the youth, specially the students, if not personally, at least virtually.
5. They need not confide in a person and can avail counseling without disclosing their identity.

Feedback

Reviews were taken regularly from the students/ people who used these counseling helplines to seek support by calling the experts. The practice was appreciated by all in the state. A few views from the actual beneficiaries are:



Themes that Emerged from the First Report

This report was prepared, when starting April 10th, the department had completed more than 700 sessions. An analysis of the common themes, that emerged from the sessions, was done and the following observations were made:

- 18% of the sessions were by the students who were worried about their exams, future jobs, career choices and also wanted to know about the schedule of their semester exams.
- 17% of the sessions were people who were worried about not getting adequate ration for their family.
- 17% were by daily-wagers or small business-owners who had lost their income due to lockdown. They were struggling financially and were worried about the same.
- 16% of the sessions were by college students who were finding it difficult to learn from online classes and also mentioned about not having proper study material.
- 5% were the professors from various colleges, who wanted to understand the objective of this helpline so as to educate their students about the same. Some of them were also finding it difficult to upload forms and documents in different portals.

In addition to the major issues identified above, following are some of the other themes that emerged during the sessions are:

- Some people were suffering from cold, cough and fever and were anxious about being infected with the Corona Virus.
- A few students were worried about their relationship with their partners due to the lockdown.
- Some called- in to discuss the conflicts and challenges they were facing within their families due to the lockdown.
- There were calls from migrants to discuss how they have been stranded away from their homes without any job, money and food.
- A few called- in to report the malpractices being carried by shopkeepers and traders in their areas due to lockdown.
- Some students wanted to discuss the challenges they were facing due to the lockdown – poor time- management, feeling lazy, bored, unproductive and over- sleeping .
- A few students reached- out to share the unfair treatment they had received during their encounters with the police- officials.
- Some people called- in to check how they could obtain the movement- passes during the lockdown period for medical treatment.
- Others called in to enquire about the Shiksha setu app, how to download, register and use the app.
- A few wanted to report illegal sale of liquor in their region.
- A Muslim family called- in to report and discuss how they were being ill- treated by their neighbors. They were being blamed for spreading the disease and were worried about their safety. This family was encouraged to stay strong, reach out to local police and seek support. The experts have been rightfully trained and equipped with the right information to address all the concerns that are being received. People are being counseled to stay firm and motivated during the tough times.
- People facing difficulty due to being unproductive, angry with the current situation, lonely, having difficulty in managing relationships etc. are also being guided wisely to use this time effectively, staying productive, taking precautions, managing their relationships, anger, loneliness and focusing on the future.
- Students have been asked to constantly refer to the DHE website and their respective colleges to stay updated with the current happenings like online- classes, study materials and exam schedules. Some of them have also been given reference of the genuine online- internship websites and companies to cope up with the financial- crisis during this time.
- Students reaching out for career confusion, job opportunities etc. were also guided accordingly and were equipped with skills, resources to look for jobs and internships.
- Daily wagers, small business-owners and people who had lost their jobs have been encouraged to stay strong. Counselors explored options for them also. They have been educated about getting financial support through various schemes like Parivar Pehchan Patra, Mukhya Mantri Parivar Smridhi Yojna, Haryana Building and other Construction Workers Welfare Board etc.

- People, who had informed about unfair distribution of ration and other malpractices in their areas, were also guided to reach out to the district authorities through the help lines for support. They were also guided about financial assistance.
- People not feeling well were told about the helpline numbers district- wise, Ambulance and COVID-19 helpline numbers so that they could get themselves checked.
- All those who were looking for movement- passes during the lockdown were educated how to fill- up the online- forms.

Second Report

The next report was prepared by the department after two weeks. They had completed more than 860 sessions by now. The analysis was done on the basis of number of calls and the feedbacks which were received by the actual beneficiaries.

More Reviews of the Students from Different Government Colleges of Haryana:

Thank you mam for solving my problems.

~ Anonymous, Govt PG College - Gurugram

The expert was solution oriented.

~ Jitendra, JNL Faridabad

The expert's behaviour was good and gave good guidance.

~ Manju Duggal, Govt PG College - Panchkula

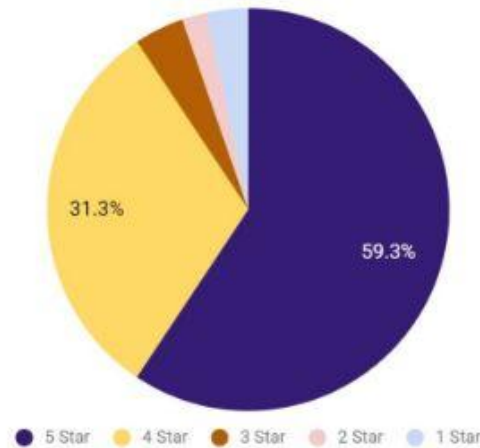
The workshop was motivating and beneficial for our future plans.

~ Anonymous, Govt PG College - Gurugram

I want to rate this helpline services positively as it is very useful in these times and it is useful for all of them who need support. Thank you wholeheartedly.

~ Prabhan, Hisar

Users' Ratings



Going by the ratings received, it was revealed that students are taking help about their career, relationships and self-improvement and are finding it quite helpful.

Conclusion

Helpline services are a very good example of “collaborative working to provide a more personalized service for people”. The evaluation and the feedback shows that helplines play an important role in supporting people who are at risk of developing mental health problems, or those seeking information, advice or support. Their anonymous and confidential nature provides a less stigmatizing way of seeking mental health support.

Recommendations

1. The counselor should be experienced and well-trained to handle these sensitive issues; otherwise the students will lose confidence and might end up feeling worse than before.
2. There should be total confidentiality and trust between the student and his/ her counsellor.
3. Some callers may expect expert medical advice which the counselors must be able to handle.
4. The means of communication could be extended beyond phone calls to emails, letters, chat rooms, forums, and video calls.
5. The helpline could be active 24x7, as the student might be alone to share his/ her thoughts only at night.
6. There must be a regular updated comprehensive guide to the current mental-health help lines.

