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Stressing on stress

Wednesday, March 09, 2011

Business, psychiatry and education experts explore the importance of mental wellbeing, stress faced by students and the young workforce, and how it impacts them, finds Kanika Rajani

Life has become nothing short of a rat race for most of us, if we are not competing with our colleagues and peers for that coveted seat in Bombay's top ten colleges or for that plushy job at an MNC, then we are beating ourselves and will settle for nothing but the best. Be it the rampant student suicides, an increasing number of students calling up counseling help lines or the recession hangover that continues to displace employees, all are indications of the soaring stress levels.



In a bid to address this concern, the Vandrevala Foundation, which runs the sole 24/7 counseling helpline held a seminar at KC College on 'Mental Wellbeing for the Knowledge Economy'. Experts from business, psychiatry and the education field explored the importance of mental wellbeing, stressors faced by students, the young workforce and how it impacts them.

"Despite the human mind being one's greatest asset, the expenditure on mental health is abysmal and mental hospitals are treated as dumping grounds which we often neglect," pointed out Mr Firdose Vandrevala, from the Vandrevala Foundation and Chairman and Managing Director of Hirco in his welcome speech, who highlighted how we help disabled people, but stigmatise those with a mental disorder.

Dr.Santosh Chaturvedi, who heads the Psychiatry department at NIMHANS, Bangalore, spoke about the importance of mental wellbeing in his keynote address and how it is an unidentified concern, "there is an acute shortage of psychiatrists", he adds, "people also tend to overlook common problems such as depression, anxiety and OCD," This was followed by a panel discussion which was moderated by Professor S. Parasuraman and included Ajit Mahadevan, Dr.Henal Shah, Professor Manju Nichani, Ranbir Singh and Dr. Santosh Thomas.

In agreement to how mental health is stigmatised, Ajit Mahadevan, Partner, Business Advisory Services, Ernst & Young, elucidated how not only awareness levels are low with regard to mental health, but is also not as concentrated, as other fields of study, "one hears all kind of estimates, not well-tracked numbers". According to him, students would also benefit if educational institutes laid equal importance on effectiveness and efficiency, referring to how institutes usually impart training solely for skills as opposed to focusing on the all round development of a student.

Lifestyle disorders, low immunity, cardiac ailments, suicidal tendencies, occupational stress are some of the consequences of not making mental well being a priority according to Dr. Henal Shah, President of the Bombay Psychiatric Society, who expressed that in order to excel at work people need to have good emotional and social skills, which is not possible if people are demotivated, cynical and get exhausted easily.

These effects are surely not limited to the working class and can penetrate among students. Professor Manju Nichani, Principal, KC College has observed that parents usually fulfill children's material needs, but invariably don't pay attention to their children's emotional needs. "Consequently, when teenagers fresh out of school are surrounded by students from more affluent families, they too long for such a lifestyle, join BPO's after the 12th std, causing their attendance to drop and sometimes leading them to drop out of college" she said.

"When one falls ill, a series of tests are carried out at hospitals, corporate's offer monetary support and even have timely health check ups" says Ranbir Singh, Chief Operating Officer at JP Morgan Services "when it comes to mental wellbeing, one doesn't look into it" adds Singh who himself earlier suffered from blackouts. Fortunately, his organization differs from others and he feels that when something is associated with stress and a softer disorder such as depression for example, it even becomes a problem acquiring a job.

The need for Industrial Psychologists is also recognized by the final panelist Dr. Santosh Thomas, Executive Director of Emmanuel Hospital Association who has noticed a rise in the number of people going to hospitals, despite new hospitals mushrooming and advanced medical research. "60-70% women come to hospitals for health check ups, because of psychosomatic problems while men have begun to come with complaints of convulsion reactions, substance abuse is also an outcome of mental ill-being" he says.

The onus doesn't solely lie on the government, "People expect the government to provide everything which is not possible

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Consulting Sex Therapist & Counsellor

Dr. (Mrs.) Minnu R. Bhonsle, Ph.D.
Consulting Psychotherapist & Counsellor

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with several viruses in the world, it's not only a question of funds, but also a shortage of professional man power" said the Chief Guest, Suresh Shetty, Public Health and Family Welfare Minister of Protocol government of Maharashtra. He also acknowledged the negligence of mental wellbeing to society's attitude, as he spoke about how aggressive society is becoming.

"Poverty can be dealt with, but not inhumanity, a just and humane society where everyone can live within the system, is possible if you redefine the notion of greed, bring humanity to business and add the dimension of value to corruption" said Professer S. Parasuraman, Director at Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

In an attempt to encourage whatever little work has been done so far, people from various fields were felicitated at the seminar. Some of them included Vandana Gopikumar founder of The Banyan, an organization that shelters and treats mentally ill destitute women, Dr. Santosh Chaturvedi, Nariman Bacha on behalf of Godrej for fulfilling its corporate social responsibility, students from Mumbai University who performed Ek Don Adich a Marathi streetplay, which centered around themes such as suicide and schizophrenia and lastly Shubha Thatte, one of the seniormost clinical psychologists in the city.

HELPFUL POINTERS

Most of us face stressors, the difference is some of us are more equipped to handle it while others are more prone to it. Here are some pointers by Dr. Santosh Chaturvedi, Head of the Department of Psychiatry at NIMHANS on ways in which students can prevent stress from turning ugly and deal with it better :-

- 1) They should be more aware about the ill effects of stress and health problems.
 - 2) They should modify their lifestyle by getting enough sleep, following a fixed routine, having a balanced diet and pursuing hobbies
 - 3) They should avoid all kinds of substance abuse, be it drinking, smoking or drugs
 - 4) They should pursue a sport or practice some relaxation technique like yoga to combat stress.
 - 5) They should seek support from friends and family so that they know who to go to when they feel lonely and stressed.
- Instead of avoiding stress, they should face it and be more resilient.

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Aries (Mar 21 - Apr 20)



What the cards say: You will be kind
 Path: Opportunity to build genuine relationships. Don't use this to feed your ego
 Ally: Take help from Libra who will be balanced. Avoid Capricorn who could be morbid
 Card for the week: Tarot key no. X The Wheel of Fortune. It is spinning in your favour

Property & Interior

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