

WORKSHOP REPORT

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH CAPACITY OF YOUTH

21 & 22 March 2024, Sri Lanka



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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the following report, we encapsulate the rich discourse and profound insights shared by esteemed speakers during the workshop held on March 21st and 22nd, 2024, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This document serves as a repository of the key discussion points, illuminating the path forward in our collective endeavor to fortify the mental health and resilience of today's youth.

Against the backdrop of escalating suicide rates among university students, our two-day residential program provided a platform for dynamic exchanges and meaningful dialogue. Speakers, representing diverse backgrounds and expertise, delved into the multifaceted challenges faced by young individuals, offering perspectives and strategies to address these pressing concerns.

The discussions unfolded against the sobering reality of students grappling with mental health issues amid the complexities of academic life. The enduring repercussions of past traumas, such as the Easter Attack in 2019, compounded by the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic instability, underscored the urgency of our mission.

Throughout the workshop, speakers illuminated various facets of resilience-building and mental health capacity enhancement, emphasizing the interconnectedness of well-being, academic success, and personal fulfillment. From strategies for stress management and coping mechanisms to fostering a supportive community and seeking professional help, each discussion point offered valuable insights and actionable steps for attendees to implement in their lives.

As we embark on this journey through the highlights of our speakers' discussions, we invite readers to glean wisdom from the expertise shared and consider the implications for their own contexts. Together, let us honor the voices that have contributed to this discourse and recommit ourselves to the noble pursuit of nurturing the mental health and resilience of our youth, ensuring a brighter and more hopeful future for generations to come.

The speaker for the two dates listed below:

Day 01 - 21st March 2024	
Opening Remarks	Hon. Hector Appuhamy M.P. Organizer of the workshop Member of AFPPD & APDA
Remarks	Hon. Hesha Withanage, M.P., Chair of the Parliamentary Caucus for Youth 3. 9.40 a.m.- 9.50 a.m. Remarks by the Prime Minister's representative
Remarks	Hon. Edcel Lagman, MP Philippines, Acing Chair of AFPPD Read by Mr. Usmonov Farrukh (PhD) Interim Executive Director Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)
Session 01	Prof. Prasanna Perera PhD in Economics - University of London and University of Peradeniya MA in Economics -Thammasat University, Thailand BA in Economics - University of Peradeniya Professor in Economics, University of Peradeniya
Session 02	Dr.Vindya Wijayabandara MBBS (Colombo) MD (Psychiatry) Consultant Psychiatrist National Institute of Mental Health
Session 03	Prof. Sampath N.Punchihewa, LL.B. (Hons)-University of Colombo, LL.M. in Intellectual Property and Competition Law-Munich Intellectual Property Law Center (MIPLC) PhD in IP Law-Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich Attorney-at-Law, Supreme Court of Sri Lanka Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo

Day 02 - 22nd March 2024	
Session 01	Mr. Manoj Samarasekara, Diploma in Child Trafficking - Australian Federal Police Criminology, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute Chief Inspector of Police, Sri Lanka Police Former Officer in Charge - Police Children and Women Bureau
Session 02	Mrs. Maheshika Silva LLB (OUSL) Deputy Solicitor General, Attorney General's Department

In the following part of this report, we'll outline the main ideas shared by the speakers during the workshop.

2. OPENING REMARKS

By Hon. Hector Appuhamy, Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka



A welcome speech and a brief narration about the objective of the “Building Resilience and Mental Health Capacity of University Students” workshop was given. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude for being the organizer of this program as a parliament member and a member of the youth caucus. Hon. Hector Appuhamy extends his warmest and heartfelt gratitude to the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD), Asian Population and Development Association (APDA) for being the financial sponsor for this workshop and the Executive Director of AFPPD and APDA.

He mentioned the vast extent of the expertise of the resource persons that have brought to shed light on mental health. He specifically mentioned this as not just a program but a call to action every one of us should prioritize the well-being of the youth. Hon. Member of Parliament emphasized the importance of conducting a program like this prioritizing the mental health of the university midst of soaring suicide cases in university results from various means which will be discussed during this program. From the program designing to venue selection every decision in conducting this program is backed by a rationale, the decision of selecting a hotel near the beach is to host this program in a calm and soothing manner where the participants can participate in the meeting in a fresh and a healthy mind. He urged the participants to actively participate in this program from the inception as this will provide pivotal information and knowledge of how to steer your university life amidst academic pressure and another sort of pressure means and let this not be another program where

the accumulated knowledge will be shared among the rest of the university students as university students are the cornerstone of the country's future.

3. REMARKS

By Hon. Hesha Withanage, Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka



Following this, Hon. Hesha Withanage expressed gratitude to Hon. Hector Appuhamy and the sponsoring organizations, AFPPD and APDA, for recognizing the importance of the workshop. As chairperson of the youth caucus, he highlighted the caucus's objective of increasing youth representation in parliament. He emphasized the significance of the selected resource persons and underscored the workshop's relevance for university students, drawing from his own experience as an undergraduate.

4. REMARKS

Hon. Edcel Lagman, Acting Chair of AFPPD

Message read by Mr. Usmonov Farrukh, Interim Executive Director, AFPPD



AFPPD acknowledging the smart and engaging young people from Sri Lanka and anticipates an interesting discussion. He highlights the role of Honorable Hector Appuhamy as the organizer of this event, a member of Sri Lanka's parliament, in representing the country in the AFPPD and also express his gratitude to chair of the youth caucus Member of parliament Hon Heshan Withanage. He underscores the importance of youth engagement, stating that no country can deny its hope lies in the youth, who are the future leaders and champions of society. He emphasize the challenges faced by youth, including mental health issues, sexual and reproductive health concerns, and gender-based violence. In Sri Lanka, mental health is a significant concern, with high suicide rates and prevalent issues like loneliness, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. He calls for urgent action from policymakers to address these challenges. He also emphasize the demographic transition in Sri Lanka, with a significant portion of the population being youth and adolescents, highlighting the need for tailored policies and an enabling environment to support their development. Finally, He stress that investing in youth, including in healthcare and mental health, benefits society as a whole, and express gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

5. WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

By Prof. Prasanna Perera

Professor in Economics

Department of Economics and Statistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya



Resilience, often defined as the ability to rebound from adversity, was the focal point of this session, aimed at equipping individuals with strategies to tackle mental health challenges. Participants engaged in thoughtful discussions, delving into the various stressors faced by students, including academic pressures and financial instability.

The conversation underscored the alarming rise in student suicide rates, sparking a collective resolve to take action. Participants stressed the importance of a holistic approach to student well-being, advocating for integrated support systems that address academic, social, and mental health needs. Inspiring anecdotes of student resilience highlighted the pivotal role of community networks in fostering strength and perseverance.

The session concluded with a renewed commitment to prioritize mental health initiatives in Sri Lankan universities, recognizing them as vital components of a nurturing educational environment. The emphasis on conscious methods of building mental resilience underscored the group's dedication to effecting positive change.

6. BUILDING RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH CAPACITY OF YOUTH

By Dr Vindya Bandara

Consultant Psychiatric, National Institute of Mental Health



Dr Vindya Bandara offered a comprehensive exploration of essential topics vital for student well-being, encompassing the 8 dimensions of wellness and cognitive processes. Participants were guided through an in-depth examination of resilience, mental health capacity, and their intersection with various dimensions of wellness.

Throughout the session, attendees gained insights into the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, social, intellectual, occupational, environmental, spiritual, and financial wellness in fostering resilience and promoting mental well-being. Discussions emphasized the importance of understanding, retaining, weighing, and communicating information as part of the cognitive process, empowering students to develop critical thinking skills and make informed decisions regarding their mental health.

Moreover, the session underscored the significance of personal resilience, highlighting key characteristics such as patience, optimism, and adaptability. Attendees were equipped with practical tools and techniques for building resilience, enabling them to navigate challenges effectively and cultivate a positive mindset.

Additionally, the session addressed the impact of relationships on mental health, encouraging students to foster supportive networks and seek help when needed. Participants explored

the role of religion and faith as resources for overcoming mental health challenges, recognizing the diverse ways individuals draw strength and resilience from their beliefs.

In conclusion, the session provided a valuable platform for students to enhance their understanding of resilience and mental health capacity, empowering them to prioritize their well-being and cultivate a holistic approach to wellness. By integrating cognitive processes, the 8 dimensions of wellness, and practical resilience-building strategies, attendees were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive academically and personally within their university community.

7. WHAT IS LAW AND IMPACT OF THE LAW ON OUR DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

By Prof. Nishantha Sampath Punchihewa

Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo



Every aspect of human life, from womb to tomb and even beyond, is governed by the law. If a country wants to achieve long-term development and progress, it must improve its laws and protect the hope of the country's future, the younger generation. So, it is necessary to strengthen the cultivation of their legal awareness and build their mental health capacity. From that point of view, the resource person gave participants an insight into what the law is, the role of the law in the society as the best civilizer, different legal systems in Sri Lanka: Roman-Dutch law, English law, Kandyan law, Thesawalamai law, and Muslim law, and many more key points regarding the law awareness. As well as he emphasized that ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking the law.

Increases in depression and suicide-related behaviors among university students have been concurrent with increases in digital media use. Cyberbullying and cyber harassment, for example, are serious and prevalent problems. Hence, the participants were addressed and adequately explained this particular issue and the 'Online Safety Act'.

After that, he moved into the interface of law and justice. Under the topic he questioned 'Does law always achieve justice eventually?' Participants gave their personal views on the question and then the resource person clarified the impact of the law on our day-to-day life and its loopholes. Additionally, he discussed practical issues in law faced by the younger generation in Sri Lanka as well as suggested remedies and legal points that can be chosen.

Legally illiterate people might not be able to recognize when their rights are being violated and they may inadvertently accept rights breaches and refrain from seeking remedies. This session indeed paved the way for participants to get an insight into the law and gain the courage to stand up for their rights.

8. INHERENT VALUE AND PRECIOUSNESS OF LIFE

By Mr. Manoj Samarasekara,
Chief Inspector of Police, Sri Lanka Police



Attendees were reminded of the inherent value and preciousness of life. With a heartfelt emphasis on the uniqueness of human existence, the officer passionately articulated the irreplaceable nature of each individual's journey, particularly in the context of living in a

challenging environment. Drawing upon real-life examples, the session underscored the profound significance of cherishing life and making informed decisions.

Through evocative anecdotes and compelling narratives, participants were urged to reflect on the gravity of their choices, especially in moments of despair or crisis. The officer's message resonated deeply, highlighting the imperative to embrace life's opportunities and seek support during times of difficulty. Importantly, the session served as a powerful reminder that education extends beyond formal institutions, emphasizing the importance of cultivating wisdom and resilience in navigating life's challenges.

By imparting invaluable insights and instilling a sense of hope, the session inspired attendees to prioritize their mental well-being and reach out for assistance when needed. Through compassionate guidance and proactive outreach efforts, the officer underscored the collective responsibility to safeguard lives and prevent tragedies such as suicide. Ultimately, the session encapsulated a message of empowerment, encouraging individuals to embrace the gift of life and make choices that honor its inherent worth.

9. LEGAL FRAMEWORK RELATING TO SOME TRIGGER FACTORS OF SUICIDE

By Ms. Maheshika De Silva,
Deputy Solicitor General



Another pivotal session within the program focused on the "Legal framework relating to some trigger factors of Suicide." This session delved into the legal aspects surrounding

various trigger factors that contribute to suicidal behaviors. Illuminate the legislative landscape encompassing critical issues pertinent to education, public health, social conduct, and legal rights. Notably, Act No. 20 of 1998 delineates the imperative provisions aimed at eradicating ragging and curtailing various forms of violence within educational institutions. Act No. 54 of 2007 establishes a robust legal framework concerning the treatment and rehabilitation of individuals grappling with drug dependency, emphasizing responsible societal engagement, including online conduct, which is further underscored by the recent enactment of the Online Safety Act No. 09 of 2024. Furthermore, pivotal discussions surrounding the Penal Code, particularly concerning grave offenses like rape, kidnapping, and abductions against minors, are paramount in safeguarding vulnerable members of society. Additionally, comprehensive legal provisions addressing the right to self-determination, especially in matters pertaining to mental health and seeking assistance in cases precipitated by external factors, warrant elucidation and accessibility.

Participants engaged in an in-depth discussion, examining the intersection of law and mental health, particularly concerning issues such as access to lethal means, cyberbullying, and social media influence. Led by a Legal expert from the Attorney General's Department, the session provided valuable insights into existing legal frameworks aimed at addressing these trigger factors. Through case studies and analysis, attendees gained a deeper understanding of the legal mechanisms available to mitigate the risk factors associated with suicide. Moreover, discussions centered on the importance of proactive legislative measures and policy interventions to safeguard vulnerable individuals and promote mental well-being within communities.

By fostering collaboration between legal and mental health sectors, the session underscored the significance of comprehensive approaches in tackling the complex issues surrounding suicide prevention. Through informed dialogue and advocacy for legal reforms, participants aimed to contribute to a more supportive and protective environment for individuals struggling with suicidal ideation.

10. UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND LEADERSHIP ROLE

By Hon. Eran Wickramaratne,
Member of Parliament of Sri Lanka



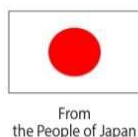
Hon. Eran Wickramaratne aimed at empowering the youth to become exceptional leaders. With a focus on cultivating leadership qualities, Mr. Wickramaratne emphasized that true leadership is not about commanding others but inspiring them to follow willingly. He underscored the importance of developing skills and character traits that resonate with effective leadership, such as integrity, empathy, and vision.

During the session, particular attention was drawn to the current state of the Sri Lankan education system. Mr. Wickramaratne lamented the prevalent practice of assessing students solely based on their grades rather than nurturing their individual skills and talents. He highlighted the need for a paradigm shift in educational assessment, advocating for a system that recognizes and fosters diverse talents and capabilities among students. By shifting the focus from grades to holistic development, he argued, the education system can better prepare youth to excel as leaders in their respective fields and contribute meaningfully to society.

Explored various leadership styles and approaches, encouraging students to discover their own unique leadership strengths and preferences. Through interactive discussions and engaging activities, he may have facilitated reflection on personal values and goals, helping students align their aspirations with their leadership ambitions.

Overall, Mr. Wickramaratne's leadership session for university students likely served as a catalyst for personal and professional growth, equipping attendees with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to become confident, compassionate, and effective leaders in their academic pursuits and beyond.

Appendix: Program



Building Resilience and Mental Health Capacity of Youth

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Dates – 21st of March 2024 & 22nd of March 2024

Description – A two-day residential programme aimed at Building Resilience and Mental Health Capacity of Youth, as a measure to reduce suicide rates among young people, encourage their future career and addressing their empowerment.

Recent statistics show a concerning increase in suicide rates among young people. Factors contributing to this include lack of social contacts, compounded by the aftermath of events like the Easter Attack in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis. To address these issues, an awareness programme spanning two days to educate youth on the importance of mental health for successful academic and professional career.

Program

Day 1		
Time	Description	Resource Person
08.30 a.m. – 9.15 a.m.	Registration of Participants and Morning Refreshments	by the organisers of the Programme
9.15 a.m. – 10.15 a.m.	Opening Ceremony	1. 9.15 a.m.- 9.40 a.m. Opening remarks by Hon. Hector Appuhami, MP Sri Lanka 2. 9.40 a.m.- 10.00 a.m. Remarks by Hon. Heshu Withanage, MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Caucus for Youth 3. 10.00 a.m.- 10.15 a.m. Remarks by Hon. Edcel Lagman, MP Philippines, acting Chair of AFPPD. Read by Dr. Usmonov Farrukh, interim Executive Director of AFPPD
10.15 a.m. – 11.00 a.m.	Opening ceremony, Group photo and Tea break	

11.00 a.m. – 1.30 p.m.	Mapping your own mental health and the group discussion • Exam stress • Committing suicide • Depression and anxiety • Mood shifting • Empowering for prevention of suicides	Prof. Prasanna Perera Professor in Economics Department of Economics and Statistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya
1.30 p.m. – 2.30 p.m.	Lunch and check in	by the Hotel staff
2.30 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.		Dr Vindya Bandara Consultant Psychiatric, National Institute of Mental Health
3.30 p.m. – 3.45 p.m.	Tea Break	
3.45 p.m. – 5.00 p.m.		Prof. Sampath N. Punchihewa, Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo
5.00 p.m. – 7.00 p.m.	Networking Session and open mike	by the Participants of the programme
7.00 p.m.	Dinner	
Day 2		
Time	Description	Resource Person
7.30 a.m. – 8.30 a.m.	Breakfast	
8.30 a.m. – 9.45 a.m.	Drug Prevention and addiction problems • Introduction • Defining addiction • Discussing problems arise through addiction • Dangers of addiction • Change cycle and how to distant yourself from drugs	by Mr Manoj Samarasekara, Chief Inspector of Police, Sri Lanka Police
9.45 a.m. – 10.30 a.m.	Legal backgrounds of addictions	Ms. Maheshika De Silva, Deputy Solicitor General
10.30 a.m. – 10.45 a.m.	Tea Break	
10.45 a.m. – 12.00 p.m.	University students and Leadership role	Hon. Eran Wickramaratne, MP Sri Lanka
12.00 p.m. Check out		

Compère – Ms Madhavi Perera, Media Officer, Parliament of Sri Lanka (Sinhala/English)
Interpretations – National Democratic Institute, Sri Lanka (NDI)

Published feature story by IPS:

https://www.ipsnews.net/2024/03/building-resilience-and-mental-health-capacity-of-youth/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0OjODspvII7BmlBDPBTaMvGuMhGnuS8ckC2vEObsN07JEpvUSdr-sJ7vc_aem_Ach3OB01rmcUFObtkB2p3U0OcmasVkfB8rtjKYAjl4O370FXSt8Mg7YXudcR_82hi90FA_7qxa8FpBpOS72eBF5U#google_vignette