

Integrated Approach to Promoting Positive Mental Health, Resilience, and Wellbeing Report of Exemplar Visit to Aligarh Muslim University

An Exemplar Visit of the following was held to the Aligarh Muslim University under the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education initiative “Integrated Approach to Promoting Positive Mental Health, Resilience, and Wellbeing in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)” on 13 September 2024 at 10.30 a.m. at the Committee Room, Vice Chancellor’s Office, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh:

- (i) Rina Sonowal Kouli, Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India
- (ii) Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Senior Psychiatrist and Program Director Expressions India
- (iii) Dr. Rushi, Head, Department of All India Institute of Speech & Hearing, Mysuru
- (iv) Prof. Kumar Suresh, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi

The following business was transacted in the presence of AMU Officials, staff and students as follows:

1. Prof. Naima Khatoon, Vice Chancellor, AMU (In chair)
2. Mr. Mohd. Imran, Registrar, AMU
3. Prof. Rafiuddin, DSW, AMU
4. Prof. Veena Maheshwari, Dean, Faculty of Medicine, AMU
5. Prof. Seema Hakim, Coordinator, Medical Education Unit, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, J.N. Medical College, AMU
6. Prof. Mohd. Shah Alam, Chairperson, Department of Psychology, AMU
7. Prof. Naseem Ahmad Khan, Chairperson, Department of Social Work, AMU
8. Dr. Deoshri Akhouri, Department of Psychiatry, JNMC, AMU
9. Dr. Faisal Shan, Department of Psychiatry, JNMC, AMU
10. Dr. Faiza Abbasi, Director, UGC Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre, AMU (Coordinator)
11. 08 students of UG and PG level from the disciplines of Psychiatry, Psychology, Chemistry and Engineering were also present. Of these 05 students were girls and 03 students were boys.

Discussion

- At the outset Ms. Rina Sonowal Kouli, Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, highlighted the need for Mental Health Awareness and wellness of academic staff and students in the HEIs. She also said that Central Universities like Aligarh Muslim University can set an example for other HEIs to follow. She enunciated the purpose of the visit as above.
- Vice Chancellor, Aligarh Muslim University Prof. Naima Khatoon, a Psychologist herself gave her insightful comments on students counselling, research & development in the area of psycho-hygiene and the commitment of AMU as an institution towards Mental Health up keep by taking regular measures like suicide prevention marches etc.
- A presentation was made by Prof. Seema Hakim encompassing the initiatives taken so far by the various AMU Units in events like awareness programmes, talks and Mental Health drives.
- Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, Senior Psychiatrist and Program Director, Expressions India also made a presentation on various concepts of Mental Health resilience and wellbeing. He also shared some best practices from education institutions.
- Dr. Rushi, Head, Department of All India Institute of Speech & Hearing, Mysuru indicated the need for collaborations Lectures experts, and AMU Units for intensifying Mental Health programmes.
- Prof. Kumar Suresh, NIEPA, New Delhi emphasized the need for follow up after such events.

The riveting two-hour discussion at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) was summarized by Mr. Mohammed Imran, IPS, AMU Registrar, focusing on mental health initiatives and holistic student development:

1. **Mental Health Focus:** The University will enhance mental health programs by fostering more interactions, removing the social stigma around seeking help, and potentially launching a helpline offering anonymous support to detect suicidal ideation.
2. **Four-Year Undergraduate Program (FYUP):** Several 4-credit value-added courses (VACs) are being introduced, which could focus on mental health and counselling. This is aimed at integrating well-being into graduate attributes across disciplines.
3. **Faculty of Medicine Initiatives:** Collaboration between the Department of Psychiatry and other organizations is encouraged, with a suggestion to create a community health program. This could be implemented via the Social and Preventive

Medicine's health centers (Urban and Rural) and expanded into the five villages adopted by AMU's Department of Social Work.

4. **Teacher Development:** Continuous professional development for faculty will include courses on student counselling and well-being, with potential credit in UGC's Career Advancement Scheme (CAS).
5. **Halls of Residence:** AMU's hostels, which house around 15,000 students, have vibrant cultures that support co-curricular activities. New student well-being clubs may be established, under the mentorship of wardens and teachers, to further promote mental health.

PS: It was later remarked that **Therapeutic Reading & Film Clubs** are a new initiative that promote reading for therapeutic purposes, featuring books about resilience and hope, such as *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, *The Old Man and the Sea* by Earnest Hemingway and *The Audacity of Hope* by Barack Obama. Films like *Life is Beautiful*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, and *The Pursuit of Happiness* may also be featured to inspire hope. This should essentially include regional language literature too.

The discussion concluded with a visit to AMU's Heritage Square, Maulana Azad Library, and the UGC Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre.

