

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the National Task Force constituted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, held on 26.04.2025 at 04:30 PM at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, Janpath, New Delhi, to address the mental health concerns of students and prevent suicides in Higher Education Institutions.

The 3rd Meeting of the National Task Force (NTF) on Mental Health was held on 26.04.2025 at 4:30 PM at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, Janpath, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Justice (Retd.) S. Ravindra Bhat, Supreme Court of India. The primary agenda was to discuss and deliberate on mental health concerns among students, the prevention of suicides in educational institutions, and to recommend preventive measures.

2. The **Chairperson**, in his opening remarks, welcomed the participants and sought updates on the actions taken based on the minutes of the previous meeting. Leave of absence was granted to those members who were unable to attend the meeting.

3. **Ms. Rina Sonowal Kouli**, Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education and Convenor of the National Task Force, welcomed all the Members and other participants and briefed the NTF about communications sent to States/UTs for nominating Nodal Officers to assist taskforce, submission of application through AoR with the copy of Demand Draft of Rs. 20 Lakh to Registrar, SCI to allow to deposit the demand draft, issued Press Note of the 1st and 2nd Meeting, the preparation of wireframe of the website and it will be ready to launch soon, creation of email ID for use of taskforce, progress report of the action taken by D/o Higher education on mental health was circulated among members. She emphasised that questionnaires are required to be finalised to seek inputs / comments / feedback of stakeholders. She further informed that an appropriate place is being explored for secretariat. She assured that a reminder will be sent to remaining States/UTs for nominating their nodal officer to provide data/information to NTF for its consideration. She also provided information about the various existing schemes to address the concerns that the department currently is engaging in.

4. After discussing the Action Taken Report, **the Chairperson** outlined the meeting's agenda, emphasizing the need to finalize the research design, methodology, questionnaires, visits, interviews, timeline, and resources and invited the members to share their insights, concerns, and suggestions to streamline the process. The chairperson underlined that the existence of the various existing schemes, of the government or the UGC are not central to the focus of the committee's inquiry, but that it would be interested in their efficacy, and if any report of their functioning or their audit exists. The chairman also stressed on the importance of speeding up the process of creating the website, by the NIC, and that before the final design of the questionnaires to be made available to the public, it would be useful for the committee members to interact with the technical team, which would ultimately design the questionnaire to elicit the responses.

5. **Dr. Nidhi S. Sabharwal**, NIEPA informed that the sub-group is under preparation of 5 sets of questionnaires for students, faculty/teachers, parents, mental health professionals and policymakers, by adopting a mixed-method approach to develop quantitative and qualitative questionnaires. As for selection of institutions, she further stated that the selection of institutions should be inclusive, considering factors such as region, cluster, and type of institution (HEIs, private colleges, state universities, etc.), and then plan site visits accordingly.

6. **Dr. Seema Mehrotra**, NIMHANS, stated that once the study design is ready, a pilot run for students and faculty will be carried out in one or two cities to gather varied observations. **The Chairman** inquired about the size of the pilot, to which **Dr. Seema** responded that the size is yet to be finalized. However, the pilot will be conducted in Delhi and Bangalore, covering a cross-section of institutions that vary along key variables.

7. **Dr. Alok Sarin**, Consultant Psychiatrist at Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science & Research, observed that the sub-group aims to study the effectiveness of the questionnaires by running a pilot in various institutes. This will ensure collecting of qualitative inputs through questionnaires and that the scope of the study is aligned with the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including (but not limited to) students, teachers, and peer groups. The approach will be more coherent and will stratify the sample based on gender, caste, disability, socio-economic status, etc. He further informed that in January 2025, the Hon'ble Supreme Court directed that a list of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) be produced to conduct further research on the mental and socio-emotional well-being of adults. **Dr. Alok** requested the Ministry to share the requisite list with the taskforce.

8. **Prof. Rajendar Kachroo**, Founder of the Aman Satya Kachroo Trust, raised the issue of identity-based discrimination and asserted that sampling should include a list of survivors as well. He suggested that students using the helplines to address their issues related to mental health & wellbeing may be interviewed to determine the causes of attempted suicides. He suggested that data on identity-linked experiences may provide valuable insights. He further mentioned that **Dr. Aqsa Shaikh** and he are working on summarizing the findings of existing reports on the history of ragging, sexual harassment, caste-based discrimination, etc., including the Prof. Mohan Rao's Report.

9. Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education presented the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Education for promotion of mental health in institutions. These initiatives include sensitization training, capacity building of faculty members, existing framework guidelines on emotional and mental well-being, collaboration with health organizations for improved outcomes, adoption of a three-tier grievance redressal system and third-party evaluations, and initiatives by UGC to promote physical fitness, sports, and psychological and emotional well-being at HEIs in India. She also mentioned signing MoUs by HEIs with

various organizations to promote physical and mental well-being among different stakeholders.

10. The **Chairperson** of the Task Force observed that while initiatives have been undertaken to address social and emotional well-being at HEIs, it is essential to understand these initiatives in detail and evaluate their effectiveness. In case of sensitization training, it is important to know how students and teachers are being sensitized, whether it is optional or mandatory, and the challenges and achievements in doing so. Furthermore, third-party impact evaluation studies need to be conducted, and if they have been, the data must be shared with the taskforce to help carve out future courses of action. It is crucial to understand the best practices that have yielded results. The taskforce needs to understand the regulatory mechanisms followed by different institutions to address concerns related to mental well-being. He further emphasised the need for study on causes leading to suicides and what are the follow-up actions are being taken to address the issue, after reporting the data on suicides by NCRB.

11. **Dr. Seema Mehrotra**, added that although guidelines exist regarding the presence of counsellors, it has often been observed that counsellors are either unavailable, working part-time, or not present at all. Similarly, students do not enrol in apps due to apprehensions of data breaches. While guidelines, policies, and programs to address mental health concerns exist, it is necessary to understand the loopholes and gaps that need to be addressed to improve existing programs.

12. **Shri Anil Malik**, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, pointed out the role of Anganwadis in fostering resilience in early years.

13. **Shri Biswaranjan Sasmal**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment underlined the importance of building resilience from early childhood (ages 3–6) which has acknowledged by NEP 2020 as well. He also suggested examining models such as military training that build resilience. He further assured to provide all existing data and reports to the taskforce for smooth functioning.

14. The **Chairperson** then acknowledged the merit in these suggestions however, it was reiterated that the NTF's scope is confined to higher education, and expanding beyond that would not be feasible for the current mandate.

15. **Dr. Arman Ali** emphasized that the burden of coping should not rest on the individual alone – the system must be designed to protect and include the most vulnerable.

16. **Dr. Alok Sarin** elaborated on the complexity of factors like toxic competitiveness, social isolation, and institutional pressures. He suggested that while the challenge is broad, a full-spectrum approach may overwhelm the NTF's capacity. Instead, a layered strategy – both proximal and distal – needs to be adopted.

17. Following the discussion, the website wireframe was showcased to the members for their comments and feedback. A few suggestions included:

- i. Website banner should not present a bleak image; rather, it should convey a sense of hope and resilience.
- ii. Including a 'Reports' section under 'Resources'.
- iii. The questions and feedback section of the website should be prominently displayed, with clear prompts to encourage engagement from visitors.
- iv. In addition to the feedback section on the website, it was suggested that alternative methods for collecting feedback, such as a simple form with a 500-word limit, could also be provided.
- v. Collecting data anonymously.
- vi. Email ID be prominently be displayed on the website.
- vii. Logo of NTF needs to be changed as 'NTF-Mental Health'.
- viii. Adding helpline numbers.

18. The **Chairman** added that the Minutes of the Meetings, Resource Material, Interim Report, other materials should be uploaded on the website and made public. In case there are names or personal details, they could be redacted from the report before making it public. Joint Secretary, Department of Higher Education and Convenor, requested the members to review the draft website and share suggestions/feedback.

19. The **Chairman** asserted that data collection, its management and storage is also very essential. Members may require researchers to do study and research, the Ministry may help provide quality researchers to assist in conducting the study.

20. After the detailed discussion, the following decisions were made:

- (i) To start with the process, press note with email ID may be circulated and dissemination of Email ID eliciting inputs/comments/feedback.
- (ii) Questionnaires for different stakeholders for their seeking inputs/ comments/ feedback need to be finalized by the end of May 2025
- (iii) After finalization, the questionnaires and other forms will be forwarded to regulatory bodies and institutions through the Ministry of Education.

- (iv) Meanwhile, a timeline for the pilot study, questionnaire framework, and methodology needs to be decided and finalized by the next meeting.
- (v) Members to identify three higher education institutions in Delhi where the pilot can be conducted. Institutes needs to be identified within 3-4 days.
- (vi) Draft wireframe of the website be shared with members of NTF for review and feedback.
- (vii) Minutes of the Meetings, Resource Material, Interim Report, other materials should be uploaded on the website.
- (viii) An interim report is to be prepared within a three-month period. An application will be moved by Amicus Curie before the Hon'ble Supreme Court to request additional time, considering the summer break.
- (ix) The list of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) being prepared for submission to the Hon'ble Supreme Court will also be shared with the taskforce.
- (x) Sub-groups may co-opt researchers and data analysts for assistance, with the prior concurrence of the Chairperson.
- (xi) The next meeting of the Task Force may be scheduled between 9th and 17th May 2025, based on the finalization of the pilot schedule.

21. The meeting was concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

Annexure

S. No	Member
1.	Justice S. Ravindra Bhat , Former Judge, Supreme Court of India, Chairperson
2.	Dr. Alok Sarin , Consultant Psychiatrist, Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science & Research, New Delhi, Member
3.	Mr. Arman Ali , Executive Director, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People, Member
4.	Prof. Rajendar Kachroo , Founder, Aman Satya Kachroo Trust, Member
5.	Dr. Seema Mehrotra , Professor of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS, Member
6.	Dr. Nidhi S. Sabharwal , Associate Professor, Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, Member
7.	Ms. Aparna Bhat , Senior Advocate (as amicus curiae), Member
8.	Shri Anil Malik , Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, Ex-officio Member
9.	Shri Biswaranjan Sasmal , Additional Secretary , Department of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India – representing Secretary, MoSJE
10.	Mrs. Sunita Moorti Anand , Additional Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs
11.	Dr. K.M. Arya , Dy. Legal Advisor , Department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India
12.	Shri Kaustubh Giri , Deputy Secretary , Department of Health & Family Welfare - representing Joint Secretary, D/o H&FW
13.	Prof. Vinod Kumar Shanwal , NCERT - representing Addl. Secretary, DoSEL
14.	Ms. Rina Sonowal Kouli , Joint Secretary , Department of Higher Education, Convener of the Task Force
15.	Shri Syed E. Rizwi , Joint Secretary , Department of Higher Education
16.	Shri Kunal Kashyav , Dy. Director , NIC, Department of Higher Education
17.	Ms. Sonam , Assistant Secretary , D/o Higher Education