



**Report on One Day State level Workshop Conducted on  
World Mental Health Day**

**DISASTER MANAGEMENT  
&  
PSYCHOSOCIAL AWARENESS**

*Organized by*

***Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA)***

***Venue: KSDMA Training Hall***

***Date: 10/10/2023***

On the 10th of October 2023, the World Mental Health Day, a workshop at KSDMA brought together professionals from various government sectors to actively explore the profound impact of disasters on mental health. This event emphasised the significance of psychological first aid, community support, and the role of psychologist/counsellors in disaster preparedness. Selected Psychologists/counsellors from Women and Child Development Department (WCD), National health mission (NHM) (adolescent Health Counsellors, Bhoomika Counsellors, Disha counsellors), counsellors under Arogyakeralam (Mental Health Programme- MHP), Kerala State AIDS Control Society(KSACS), Directorate of collegiate Education (counsellors under Jeevani), and directorate of scheduled tribes development department (counsellors from Model residential Schools) took part as participants. 40 counsellors / psychologists were invited and 39 attended the event. The workshop commenced at 10:40 AM, with a warm welcome from Dr. Midhila Mallika, the State Project Officer. Following her opening address, Dr. Sekhar Lukose Kuriakose, Member Secretary of KSDMA, inaugurated the event. During his inspiring presidential speech, Dr. Sekhar emphasised the critical need to address the mental health of both disaster victims and administrators. He shed light on the stress and anxieties experienced by designated officers during disaster phases, emphasising their urgent need for mental support. Dr. Pradeep G. S, Hazard and Risk Analyst at KSDMA, delivered an insightful felicitation talk. He shared his personal experiences during disaster phases, highlighting the mental trauma endured by victims and the vital importance of incorporating more mental health support during these challenging times.

The renowned psychiatrist from GMC, Dr. Arun B. Nair (Associate professor, department of Psychiatry, GMC, Thiruvananthapuram) delivered an enlightening talk. He dissected the psychological impact of disasters and eloquently connected it to four key areas.

First and foremost, Dr. Arun B Nair shed light on how disasters destabilise life. When disasters strike, they ruthlessly disrupt the normalcy of everyday existence. Individuals, families, and entire communities are suddenly thrown into a whirlwind of life-altering challenges, including the loss of homes, livelihoods, and loved ones. The very foundations of stability that were once taken for granted crumble in an instant, giving rise to overwhelming emotional turmoil. The economic impact of disasters was the next domino to fall in his narrative. He vividly painted the picture of the financial repercussions, which are both widespread and profound. In the aftermath of disasters, businesses and crucial infrastructure often lie in shambles, leading to widespread job loss and financial instability. It's not uncommon for these economic woes to plant the seeds of long-term mental health issues, as financial insecurity looms large. Dr. Arun B Nair further illuminated the loss of human resources caused by disasters. This aspect is often overlooked, yet it carries significant weight. Communities are suddenly grappling with the sudden absence of valuable human capital. Disaster takes a toll on individuals with knowledge, skills, and leadership, leaving communities without the resources they need to recover and rebuild. This aspect of loss often remains in the shadow of more visible disaster impacts, yet it is undeniably vital in understanding the complete picture. The emotional trauma that disasters inflict was his final focus. This aspect, often hidden beneath the surface, is a common outcome of disasters. Survivors are frequently left to deal with shock, grief, and post-traumatic stress. These emotional scars can run deep and have long-lasting effects on mental health, requiring support and care that can span years. Dr Arun B Nair focused on mental Health First and psychological first aid in post disaster phases and the need of capacity building during preparedness. He also demonstrated some quick exercises and diagnosing tips that can be used by the psychologists for the communities during the post disaster phase.

As a whole, the talk emphasized the importance of psychological support, community resilience, and the role of public health professionals including psychologists and counsellors in ensuring the well-being of disaster-affected

communities. This event recognized the needs of both victims and administrators, emphasising the critical role of mental health as first aid in disaster response and recovery. The session was highly interactive and this first session ended by 1 PM.

After the lunch break, at 1:45 PM, the participants convened in the training room where Dr. Mercy Alexander, an accomplished expert in gender and development, and the coordinator of SAKHI, a women's resource centre in Thiruvananthapuram, shared her extensive knowledge on the community perspective of disasters. With her wealth of experience in working with communities, especially those marginalised and living in coastal areas, she possessed a profound understanding of their cultures, practices, beliefs, needs, and immediate responses during times of crisis. Having actively engaged in providing community support during events like Cyclone Okhi, floods, and other threatening situations in Kerala, Dr. Alexander's presentation vividly illustrated psychosocial care and cultural perspectives to the participants. Her talk not only enabled participants to visualise the experiences of communities during disasters but also empowered them with valuable insights into how to handle such situations as psychologists. She also described the hardships endured by women and children in the name of gender and their sexual safety during such challenging times. This session not only provided a wealth of knowledge but also left attendees inspired to approach disaster-related psychological care with a rejuvenated perspective.

Between 3 and 4 PM, a thought-provoking panel discussion took place, expertly moderated by Ms. Ziya Arun, Psychologist, KSDMA, and Dr. Jazeela A, Hazard Analyst -Public Health, KSDMA. During this session, a dynamic group activity was organized, where all participants were divided into four groups, each assigned a specific topic. These topics revolved around harnessing their expertise for disaster response, with one group focusing on children, another on the general community, a third on the elderly, and a fourth on individuals with disabilities. This interactive group activity facilitated a cross-pollination of ideas and

experiences among psychologists and counsellors from various specialties, resulting in a rich exchange of insights and comprehensive solutions to address disaster-related challenges. Participants used this opportunity to candidly voice their concerns and offer suggestions for system improvement and areas in need of development. Some also shared valuable feedback about the workshop itself. The workshop, as a whole, was a testament to the importance of understanding and addressing the profound impact that disasters have on the mental well-being of individuals and communities alike.

The event was summarised by Dr.Midhila Mallika, the State Project Officer, and Ms. Anagha E, Rural Development Specialist, KSDMA delivered a Vote of Thanks. The workshop concluded at 4 PM.

## **PICTURE GALLERY**









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10 ഒക്ടോബർ 2023

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