

Report on Engaging University Faculty for Mental Health of Youth 25th October, 2022

Introduction:

Addressing the need to focus more on the achievement of SDG 3 and its targets that includes mental health wellbeing, Faculty Development Academy (FDA), the training wing of COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI), in collaboration with COMSATS Secretariat Islamabad, organized a Workshop on “**Engaging University Faculty for Mental Health Wellbeing of Youth**”, on 25th October 2022. The event was the continuation of initiative undertaken last year to observe World Mental Health Day through awareness for mental health and well-being of youth. Held at SSBC – CUI, Islamabad, the half day workshop had physical participation of **49** faculty members belonging to CUI campuses including Islamabad, Wah, Attock, Abbotabad, as well as other universities including Islamic International University (IIU), National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Bahria University and National University of Modern Languages (NUML).

Opening the event, Ms. Aafia Malik, Assistant Program Officer, FDA, highlighted the significance of mental health of young generation and the role and importance of teachers in the life of students. Ms. Malik also highlighted the agenda of the workshop to the participants.

Mr. Laeeq Hassan Jaswal, In-charge, FDA shared his welcome address on the occasion, and stressed upon the gravity of mental illness. He especially mentioned the turmoil caused by the un-controlled use of social-media and digital gadgets in young generation which are causing various behavioral disorders not only in young generation but in overall population.

Session – I: Prevailing Mental Health Issues Among Students

To enlighten the faculty members on mental health management of their students, Ms. Sidra Akhtar, Chairperson, Foundation Drug Psychological Rehabilitation Centre, Islamabad, joined as a speaker for both technical sessions of the workshop.

Ms. Akhtar initiated the first session by conducting brief introduction of the faculty members and then she oriented the participants with the actual definition of health and stated that the physically, mentally and socially stable persons are the healthy ones. Moreover, she told the participants the high interdependence of physical and mental health by citing recent researches that clearly showed 80 percent of the physical ailments are due to mental illness, including a fatal disease like cancers. She also shared some facts on mental health, like 80 million people in Pakistan are suffering from psychological disorders and the number is expected to increase vigorously in next three years.

The resource person also shed light on the social stigmas associated with psychological disorders and judgmental behavior of people instead of showing empathy with the sufferers. In particular to targeted population group and agenda of workshop, i.e. youth and role of teachers in their psychological wellbeing, the domain expert highlighted the common disorders in young generation and their possible reasons. Moreover, she stressed upon not to ignore the abnormal behavior and the denial attitude of students and advised not to isolate them. She highlighted the rising trend of favoritism introduced by teachers in educational institutions that it is one of the key causes of emotional and mental disturbance in young generation. According to research, addiction and suicide are the silent problems of Pakistan's Education System. The speaker also demonstrated the pictures of suicide victims from different educational institutes to highlight the gravity of situation.

Ms. Sidra concluded her first session by highlighting the consequences of student's mental illness on University's environment and stressing that the administration and policy makers take swift action on mental well being to avoid social and health turmoil.

Session – II: Equipping a Teacher to Handle Mental Health Issues of University Students:

The technical session II was opened with a group activity. The sole purpose of the activity was to make teachers observe and share the ways to make students comfortable with them and increased interaction. The participants took keen interest in the activity and came up with ways to engage with the students other than studies and out of the class room. After conducting activity, Ms. Sidra Akhtar summed up the reason and result of the activity by suggesting faculty members to develop keen observation for their students, increase healthy interaction thorough learning. She also suggested to teachers to stay polite and understanding but in firm manner so that the decorum of learning environment should not be compromised.

In conclusion she appraised the teachers with tools and strategies to manage the behavioral and mental problems in their students. She urged teachers to encourage "expressions" and "discussion" to overcome the communication gap with children/ students. The resource person specifically stressed that, *"Be understanding and actively listen to your students without showing judgmental behavior, show empathy and build resilience of your students, and refer to professional help if needed"*.

Furthermore, besides teachers, she also opined to educate staff members, parents and fellow students' in-order to safeguard the mental wellbeing or young learning minds. In conclusion, she encouraged everyone to help and to start with themselves to ensure access to positive, safe and healthy environment for all, especially youth.

The event was concluded with Dr. Fareed A. Minhas, the renowned Psychiatrist and Director, The Tree House psychiatry clinic, chairing the session as Chief Guest. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Minhas stated that the vigorously increasing psychological issues are the most pressing social and health problem of our society. He

not only stressed upon the significance of mental wellness but also shed light on the social stigmas and people's opinions and suggestions faced by the patients upon sharing their thoughts with participants. To give a clearer picture, he also shared a case of a patient who underwent mournful events in her entire life which ultimately lead her to depression. He also stated the fact that *"there is no health without mental health"* along with the reasons and examples.

He orated that the beginning 8 years of the individual's life are very significant for personality development, and those who spend their initial period of growth with healthy bonding and attachments have great emotional and intellectual growth. Focusing on students and teachers, he advised teachers to talk and build their connections with their students. This will not only create healthy learning environment but also aid teachers to identify the various behaviors in their student. He also stressed upon the emotional stability and psychological health of teachers in-order to deliver their best and also identify the red flags in their students. Dr. Minhas also addressed the queries raised by the audience and appreciated the efforts and initiative taken by the organizing partners. *"These events are necessary for mental health advocacy, as the awareness in local population related to mental illness is as low as zero"*, he said.

Conclusion:

The sessions were highly interactive and the participants showed their interest not only by raising questions, but also shared their own views and experiences related to mental health in students. One of the faculty members asked a question that either any research study has been done on student's life style, for which he got positive response. One of the participants raised concern about bullying faced by teachers from students especially in the private sector and questioned about the mental wellbeing of the teachers as well. The resource person acknowledged the concern and elaborated that the teachers should also be psychologically healthy to cope up with this kind of chaos. In addition, she stressed upon the strong need to psycho-educate the teachers to ensure their mental wellbeing just like the physical health. One of the participants commented that *"we are not dealing with our children at their level and in friendly manner"*, which is one of the key reason behind increasing emotional stress in younger generation.

Closing Ceremony:

In closing ceremony, Dr. Azeema Fareed, Additional Director, Health, COMSATS Secretariat, recapped the whole event. In her vote of thanks, she expressed gratitude on behalf of COMSATS Secretariat and FDA to the Chief Guest, Dr. Minhas, for accepting the invitation and sharing his expert opinions with the participants. She also appreciated the valued insights of Ms. Sidra Akhtar over the topic. She also thanked the faculty members who managed to join this workshop with great interest despite their busy schedule. In conclusion, Dr. Fareed expressed her gratitude to Mr. Laeeq Jaswal, for FDA's collaboration and appreciated the efforts of the organizers for the event.

The event concluded with the distribution of certificates among the participants and presentation of souvenirs to the Speaker and the Chief Guest.