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Creating a ‘Care- Full’ Ambience: The Practise of Self- Care in Indian Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract:

World Health Organization has defined self care as “The ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider”. In today’s World, the meaning of Self-care is more widened indicating a design of learned, focused and uninterrupted behaviour. It emphasizes practises that nurture, strengthen and sustain welfare with attention on the soul and knowledge of the self. The concept of self-care has gained immense importance in Higher Educational Institutions which consist of students, teachers, staff and other members. Weaving their emotions to construct an inclusive academic world is the largest challenge in the era of globalization, privatization and liberalization. Therefore, the notion of personal well-being is becoming significant to measure the comprehensive success of the Higher Educational Institutions.

This paper will try to explore the exact meaning of Self-Care in the context of Higher Educational Institutions in India. Emphasis will be on analysing what measures these institutions are taking to ensure the mental wellness of their faculty and students to promote a healthy and happy ambience of Teaching-Learning. Is self-care given proper attention or often it is treated as antithetical to community development? What policies the Government is taking to foster the mental wellness of the makers and learners of the future world will be an interesting zone to discover. Primary data from different Government offices, structured and unstructured interviews with Teachers and Students and Observation methods will be the methodology to investigate the scenario and to draw a decision.

Key Words: Self Care, Higher Education, Community Development, Mental wellness, Teacher-Student relation, Govt. policy.

Self-care is a pattern of learned, purposeful, and continuous behaviours. It contains practices which raise, strengthen, and withstand well-being, with an emphasis on the soul and knowledge of the self (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Self-care has been defined as “a

multidimensional, multifaceted process of purposeful engagement in strategies that promote healthy functioning and enhance well-being". Essentially self-care means a constant act people take to promote their own physical, mental and emotional health.

In Higher Education institutions multiple persons ranging from students, and teachers, to administrative and supporting staff are involved with diverse needs, aims and responsibilities. It is difficult to balance professional responsibility and self-care at the same time because many times professional commitments result in a sacrifice of personal wellbeing and self-compromise. Suppression of personal development can create great stress for all. Therefore it is essential to figure out the problem logically and rationally. A mid-way is required to maintain the equilibrium of self-care and professional /academic responsibilities in higher education institutions. Through this article attempt will be made to define what self-care is and how can it be practised in higher education institutions without hampering the collective goal and responsibility and who are the stakeholders and what is their role in attaining self-care.

The question starts with what is higher education and why self-care is so important in higher education. Is the self-care of students enough or do the teachers also need an equal weightage? To be precise higher education institutions include Universities, Colleges and other professional schools that give training in multiple disciplines like law, theology, art business, music and many more and make one eligible for the professional world. Higher educational institutions play an important role in promoting lifelong learning. These institutions have an excellent capacity to develop skills and foster knowledge. They can mobilize educational resources and provide learning opportunities to diverse populations. Mainly young aspirant minds are the takers of higher education. After spending a secure life within the four walls of the school suddenly they are on the threshold of a new world full of competition and aspiration which creates stress and anxiety in their mind. Concern about better performance, and doubts about employment augment the pressure which needs to be handled very carefully otherwise this may lead to catastrophic consequences. In this context the question of wellbeing and self-care becomes relevant.

The development of any institution is the collective responsibility of all its stakeholders amongst whom students are a major part. Therefore the concern of the authorities towards the students needs more care and attention. An inclusive well-being approach is required on the part of the administration to embrace the students and assure them a secure and comfortable ambience to foster their skills. Learning is a long-term process and to enjoy the journey, students must be ready to learn, and the authorities should be compassionate and responsive towards their needs.

Often self-care is treated as antithetical to the notion of collective benefit, but a deeper understanding would reveal that both are not contradictory but complementary. In higher educational institutions multiple stakeholders are related to each other in terms of performance, delegation of duties, collaborative effort to ensure overall betterment and in many more ways. Often the relationship between an institution and stakeholders is projected

mechanically, bound with rules, regulations, discipline, customs and traditions. As per the opinion of the education executive, Strikwerda (2015), higher educational institutions are facing the challenge of making the standards of their institutions high, raising graduation rates, thinking about making the academic and administrative leadership more effective, and making financial renovation. While doing this, concepts like health, self-care, and wellness do not get placed in the priority list. So a risk of stress and burnout runs through the stakeholders. A little change in attitude with care, responsiveness, understanding and empathy can make a great difference. Thus a humanistic approach is required on the part of the institution towards all the stakeholders so that one can do his or her best in attaining individual and collective goals. It becomes important to discuss what types of stress the students and teachers feel in the institution that can be reduced with the magic wand of empathy and self-care.

Students mostly face the challenge of adapting themselves to a completely new situation, the pressure to do well in the University level examinations and to secure a proper job for the future. Many introvert students cannot mingle properly with their fellow friends and remain inexpressive of their needs and demands which later on create frustrations among them. The fear of getting marked prevents them from revealing or discussing their problems with counsellors. A social taboo on mental health stands as a big impediment to solving these issues properly.

The story of the teachers is even more complicated as they are portrayed as problem solvers and not problem bearers. It is assumed that a teacher is a magician who can sort out the problems of his or her students with effort and care but society forgets to take into account that teachers are human too with emotion, frustration, despair and stress. They are assigned multiple tasks from teaching, evaluation, administrative responsibilities, mentoring the students etc. Therefore they too deserve proper care and attention because unless they feel good how can they make students feel good? So it is essential to promote and practise the notion of self-care for the betterment of all. Below are some of the fields where self-care can be practised-

Emotional self-care: Emotional self-care creates a positive ambience and it is an approach which focuses on emotional wellbeing. It nurtures, strengthens, and withstands healthy emotional conditions for those involved in the higher education system. In this process, one is encouraged to be kind to oneself as he or she is expected to be kind to others. Like the proverb 'charity begins at home' this approach teaches a person to be sympathetic and empathetic to their own needs and emotions thus creating a positive vibe in the entire institution.

Mental self-care: Mental self-care practices are required to overcome or manage the burden of everyday stress. Different stakeholders have different responsibilities with the target of completing a task within a particular time which often makes them overwhelmed by their to-do list resulting in extreme stress. If exercised regularly, mental self-care can

help in combating the tension, fear and stress of dealing with assignments. Regular practice of meditation, mindfulness, and generosity can help a person to proceed in a better way.

Social self-care: Social self-care means the process of planned decision-making in Higher educational institutions to make a balance between individual and institutional goals. It denotes proper planning, sharing of responsibilities with empathy, creating a network of understanding and care and practising resilience. Volunteering is one of the important tools of social self-care that makes work easy and enjoyable for all.

Physical self-care: Pressure in higher education institutions may lead to a lack of proper rest, nutrition, sedentary lifestyle for both Teachers and students. Physical self-care contains practices like proper exercise, sleep, medical examinations, and workable nutrition. In very few institutions these practices are noticed. Even the majority of the institutions lack the presence of a medical practitioner on campus which is extremely essential for the physical well-being of all. Open-air campuses with playgrounds, and lush green parks are scarce in urban areas which is essential for outdoor activities and physical development.

Ways of practising self-care: In the hectic and competitive life of today, it is really difficult to find inner peace. Only a concerned and careful effort can make it possible. Thus to deal with the daily pressure of workload Teachers and Students should practise self-care in various ways-

Spending quality time with family, friends and near and dear ones is one of the prime means to nurture oneself as it helps reduce stress through positive interaction. Teachers must engage themselves with more such interaction with family and try to maintain a work-life balance. Nurturing hobbies doing regular exercise, keeping themselves up to date about their discipline, and professional upliftment through different training programmes will make them feel better to face the outer world confidently.

Students must maintain a balance between their studies and leisure time. Cultivation of good habits, and playing outdoor, indoor games will refresh their minds. They should share their feelings with fellow-minded friends, and keep the habit of writing their emotions to vent stress and anger. They should be aware of their surroundings and be always up to date. Engaging in debate sessions, and group talks will build up their confidence and will help them to make decisions independently. Moreover whenever required both teachers and students should seek professional help. Unlike physical illness, mental problems are often seen as a secluded one with social taboos. The time has come to get oneself free from these stigmas and determine the criteria of one's wellness in his/her way.

Institutional and Governmental responsibility: Every institution should maintain such an ambience where a student or teacher finds ease. Responsibility needs to be balanced with mental peace. Higher educational institutions must organize yoga classes and meditation sessions for students and teachers. Positive interactive sessions among teachers should enable both parties to understand each other's views.

On the governmental level also several steps have been taken to ensure the concept of self-care in higher educational institutions. University Grants Commission (UGC) has ordered to set up of Student Services Centres (SSC) in all higher educational institutions to manage problems related to stress and emotional adjustment. It aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality mental health services for all students. The SSCs are expected to provide requisite support to students, especially from the rural side, female students. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds and students with special needs. The National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 also emphasizes on the Student's mental, emotional and physical health. All students in Higher Educational Institutions must have access to support services like help centres and career counsellors.

The Covid 19 pandemic created a threat to human life and psychological well-being. To fight the stress. The Ministry of Education launched "Manodarpan" to provide psychological support to students to ensure their mental health and well-being. "Mandarin" also covers a wide range of activities to provide psychological support to Teachers since the Covid 19 outbreak to date as the online classes of covid time created a challenge for the teachers to adopt a new mode of teaching with learners as remote spectators and parents as unwanted intruders. The stress of being under constant observation while teaching through an unfamiliar medium with totally new tools was extremely challenging and stressful. Different initiatives of the Government help to deal with these challenges effectively. The government has taken the initiative to know the mental health conditions of the Govt. aided school teachers in all States under the "Mental Wellbeing of Teachers Survey". College and University Teachers are in extreme need of such schemes because after all self-care is not selfish, it is necessary.

In reality, the scenario is depressing as not all institutions can nurture the self-care notion in the truest sense of the term. India is a large country and has one of the largest Higher Education systems globally. The challenges of handling youth mental health are numerous. The inclusion of a mental wellness programme in the curriculum is not guaranteed unless executed properly. There is a scarcity of regular counselling services and active involvement of mental health professionals in Higher Educational institutions. Social stigma is another reason for not availing the professional help on psychological issues.

The discussion reveals that self-care needs to be practised in the everyday life of an individual to make him or her perform to the best of possibility and higher educational institutions have a direct role in promoting and retaining the notion of well-being for their own sake. Self-care should be reflected in the policies, regulations, performance and practises of such institutions. The government is also required to take self-care as an integral part of human development. Large-scale awareness programmes on self need to be promoted at governmental and institutional levels. The gap between policies and practices should be covered with utmost necessity.

Detailed directives and support from supervisory bodies, sponsorship efforts by mental health professionals and appreciation of such efforts by institutes can help to address the

situation. In low-resource situations, the application and utilization of current support structures in educational institutes can augment the viability, receptiveness, scalability and sustainability of endorsing programmes for youth. Precisely the practice of self-care should be a regular and continuous process.

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