

# Professional Network

## Post Event Summary

### Young People Take the Platform

Wednesday 15 June, 2022  
14:30 IST / 10:00 BST

#TogetherWeAreSAMA



# Executive Summary

This event was part of a schedule of events organised by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) Professionals Network.

Youth mental health and well-being is of concern not only in India but also in the UK and globally. It is critical that we start to pay attention to the everyday circumstances that can be influencing young peoples mental health, just as we might do for physical health. Schools have been identified as a key context that young people are growing up in during this relatively vulnerable time of development.

## Programme and Speakers

### Welcome Address

**Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones** (Associate Professor in Mental Health Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Leeds, UK) – Welcomed the audience and highlighted the increasing interest in how schools can be both a positive and negative environment for youth mental health and well-being. Siobhan emphasised how schools can be places where we can extend support for the mental health of young people but that schools are complex places, each with their own unique cultures, resources and challenges, even if they are in the same geographical region

Siobhan then indicated that this event is part of a response to a global agenda to do research differently by working much more closely with the young people who are the intended beneficiaries of that research.

### Young People Take the Platform

**Dr Muthuaraju Arelingaiah**, (Project Manger, Dept. of Psychiatric Social Work NIMHANS, Bengaluru) – Introduced the young people, Dhyanaa and Anushka, presenting their understanding and perspective of youth mental health and the impact of school.

### What do young people think and feel about mental health?

*"Our understanding of mental health means having a trouble free and stress free mindset, if we have this then we will have good mental health. And if we have good mental health then we have good relationships with others, we will not quarrel over simple matters, we will listen better in class and perform better in our academics." – Dhyanaa*

### What are the biggest challenges to youth mental health right now?

*"Lack of peace and mindset: consistently we are preoccupied by something in our mind. An inability to manage emotions: being young we have difficulty managing our emotions, we often react to a situation without thinking. We don't know exactly what is mental health. We don't know who to talk to about our mental health. We don't know where to go for help and support with our mental health. We are behind on our academic grades." – Dhyanaa*

## What must adults absolutely understand about youth mental health?

*"They should remember that they once had a life as a young person before they became adults. They need to understand about youth mentality. They should stand in our place and think about us, what could have happened? They should predict various consequences in youth life using their experience. They should then talk to us so we can consider them in our own mind on our own time.*

*During difficult times they should help us. Also they should not take us to treatment without informing us beforehand and getting our consent. Finally they should not complain to others about our issues or our weaknesses." – Dhyanaa*

## What role does school play in youth mental health?

**"A vital role:** as we spend most of our time in schools, like more than 6–7 hrs a day this environment should be safe, clean and healthy for our mental health to help us to cope with our studying and have a good academic proficiency so we can get good grades.

**Equal opportunities for both boys and girls:** this is the main problem that girls actually face in schools, that they are not given opportunities equally to the boys. Boys are only selected for sports and girls are not selected which makes them feel like they are inferior to boys and they start feeling like they are incapable of participating in sports and other activities that require physical strength. So boys and girls should be given equal opportunity so boys too feel that girls are equal to them and treat them with respect. As well as girls feeling that they are equal to boys and can achieve anything that they would like to.

**Opportunities to implement new ideas:** schools are not very free to implement new ideas, they take information from the top and then implement if but all students are not the same. Not all methodology will work for every student. So the students have to be given the leverage to implement new ideas that comes to their minds so they can learn and perform better in the school – and get the best results to the school.

**Breaks during classes and discussions with friends:** schools typically have a lot of periods and there are no breaks between classes, this makes students time watch in classes and not properly concentrate. So there needs to be 5 –10 minutes of break between classes so they feel fresh to attend the next class." – Anushka

## How can school be better at young people's mental health?

**"Have supportive teachers and management:** the teachers have to be supportive and not show any favouritism. They shouldn't only give attention to those doing well in their studies and ignore the students struggling. This is one of the biggest problems that each and every child feels in the school. This is the main thing that teachers should keep in mind and try and treat everyone equally so they are not mentally stressed.

**Weekly awareness sessions:** to give adolescents awareness of any changes that they will be facing so they can prepare. This will allow students to prepare beforehand and will give them an expectation on how to deal and cope with any upcoming changes. So students won't feel like the changes are new to them, they were aware, they had time to understand and prepare.

**An open environment:** where adolescents are encouraged to speak up, ask questions or clarify their learnings. Adolescents commonly feel hesitant and lack confidence to ask questions to clarify their doubts to the teachers. Teachers should be approachable to be asked questions for clarification not only in the classroom but in the staff room or at lunch breaks etc. Or they could agree to meet the teacher one-on-one this would help adolescents lacking in confidence to ask questions as its less awkward as its not in front of the whole class.

**Interactions with peers in class:** during school time it is natural for adolescents to interact with the opposite gender. In some schools this is considered an offence. Being able to speak to the other genders allows us to learn and understand the perspective of the world from the other genders point of view, this would help us in the future and in the workplace. It will help us understand that genders have different views, opinions and characteristics but also help us learn how to be more open minded and try and learn their other view points and perspectives.

**Have school counsellors:** adolescents can often feel uncomfortable telling their problems to people. Having a school counsellor would help the adolescents a lot as they would feel they now have a safe and confidential place to open up about their problems with someone with n open-mind. And because they have been able to share their problems they would feel lighter and better and happier to learn.

**Having co-curriculum activities** (e.g. art, music, drama, sport): this would not only freshen up the students in between the harder classes but it will also improve the skills of the students which could help them in the future.

**Have games period:** when we get to 9th or 10th grade we don't have a games period anymore. This is because the school feels we have to concentrate on our studies, but this is actually not correct. The students feel so stressed out they feel just a 10 minute break is enough for them to feel recharged and ready to learn again. We need this free time." - Anushka

## What is the key priority for your mental health right now, as a young person?

**"Freedom:** we feel that we are restricted from everything. We are not free to give our opinions in front of people. We must be given the freedom to try new things, explore our ideas and be creative even at the level of our families.

**Space to discuss:** parents and teachers need to encourage us to have an opinion and put it forward and not feel hesitant, they need to support and encourage us to feel more confident. Our opinion might even benefit someone else in the group.

**Self-time:** this is really important to adolescents, we need self -time. So we can reflect on what is right and what is wrong. Parents and teachers are always nagging us to do this or do that, this makes adolescents feel very stressed out and then we feel overwhelmed and cannot do anything. When we are given self-time we come up with our own ideas of what we need to be doing and how we want to implement them. This time helps us to make good decisions." - Anushka

## Do you see 'stress' as the main mental health challenge for young people? Or do you see other problems amongst people your age? Is stress the main problem or are there other issues we should be aware of?

"Stress is the main problem but girls face many more problems too like in their family home they get many more restrictions at each and every point. Like when they want to do something they are restricted from their parents. Bullying in school is also another issue. This affects the mental health of adolescents a lot." - Young Person

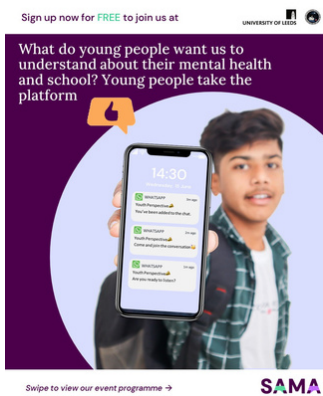
Could you explain more about the benefit of a school counsellor for young people?

*"School counsellors help adolescents overcome their problems and close the communication gap they have with their parents. Like we cannot share each and every aspect of our lives with our parents as they would judge us. When we have a counsellor we feel free and confident that they will not judge us and we can share all our problems with them, they are also really good at providing solutions to our problems and supporting us that sometimes our parents are unable to do. They are viewed by adolescents as a trusted open minded adult." - Young Person*

**Network Discussion**

**Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones** (Associate Professor in Mental Health Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Leeds, UK) and **Dr Poornima Bhola Professor** (Dept. of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS) - then chaired the discussion that explored: the value of having youth voice at the centre of research decisions, the importance of gender equality, the toxic culture of classroom favouritism and how it can affect the well-being of adolescents, how down time and fun are missing from the school schedule despite them being crucial for adolescents well-being, and finally the impact of bullying in schools.

# Social Media Promotion



# Attendee Feedback

A total of 23 external professional network members joined the event.

A total of 8 anonymous feedback responses were received from attending professionals.

**1) What is your job title/role?**

Responses included: Research assistant, Research manager, Psychiatric social worker, Child counsellor, Research field assistant, counsellor.



## 2) Where is your work mostly based (geographically)?

All responses included: Bangalore.

## 3) What is your main area of work?

Responses included: Research (India), Mental Health Professional and Other (Paediatrician, volunteering in giving health awareness in Government schools).

## 4) What attracted you to this event?

All responses included: I was interested in hearing the adolescents perspectives and lived experience regarding youth mental health and the role of the school environment.

## 5) How well did the event help you understand the impacts that the school environment can have on adolescent mental health?

Average response rating: 4/5

## 6) To what extent do you agree that young people's participation in mental health research is important for the progression of research?

Responses comprised of: 50% Strongly agree, 25% agree and 25% strongly disagree.

## 7) What has been the most important message or learning point for you from this event?

Responses included:

*"Small actions can be done in school to help young adolescents feel more connected and have better mental health and well-being in school."*

*"Young people's perception"*

*"The event reflected upon the importance of school and mental health among children and adolescents studying in school. Childhood is the most beautiful phase of one's life and it's everyone's responsibility to make it safe, secure and healthy for a child. Children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, bullying, harassment and many other stressors in general and people around the world should have a dire need to constantly modify the educational boarding systems and services for the well-being of children and education of appropriate parenting style among parents. I'm happy to attend all events held by the SAMA community and today's discussion has really been healthy and helpful."*

*"Youngsters feel strongly about the importance and appreciation to academics over the overall character of the child or adolescent... both in the school and at home...the comment about partiality to a child who is first academically vis a vis a child not in the forefront in academics, but good in other aspects"*

*"Giving time for play, relaxation, gender biases, bullying, academic pressure affect children's mental health. And there is a need for adults to understand children in a different perspective."*

*"Adolescents are really facing challenging situations like academic pressure, social life, identity, reaching their goals, peer pressure, psycho social economic conditions, distractions like gadgets, social media, etc.. Also they need to manage developing sexually and the deal with the effects of hormones... They need empathy badly and emotional support from family and society."*

## 8) What action might you take as a result of this event?

Responses included: 29% I will approach Project SAMA about this, 29% I not sure right now, 43% Other (I will implement this to research. I've recently not been able to qualify my PhD entrance exam. Although, I've a scholarship, I'd like to consider this noble work as my PhD thesis topic in future).

## 9) Was there anything you felt was unclear or confusing about the event?

All responses indicated: No.

## 10) How satisfied were you with the online platform experience?

Average response rating: 4.

## 11) If you encountered any problems with the online platform, what were they?

Responses indicated no problems were experienced.

The SAMA Professional Network received three new members sign up.

The SAMA Newsletter received five additional subscriptions.

# Adolescent Feedback

## 1) Would you recommend participating in an event like this to your friends?

All adolescents answered yes.

## 2) To what extent do you agree that you received enough support before the event?

All adolescents strongly agreed (100%).

## 3) The way the event was organised and run allowed me as a young person to feel involved and that I had an equal say in it?

All adolescents strongly agreed (100%).

## 4) How comfortable did you feel talking about mental health and the influence of the school environment?

All adolescents felt very comfortable (100%).

**5) How comfortable did you feel in expressing your point of views during the event?**

Responses included: 50% very comfortable, 50% neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

**6) To what extent do you feel your point of view was listened to and valued throughout the event?**

Responses included: 100% Always.

**7) To what extent do you agree that you have learnt more about young people's mental health and the involvement of the school environment due to participating in this event?**

Responses included: 50% strongly agree, 50% agree.

**8) To what extent do you agree that being part of this event has helped you develop skills that will be useful in other parts of your life?**

Responses included: 100% strongly agree.

**9) As a result of being part of this event, I am more likely to participate in other events, meetings or presentations to voice my say on adolescents' mental health?**

Responses included: 100% yes.





# SAMA

[www.sama.org.uk](http://www.sama.org.uk)  
[projectsama.23@gmail.com](mailto:projectsama.23@gmail.com)