



Wilson College

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Safe Mumbai and Gender Concerns: The Changing Face of Mental Health and Well-being

The 90 min panel discussion on "Safe Mumbai and Gender Concerns: The Changing Face of Mental Health and Well-being" was organized by Mumbai First and Women's Development Cell and Internal Complaints Committee at Wilson College to create safe cities for its citizens. In Dr. Juhi Deshmukh's opening remarks, she spoke of the increased loneliness and fragile self-esteem experienced by youth today. There is a lack of psychological first aid and mental health awareness. While physical education in the school curriculum has been mandatory, mental health has only been optional. Mental Health as a concept has been associated with the elite and not something which has reached the grassroots level. Dr. Deshmukh also spoke of the need to have a conversation about mental health, youth, and the challenges when it comes to citizen security on social networking sites and in public spaces, roads, and educational institutions.

In the context of ragging, Dr. Harish Shetty made a strong plea to never rag anybody in light of its long-term consequences. He shared an instance, A brilliant student from engineering college is still on medication from the horror of what took place twenty years ago. The student was told, "If we have to convert iron into steel, it has to be tempered". Women in their forties fear intimacy, feel ashamed, and have poor self-image- all a result of abuse in the formative years. It is important, to give students in educational institutions, space and a voice in order to prevent, correct abuse and educate them on mental well-being and wellness.

Responding to some of the opening remarks, co-panelist and Moderator Ms. Nirali Bhatia mentioned that physical consequences of ragging or abuse may be short-lived but the emotional trauma lives on for years. Emotional clogging seems to be rampant among youth today. Taking care of emotional safety is important for young citizens today. "Humans are social beings; they are not conditioned or wired to live in isolation", Ms. Bhatia highlighted the need to strike a balance while indulging in excessive use of technology. Talking of crimes in cyberspace, Ms. Nirali Bhatia spoke about CYBER B.A.A.P an acronym for Cyberbullying Awareness, Action and Prevention, which is committed to combating the menace of Cyberbullying by creating awareness and prevention. The organization has identified and is taking the necessary efforts to ensure the well-being & safety of young children in Cyber Space.

Ms. Aswati Dorje defined crime as "**something where a motivated offender meets or comes across a suitable target in the absence of a capable guardian**". In the physical realm of crimes, it is easy to get hold of the offender by target hardening and deploying CCTV cameras. Ms. Dorje shared that there are about 5,300 CCTV cameras and also spoke of how the Women and Child Department and the Municipality have worked together to create safe spaces in the physical realm. As per the NCRB records, cybercrime has seen a 63.5% spike in numbers in 2019 compared to 2018. Ms. Dorje shared that when it comes to monitoring cyber-crimes, people may not want to make the tradeoff between privacy and policing; instead, it requires young citizens to be aware of informed behavior in the cyber realm. In this regard, the involvement of families is important. Ms. Aswati Dorje stated that the police would be happy to be part of such training and information dissemination with regards to helplines and laws in place (Indian penal code, IT act, etc.). She spoke of how preventive action is the need of the hour when it comes to matrimonial fraud, phishing, abuse on digital platforms.

The Mumbai Police and the National Cyber Crime Reporting website make a mention of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' in this regard. Making such information known to women, young citizens is required as part of prevention. Investigating cyber cases comes with limitations and challenges. This makes awareness an important strategy to tackle cybercrimes. Lots are being done by authorities for the cyber safety of citizens, of which hardly anyone is aware of, like,

Preventive action is crucial with regard to abuse on digital platforms. The Mumbai Police and the National Cyber Crime Reporting website make a mention of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' in this regard.

How can victims report? How can we help victims report perpetrators?

These are some of the important questions that were captured during the discussion. The discussion saw experts highlight a very pertinent problem with regards to rampant cyber use- one of the most common crimes against youth, Sextortion. **"A form of extortion where the victim is lured into sharing their sexually explicit content willfully or by morphing them and then they are extorted to generate more such content or for money"**, Ms. Bhatia shared that organized sextortion is targeted at young boys between the age group of 17-25 or 30 years. In cases of women, this is done in order to generate more such content, to threaten them or bully them.

Responding to a question by Ms. Nirali Bhatia on the reasons for youth exposing themselves online, Dr.Deshmukh responded saying, that some of the factors for this are low self-esteem, fragile self-concept, worry, and increased loneliness. The ability to maintain anonymity across social media platforms is another contributing factor. Likes and validation on social media platforms lead to heightened levels of dopamine and oxytocin- "cuddle chemicals for the brain". Dr. Juhi Deshmukh explained how the feeling of losing self-control with rising self-esteem, results in people engaging in such activity very often. This lack of inhibition thereby swiftly moves from "use to addiction". She spoke of how the desire to live the happier moments on social media takes over and one tends to lose control gradually.

Chasing momentary pleasures for heightened levels of dopamine can have severe lifelong consequences to live with for the youth.

Ms. Nirali Bhatia highlighted the complete lack of cyber hygiene and netiquettes that young citizens follow across platforms. She posed a question to Dr.Shetty about the post-traumatic impact of cybercrimes on their relationships, ideologies of love, trust, sexual relationships, and future lives. Dr.Shetty mentioned the heightened risk youngsters at the age of 14 are exposed to given the virtual audience they expose themselves to. Men in their late twenties often threaten them for money- becoming an increasingly common cause of sextortion. One way of tackling this issue in the words of Dr. Shetty would be, **"Can our families provide the safe space for our children to share everything and anything?"** He emphasized that our youngsters should be able to express their emotions freely and all emotionally and physically nude in their narratives. Families ought to realize that children require emotional safety and security as the basic psychological need. Dr. Shetty spoke of the need for schools and colleges to proactively create safe spaces to share such incidents of crime or mishap and correct inappropriate behavior without judgment.

He also spoke of another critical consequence- Guilt, shame, fear tend to trample emotional development resulting in the inability to relate to people around the person. Dr. Harish Shetty also talks of vengeful behaviors as a dangerous consequence of post-traumatic behavior- continuing to indulge in self-destructing behavior as a way of seeking revenge. Lifelong Depression and anxiety are some of the long-term consequences of trauma- with mothers passing on the same to their girl children through imitation and modeling. The unwillingness to send their girl children to others homes' and thinking of it as a sin to give birth to a girl child are also some of the grave consequences of abuse. He talked of how this can result in intergenerational trauma which is similar to that of partition or the world war,

In this context, Ms.Nirali Bhatia highlighted that chasing momentary pleasures for heightened levels of dopamine can have severe lifelong consequences to live with for the youth. She spoke about the need for families to create emotionally safe environments and urged the youth to speak to their families when faced with any such untoward and harmful incidents. Young citizens fear parents finding out about such incidents which results in inhibition to report crimes as well. Ms. Bhatia posed a question to Ms. Dorje about the hesitation to report to the police in the context of handling the matter sensitively or involving parents/family etc. Responding to this, Ms.Aswati Dorje recollected an instance where victims in an ashram-shala who were systematically abused were comfortable talking to the police rather than their families. The reason being shame, helplessness and the inability often share with families.

Reasons for youth exposing themselves online include low self-esteem, fragile self-concept, worry, and increased loneliness.

In cases of cybercrime, Ms.Aswati Dorje mentioned that anonymity prevents victims from speaking out. There is a lot more shame and trauma involved considering the viral transmission of sensitive content across digital platforms almost instantaneously. She mentioned the Mumbai Police having been sensitized by nonprofit organizations in cases of sensitive nature to report crimes. In cases of cyber-crime involving minors, some cases often involve accused who carry out pranks and revenge often not taking cognizance of their actions. The police then, do inform parents and proceed with further action accordingly. However, in cases of cognizable offenses where severe damage has been inflicted like in cases of sextortion- sextortion is not mentioned anywhere in the codebook, penal code, or IT Act.

CYBER B.A.A.P an acronym for Cyberbullying Awareness, Action and Prevention, is committed to combating the menace of Cyberbullying by creating awareness and prevention.

“Putting someone in fear of injury and threatening to reveal what is private to the person online definitely amounts to extortion”, Ms.Aswati Dorje, and this can amount to 2-3 years of imprisonment in cases where the accused is convicted.

Ms.Dorje spoke of “100” and “103” helplines for citizens to report crimes. Women reporting crimes on 103 are redirected to the cybercrime unit. She highlighted that starting January 26, 2021, five new cybercrime police stations with senior rank police officials have been set up. This is for five different regions-South, Central, East, West, and North regions of Mumbai Police.

These fall under the Regional Additional Commissioner and there is a seriousness attached to cyber offenses in the way they are reported, through the process of evidence collection, and up to the final arrest. The cyber cell in Mumbai has been conducting several sensitization sessions for its officers and proposes to take up information dissemination sessions for college students as well.

Ms.Dorje shared a successful initiative of the Mumbai Police, the Police Didi system where children in schools are encouraged to get in touch with police authorities in cases of abuse. Through this initiative, children are sensitized about "good touch" and "bad touch" trained to scream, retaliate and resist when the offender attempts to cause any harm.

Ms.Nirali Bhatia then discussed an important aspect of reporting anonymously on the National Cyber Crime Portal (<https://cybercrime.gov.in/>). Victims of cybercrime in Maharashtra have particularly had good experiences with the portal.

Various authorities and web portals such as the National Cyber Crime Portal are working towards securing citizen security and a safe future for the youth. Reporting cybercrimes anonymously is possible through the National Cyber Crime Portal (<https://cybercrime.gov.in/>).

Within 3-4 days of filing the complaint online, the issue is looked into. Complete anonymity is maintained through the process. Various authorities and web portals such as the National Cyber Crime Portal are working towards securing citizen security and a safe future for the youth. During further rounds of discussions moderated by Ms.Nirali Bhatia, some key challenges with regards to Mental health & wellbeing emerging from cyberspace usage by youth were discussed.

Some of these include stigma in approaching mental health professionals for help when in need, overburdened school and college curriculum which does not allow for such discussions to be taken up, shame and fear which prevent people from talking about issues, signs to look for indicators of abuse (irritability, anger, withdrawal symptoms, distancing from relatives, extreme fear or clingy nature) and victims turn abusers.

A question to Dr. Shetty was about when would be a good time for someone to seek guidance from a mental health professional. Responding to this, he mentioned that before we seek professional help, as a society we should create an army of mental health professionals within families (receptive to family's experiences of abuse/ harassment) and in schools (principals should find eyes and ears within the student community) and destigmatize the profession of psychologists and psychiatrists. Mental health professionals, therefore, require such support at various levels. Ms.Nirali Bhatia raised a question: **"It is found that many times the offenders of online harassment are young people who do not know where to draw a line. Is there any provision in the system to counsel and sensitize them?"** In response to this question, Ms.Dorje said that in many cases **"It is often the bully who requires help."**

Families ought to realize that children require emotional safety and security as the basic psychological need. Schools and colleges should proactively create safe spaces to share such incidents of crime or mishap and correct inappropriate behavior without judgment.

She further stated that it is the bully who is craving attention or has gone through some traumatic experiences themselves and perpetrates crimes. Ms.Dorje shared that police authority often works closely with counselors in this regard to speaking to the offender (especially in cases where they are not older than 18). They are trained by non-profits in handling phone calls in cases of cybercrime complaints. She shared that sensitization and prevention go a long way in addressing the gamut of cybercrime.

“How do you think the youth can contribute to the awareness on mental health today? How can they make cities in cyberspace safer?”, Ms. Nirali Bhatia. In her response, Dr.Juhii Deshmukh mentioned that **“presently in India, the gap between the number of mental health professionals and the number of concerns is huge.”** Community education and educating the parents is of utmost importance. Talking about compassion vaccines and psychological wellbeing is important **“Let’s create barefoot counselors”**, Dr.Juhi Deshmukh She mentioned that not everybody can be a psychiatrist, counselor, or social worker; it is important to work with youth and educate them. This will make it possible to reach out to many more citizens. She spoke about how empathy buddies in universities would make it possible for young students to share their experiences on college campuses. Dr.Deshmukh highlighted that mental health has to be taken up at the policy level and taken up as an issue of priority by decision-makers.

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The discussion concluded with Ms. Nirali Bhatia urging youth to work with authorities, experts to make the city safe for all.

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SPEAKER PROFILE



Smt. Aswati Dorje Special I.G.P, Director, Maharashtra Police Academy

Ms. Aswati entered Indian Police Service in the year 2000. As Director of MPA, she headed the team that revised the Maharashtra Police Manual, after a gap of sixty years. She has recently headed the committee to introduce legislation on the lines of Disha Act of Andhra Pradesh to ensure more stringent punishment and speedier investigation to provide justice to survivors of violent crimes against women. During the span of her career, she was the head of the Mumbai Immigration and the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer. She was the first lady officer in the country to handle this responsibility. Ms. Aswati has won the Internal Security Medal and Hard Area Medal for her services in the Naxal affected districts.

Dr. Harish Shetty Psychiatrist

Dr Harish Shetty is a practicing Psychiatrist with a post-graduate degree in Psychological Medicine and a post-graduate diploma in Comparative mythology from Bombay University. He completed his MBBS, DPM, and MD from T. N. Medical College and Seth G. S. Medical College. He worked in the field of Yoga and Mental Health under the illustrious Professor Dr. N.S. Vahia for 12 years. He has been conducting workshops with the youth on Suicide Prevention and trains the lay people to be Mental Health Soldiers. He is a member of NTA, National Testing Agency by the Union Cabinet on behalf of the HRD Ministry. He is a trainer, researcher & an avid blogger.



Dr. Juhi Deshmukh
Assistant Professor, Department of
Psychology, Savitribai Phule Pune University

Dr. Juhi Deshmukh is an Assistant professor in the field of Psychology in S.P.University Pune. She holds a PhD. in Clinical Psychology and P.G.Diploma in Counselling. She specialises in Neuropsychology, Cognitive psychology, Positive Psychology, Psychometry and Clinical Psychology. She is Member and Counsellor Pre -Litigation Council, Maharashtra High Court and Member Central and Forensic Science Laboratory, Technical and Evaluation Committee, Government of India. She has conducted several positive psychology workshops in various refresher courses, orientation courses and faculty development programs.



Ms. Nirali Bhatia
Cyber Psychologist and Psychotherapist

Nirali Bhatia is a Cyber Psychologist, Internet Addiction Therapist & Psychotherapist with over a decade of experience in counselling for anxiety, depression, relationship issues, behavioural issues & counselling cybercrime victims. She is a TEDxSpeaker and has been quoted in various articles in leading newspapers and regularly appears on several news channels. She is also the director of V4WEB CYBERSECURITY and founder of an anti-cyberbullying organisation - Cyber B.A.A.P. which stands for Cyber Bullying Awareness, Action and Prevention. She has recently been awarded as "India's top Women influencer in Cyber Security"



Mumbai First is a not-for-profit think tank which aims at making Mumbai a better place to live, work and invest in. Mumbai First works on a unique Public-Private Partnership Project (PPPP) model. As a think tank and catalyst between Industry and Government, Mumbai First has in the last ten years, been working relentlessly towards its vision of transforming the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) into a world class city for its citizens and the most preferred destination for business. Mumbai First has been constantly evolving and organizing programs, workshops and roundtable discussions on the most relevant issues in the city, across nine verticals- Environment, Governance, Health, Education, Economic Growth, Art, Heritage & Culture, Transport & Mobility, Security & Resilience, and Housing.

For more details: <https://mumbaifirst.org/>



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John Wilson Education Society's Wilson College has a long standing history. Founded by Dr. John Wilson, the founder of Bombay University, in the year 1832. Wilson College has made significant contributions to the growth and development of education in India. The college has maintained its rich tradition of liberalism and freedom of expression, which has motivated several of its students to become selfless and dedicated nation builders of India. The College Management has time and again emphasized a 'Zero Tolerance Policy' towards harassment of any kind on campus; especially to girl students. Wilson College has a NAAC "A" Accreditation since 2005.

For more details: <https://www.wilsoncollege.edu/>



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