



ADITYA BIRLA EDUCATION TRUST



Acceptance · Action · Advocacy



WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT

February 2026

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Key Themes Emerging from the Summit

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Unseen. Unheard. Untreated.

Dear Friends,

The global conversation around mental health has gained significant momentum over the past decade. Yet despite this growing awareness, **women's mental health continues to remain under-recognised, under-resourced and often unheard.**

Evidence from across the world indicates that women are disproportionately affected by mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and trauma. Women today are nearly twice as likely as men to experience anxiety and depressive disorders. At the same time, social and professional pressures continue to weigh heavily on women, with nearly half of working women reporting stepping back from opportunities due to burnout, and caregiving responsibilities.

These realities reflect more than individual distress. They reveal structural challenges within our societies, where women are expected to carry emotional, professional and caregiving responsibilities simultaneously, often without adequate support systems.

The **Mpowering Minds Women's Mental Health Summit 2026** was conceived as an important step in advancing this collective journey. The Summit brought together clinicians, researchers, policymakers, advocates and voices with lived experience to examine how women's mental health can be better understood and supported across life stages.

What became clear through these conversations is that women's mental health cannot be addressed through isolated interventions alone. It requires coordinated efforts across healthcare systems, workplaces, communities and families.

This report captures the insights, reflections and perspectives that emerged during the Summit. More importantly, it seeks to encourage continued dialogue and collaboration around one of the most pressing yet often invisible public health challenges of our time.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support is instrumental in driving meaningful change where women's mental well-being is supported. The benefits extend far beyond individuals.



Mrs. Neerja Birla
 Founder & Chairperson
 Aditya Birla Education Trust

About the Summit

The Mpowering Minds Women’s Mental Health Summit 2026 was convened to explore one central question: how can societies create environments where women’s mental well-being is recognised, supported and prioritised?

Women today navigate complex social realities. They are leaders, caregivers, professionals, entrepreneurs and community builders. Yet behind these visible roles often lies an invisible emotional burden shaped by societal expectations, structural barriers and life transitions that remain insufficiently acknowledged.

The Summit brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including:

- Psychiatrists and psychologists
- Public health experts
- Policymakers and government representatives
- Social entrepreneurs and community leaders
- Researchers and academics
- Advocates and voices with lived experience

The conversations explored women’s mental health across the entire life course from adolescence and youth to motherhood, midlife and later years.

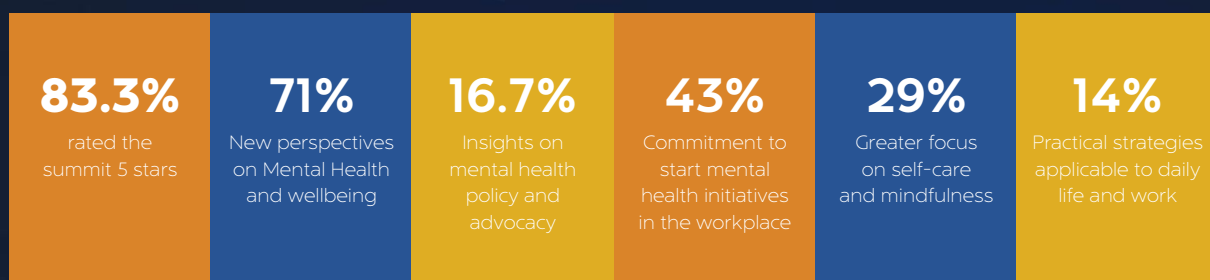
Through keynote addresses, panel discussions and fireside conversations, participants examined how women’s mental health is shaped by biological, psychological and social factors, and how systemic responses can better support well-being across communities.

The Summit also highlighted the growing importance of building integrated mental health ecosystems that combine medical care, social support, public awareness and policy action.

25
Speakers

8+
Themes

250+
Changemakers



The summit successfully created a meaningful platform for dialogue on women’s mental health, enabling participants to gain new perspectives, explore policy and workplace implications, and connect with experts and peers working to strengthen mental health awareness.

Thought Leaders



Lakshmi R Hebbalkar

Minister of Women and Child Development, and Disabled and Senior Citizens Empowerment, Government of Karnataka



Dr Prathima Murthy

Director & Senior Professor, Department of Psychiatry NIMHANS



Rohini Nilekani

Chairperson of Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies and Co-founder and Director of EkStep Author and Philanthropist



Prof Eamon McCrory

CEO, Anna Freud and Professor of Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology, UCL



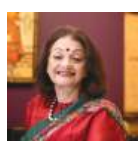
Peter Fonagy, CBE

Professor of Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Developmental Science, Head of Division for Psychology and Language Sciences, UCL



Dr Shyam Bhat

Founder of the Nirvikalpa Foundation



Dr Duru Shah

MD, FRCOG, FCPS, FICS, FICOG, MICRCH, DGO, DFP



Dr. Harbeen Arora

Founder, G100, WEF, WICCI, SHEconomy



Meenakshi Kirtane

Founder Director, Maanas The Inside Story; Founding President, Indian Psychodrama Association



Sunita Wazir

Head of Transformation, Global Health & Wellbeing, Hindustan Unilever Ltd.



Dr Padmaja Samant

Professor & Head, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, KEM Hospital & Seth GS Medical College



Dr Anju Bobby George

Olympian, World Championship Medalist & Pioneer of Indian Athletics



Dr Jahnvi Nilekani

Founder and Chairperson, Aastrika Foundation & Aastrika Midwifery Centre



Dr Meghna Singhal

Founder & CEO, Raising Family Academy & Partners to Parents



Dr Ruksheda Syeda

Psychiatrist, Psychotherapist



Saloni Suri

Executive Neuro Coach, Speaker, Trainer and Author



Jasmine Kalha

Co-Director and Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, ILS Pune. Trained in Social Work and Sociology



Padmini Sahoo

IPS Officer DCP, Admin Bengaluru City Police



Dr Akkai Padmashali

Social Activist



Laveena Sharon

Journey Speaker



Masaba Gupta

Founder of the House of Masaba, Actress



Dr Zirak Marker

Child, Adolescent & Family Psychiatrist Medical Director - TABIS, Sr. Psychiatrist & Advisor



Shweta Punj

Editor, Economic Policy, Moneycontrol



Seema Kumar

Founder Editor at 90CAPS and The Mind Diaries



Shobha Ratna

Chief Human Resources Officer Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd (ABFRL)



Dr Camilla Rosan

Academic Programme Director - Doctorate in Clinical Psychology Consultant Perinatal Clinical Psychologist Chair, Faculty of Perinatal Psychology, British Psychological Society



“Mental Health Is Not a Side Issue. It Is a Life Issue.”

Karnataka Minister Lakshmi R Hebbalkar calls for collective action to prioritise women’s mental well-being at the Mpowering Minds: Women’s Health Summit 2026

Honourable Minister Lakshmi R Hebbalkar, Minister of Women and Child Development, Disabled and Senior Citizens Empowerment, Government of Karnataka, delivered a compelling address highlighting the urgent need to recognise and prioritise women’s mental health as a central societal concern.

“Many smiles hide stress. Many strong women carry unseen battles. Silent struggles are still real struggles.”

She further highlighted findings indicating that thousands of women in Karnataka experience mental health concerns. She emphasised that these figures represent more than statistics, they reflect real lives, families, and futures.

Calling for a collective response, she stressed that addressing mental health cannot rest with a single institution. Governments, workplaces, communities, and families must work together to build systems that support women’s well-being and create safe environments where they feel valued and heard. Greater awareness and empathy are essential to strengthen support systems for women everywhere.

Reflecting on the broader societal impact, she emphasised that the health of women directly influences the health of society itself. As she concluded, **“Healthy women build healthy families, healthy families build a healthy nation, and a healthy nation builds a strong future.”**

“These are not just numbers. These are lives, families and futures. It takes society to support a mind.”



“Our mission must be simple and strong. Create space where women feel safe, create systems where women feel supported. Create a society where women feel valued.”



Empowerment & mental health across life stages

Dr Prathima Murthy

I believe that women's mental health cannot be fully understood without examining the broader context of women's empowerment in society.

Across their lives, women often face structural challenges such as gender bias, unequal access to opportunities, societal expectations around caregiving, and limited autonomy in decision-making. The cumulative impact of these experiences can significantly influence mental health outcomes.

In my view, empowerment is closely linked to psychological well-being. When women feel recognised, valued, and supported within their families and communities, their sense of agency and resilience strengthens. Conversely, environments that limit women's participation or diminish their contributions can contribute to emotional distress and poorer well-being.

Recognising and celebrating the diverse roles women play in society is therefore essential to advancing both empowerment and mental health.



Women shouldn't have to carry it all alone

Rohini Nilekani

I believe that conversations on women's mental health must move beyond the idea that women simply need to cope better.

Many women carry emotional responsibilities across their families, workplaces and communities, often placing their own wellbeing last. When we speak about mental health, we must recognise the systems and social expectations that shape women's lives.

Creating safe spaces where women can speak openly, without stigma or judgement, is essential. At the same time, we need stronger community support and more accessible care so that women do not feel they have to navigate emotional challenges alone.

Supporting women's mental wellbeing is not only about individual care; it is about building more compassionate families, communities and societies.

Opening the conversation with **ACCEPTANCE**

Healing begins with acceptance, recognising mental health as a shared reality. **With 1 in 4 people affected globally** and young women facing disproportionate stigma, the Summit opened with powerful stories that set the tone for dialogue and action.



Two Indias, Two Conversations on Mental Health

Moderator Dr Zirak Marker speaks with Dr Shyam Bhat, Dr Jasmine Kalha and Meenakshi Kirtane about the evolving landscape of young women's mental health—from silence and stigma to identity and self-labelling.



When it comes to the mental health of young women in India, the country may be navigating two very different realities. At the Summit experts spoke of a growing divide—between a culture of silence that has long shaped women's lives and a new, sometimes overwhelming openness around mental health.

In one India, distress remains largely invisible. Generations of social conditioning have taught women to endure emotional struggles quietly, often without the language or space to express what they are feeling.

Moderating the discussion, child, adolescent and family psychiatrist Dr Zirak Marker traced this silence to deep cultural roots.

“From the brutality of sati to the social exile of widows, women's suffering has often been ritualised, normalised and silenced.”

That legacy continues to shape how many young women experience anxiety and emotional distress today, often internalising these feelings rather than speaking about them.

Psychiatrist Dr Shyam Bhat, founder of the Nirvikalpa Foundation, believes the challenge often begins with the difficulty of articulating emotional pain.

“Women are expected to be the ‘good person’ and conform to a role where their feelings cannot be expressed.”

Symptoms such as fatigue, numbness or irritability are often dismissed as hormonal changes or adolescent phases, delaying the moment when help is sought. But the problem, experts say, is not just personal, it may also be systemic.

Dr Jasmine Kalha, Co-Director and senior research fellow at the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, believes access to meaningful support remains limited.

“Help has become extremely inaccessible, and we are not providing the solutions that people want.”

Many young people, she noted, find traditional models of mental healthcare distant or unrelatable, prompting efforts to design solutions alongside

time, another India is emerging—one shaped by global conversations around identity and mental health. Here, young people speak more openly about emotional struggles, though sometimes with a tendency toward quick self-diagnosis and labelling.

Dr Bhat cautions against adopting Western frameworks without reflection. **“The western idea of liberation is to label the hell out of yourself.”**

For Meenakshi Kirtane, founder of Maanas - The Inside Story, the answer may lie closer to home.

“As a culture, we have always been rooted in wisdom. We should celebrate ourselves just as we are.”

Between silence and over-definition, India's challenge may be to find a balanced path, one where young women feel safe to speak about their struggles without shame, and where systems evolve to meet them with empathy, accessibility, care and understanding.



Mental Health Is Survival for the Marginalised

Transgender activist Akkai Padmashali speaks about resilience, rejection and why mental health is essential for dignity and survival.

For transgender activist Akkai Padmashali, mental health is not a distant concept—it is survival. After years of rejection for her gender identity, she says it took more than three decades to build self-acceptance and self-respect.

Having lived through homelessness, police harassment and two suicide attempts, Padmashali now advocates for stronger mental health support for transgender communities, who often face barriers to housing, education and gender-affirming healthcare.

Despite India's growing awareness around mental health, access remains limited for sexual minorities. Padmashali believes real change will come only when society moves beyond sympathy to empathy.

“Mental health is not a luxury, it is survival.”

“I am against sympathy, I want empathy.”

“Self-acceptance is essential, to your own mental health.”



“Then Came the ‘I Told You So’”

Laveena Sharon shared a deeply personal story about miscarriage, societal pressure and the emotional toll of expectations around motherhood.

Three months after giving birth to a baby boy, Sharon—a budding lawyer, stood before the audience to speak about an experience many women carry quietly but rarely voice.

Sharon's story highlighted how deeply societal expectations can shape a woman's journey into motherhood.

Three years into her marriage, she recalled, family members began urging her to have a child. **“My mother-in-law told me not to wait and plan for a baby but to let it happen naturally,”** she said.

In mid-2024, Sharon and her husband decided they were ready. She conceived the following month. But at seven weeks, she miscarried.

“The baby didn't develop a heartbeat,” Sharon said. **“I didn't have any symptoms. I just had cramps, and when I went for a scan they told me the baby was no longer there.** What followed, she said, was not only grief, but judgement. **“Then came a barrage of ‘I told you so’.”**

Experiences like Sharon's are more common than many realise. Studies suggest that around one in five women experience postpartum depression, while many more go through emotional distress during and after pregnancy. Yet conversations around maternal mental health often remain silenced by stigma and social expectations.

Her story was a reminder that behind conversations about motherhood lies a deeper need for empathy, understanding and space for women to grieve without blame, and to speak openly about the emotional realities of pregnancy and motherhood.

“Even Empowered Women Sometimes Lose Agency After Childbirth”

A panel at the Mpowering Minds Summit explored the overlooked mental health realities of the ‘fourth trimester’ and why supporting mothers must become a shared responsibility.

Moderator Seema Kumar in conversation with Dr Padmaja Samant, Dr Ruksheda Syeda, Dr Meghna Singhal and Dr Janhavi Nilekani.



The weeks after childbirth are often described as joyful, yet for many women they can also be emotionally overwhelming. At the Summit, a panel moderated by Seema Kumar brought together experts including Dr Padmaja Samant, Dr Ruksheda Syeda, Dr Meghna Singhal and Dr Janhavi Nilekani. The panel explored the mental health realities of the “fourth trimester” and the need for stronger systems of support around new mothers.

The conversation highlighted how postpartum recovery is not only about the body, but also about emotional wellbeing, identity shifts and changing family dynamics. Between hormonal fluctuations, exhaustion and new responsibilities, many mothers experience emotional struggles that remain largely unspoken.

Dr Padmaja Samant pointed out that maternal healthcare has historically focused on the medical aspects of pregnancy while overlooking the woman’s emotional experience. “Most obstetricians look at pregnancy as the uterus, not the whole woman,” she said, noting that questions about a mother’s emotional state or even whether a pregnancy was wanted—are rarely asked.

Dr Ruksheda Syeda highlighted how

“One in five women experience postpartum depression,” she said, adding that up to 80–90 percent of women experience some form of emotional distress during the postpartum period. Early awareness and support, she emphasised, are critical in preventing these struggles from escalating.

The discussion also explored how maternal wellbeing directly affects a child’s early development. Dr Meghna Singhal explained that a baby’s brain develops through social and emotional interaction, making early bonding particularly important. However, when a mother is struggling emotionally, this connection can become difficult.

“A baby’s brain is social, emotional and relational,” she noted, emphasising that caregiving should never fall on the mother alone. Families and support systems must play an active role in creating environments where both mother and child can thrive.

Dr Janhavi Nilekani reflected on the role of culture and tradition in shaping the postpartum experience. While many traditional practices aim to support new mothers, she noted that they must be continually re-evaluated through the lens of evidence and wellbeing.

“Traditions are not wrong, but they must be examined through evidence,” she said. “Even empowered women sometimes lose agency after childbirth.”

Ultimately, the panel underscored that maternal mental health cannot remain an individual burden. Supporting mothers during the fourth trimester requires an ecosystem of care—partners who are emotionally present, families who recognise and acknowledge struggles, and communities that create safe spaces for open conversations.

The discussion ended with a powerful reminder that mental health challenges during and after motherhood are far more common than people realise. But they are not signs of failure. With empathy, awareness and collective support, the fourth trimester can become not a silent struggle, but a shared journey of care.





Turning Intent into Impact with **ACTION**

Awareness must lead to change. With **women nearly twice as likely to experience anxiety and depression and 1 in 5 mothers facing perinatal mental health challenges**, the urgency is undeniable. The Summit's Action pillar focused on practical solutions, strengthening care systems and equipping communities with tools to turn commitment into real and measurable impact.



Intergenerational trauma

The invisible inheritance

Prof Eamon McCrory

Prof McCrory's keynote was deeply illuminating, bringing sensitivity, clarity, and scientific insight to a subject that is often felt but rarely understood. It revealed how trauma does not simply belong to the past, but can quietly shape minds, relationships, and lives across generations. Most importantly, it offered hope, showing that understanding these pathways is the first step toward healing.



The Three Pathways of Transmission

Biological	Psychological	Social
Trauma alters threat and reward systems in the brain, affecting how individuals perceive safety, motivation, and stress.	It can shape trust, emotional regulation, and the ability to form secure relationships.	Trauma influences parenting, relationships, and the social environments that children grow up in.

Together, these pathways shape how trauma is carried forward.

The Invisible Impact

Trauma can lead to:

- Heightened anxiety and hypervigilance
- Difficulty forming and sustaining relationships
- Disrupted caregiving patterns across generations
- These effects often operate quietly, without being fully recognised

The Core Insight

Trauma can extend beyond the individual. Even when not directly experienced, its effects can influence future generations, through the brain, behaviour, and relationships.

Trauma becomes an invisible inheritance.

These effects often operate quietly, without being fully recognised.

The Most Powerful Insight: Healing is Possible



Trauma is not destiny.

Supportive relationships, safe environments, and strong social networks can interrupt these cycles and enable recovery.

Healing happens through connection, within families, communities, and society.

The Key Takeaway

Understanding intergenerational trauma helps make the invisible visible. It shifts the conversation from blame to awareness, and from inheritance to healing.

Attachment as a blueprint

Keynote by Prof Peter Fonagy and Dr Camila Rosan

This keynote was deeply moving in its simplicity and truth. It reminded us that attachment is not just a psychological theory, but the foundation upon which a child's emotional world is built. With clarity and compassion, it showed how everyday interactions between parent and child quietly shape resilience, trust, and future mental health.



The Core Insight

Attachment is the child's first blueprint for understanding the world. When caregivers provide safety and responsiveness, children develop the confidence

How Attachment Shapes the Child

Secure attachment enables:

- Better emotional regulation
- Stronger social relationships
- Greater confidence and curiosity
- Improved learning and cognitive development

Children learn not just through teaching, but through feeling safe.

The Invisible Mechanism: Mentalisation

At the heart of the attachment is the caregiver's ability to understand the child's mind, stay calm and respond sensitively.

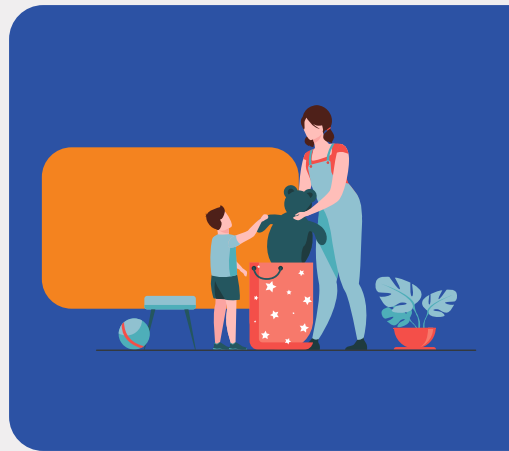
The Critical Insight: Perfection is Not Required

Secure attachment does not require perfect parenting.

What matters most is:

- Consistency, not perfection
- Repair after moments of mismatch
- Emotional presence and curiosity
- Safe, stable relationships

Even small moments of attunement can shape lifelong resilience.



The Most Powerful Takeaway

Early relationships shape how children regulate emotions, build trust, and navigate the world.

When we help caregivers better understand their child's mind, we strengthen the foundation of that child's future mental health. Attachment is not just about childhood, it shapes the architecture of the self.



Leadership, vulnerability and authenticity

Masaba Gupta on vulnerability, ambition and redefining what success really looks like.



In a candid conversation at the Mpowering Minds Summit, designer and entrepreneur Masaba Gupta offered a refreshing perspective on success—one rooted in authenticity rather than perfection. Reflecting on the emotional realities behind ambition, identity and public visibility, she spoke openly about the importance of embracing one's true self.

"We do the world a great service when we are ourselves, because then we allow others to be themselves."

She also addressed the pressure many women feel to balance multiple roles at once. Rather than rejecting the idea of "having it all," she reframed it with empathy and realism.

"Women can have it all but they have to stagger it."

Her honesty struck a chord in a discussion centred on women's mental health. In a world where women are often expected to appear constantly composed and accomplished, Masaba's openness highlighted the quiet strength in vulnerability.

"Being vulnerable is a superpower."

"Many see it as weakness. I see it as my biggest strength."

Her reflections reinforced a powerful message: success is not defined by flawless achievement, but by the **courage to live and lead with honesty.**

Entrepreneur, mother, creator, yet perhaps her most meaningful role is the woman she continues to discover.

Menopause

not an Ending - a new beginning

Dr Duru Shah

Dr Duru Shah reframed menopause with clarity and compassion. It highlighted menopause not as decline, but as a natural biological transition, one that deeply impacts physical, emotional, and mental well-being, and deserves awareness, care, and dignity.



Why This Matters

Menopause is a major life stage, and a growing public health reality.

1.2

billion women globally will be menopausal by 2030

18%

of adults over 45 in India live with chronic diseases, with higher risk in women

Women spend nearly one-third of their lives post-menopause

Menopause is not just personal it is demographic and societal.

What Women Experience

Menopause is driven by neuroendocrine changes affecting both body and mind.

Common effects include:

- Sleep disruption, fatigue, and bone loss
- Anxiety, mood changes, and brain fog
- Increased risk of heart, metabolic, and bone disorders

These symptoms are biological and treatable.

The Most Important Reframe

Menopause is not a disease. It is a transition. With proper care, women can experience:

- Better health and emotional stability
- Renewed autonomy and confidence
- A powerful phase of personal reinvention

Menopause is not decline, it is redesign.

Critical Health Insight: Hidden Risks

A major rural Indian study revealed high prevalence of undiagnosed conditions:

58%

Dyslipidaemia

50%

Osteopenia

44%

Vitamin D deficiency

25%

Diabetes

Menopause is a key window for early detection and prevention.

The Way Forward

- Increase awareness and remove stigma
- Screen early for physical and mental health risks
- Support women through medical care and lifestyle interventions
- Build community and workplace support systems

The Key Insight

- When women are supported through menopause, they don't just manage symptoms, they enter a new phase of strength, clarity, and possibility.
- Menopause is not an ending. It is a new beginning.



Systemic change, lasting impact evolving with **ADVOCACY**

Real change happens when systems evolve. Recognizing that women's mental health is shaped by social, cultural, and structural realities, this pillar emphasized the urgent need for gender-responsive policies, inclusive data and equitable access to care by calling on institutions, governments and communities to turn commitment into lasting reform.





“Women’s mental health must move from private struggle to public priority”

Dr Harbeen Arora



Dr Harbeen Arora called for women’s mental health to be recognised as a global public health priority, shaped not just by individuals, but by systems, policies, and societal support structures.

She emphasised that mental well-being depends on three pillars: Safety nets · Social support systems · Personal empowerment

“Women’s mental health is not an individual burden. It is a societal responsibility.”

The Global Mental Health Gap



Early intervention and accessible support systems significantly improve mental health outcomes.

What Global Models Show

Countries investing in systemic support see measurable improvements:

- Sweden operates 24/7 national helplines supporting ~50,000 women annually
- Luxembourg invested 13% of its healthcare budget in mental health, reducing depression rates significantly
- Singapore’s national strategy has enabled 60% of citizens to actively seek mental health support
- MHFA programmes and community mental health teams are improving early intervention worldwide

India’s Opportunity

India has begun progress through initiatives such as:

- Ayushman Bharat, providing mental health coverage to vulnerable populations
- MHFA training programmes in universities and communities
- Growing institutional and civil society efforts to expand awareness and support

However, access, awareness and systemic integration remain key priorities.

The Core Insight

Women’s mental health is shaped by systems, healthcare, workplaces, education, law enforcement, and social support. When societies invest in accessible care, early intervention, and supportive environments, mental health shifts from silent struggle to shared responsibility.

Key Takeaway

“Power. Empower. Own Power.”

Supporting women’s mental health is not only an individual need, it is essential to building healthier societies, stronger economies, and more resilient futures.

Ambition Is Only the Minimum Requirement for Women to Become Leaders

Moderator Shobha Ratna in conversation with Sunita Wazir, Dr. Anju Bobby George, Padmini Sahoo and Saloni Suri on women, ambition and leadership.

The story began at a dinner table in 1960s Madras.

Every evening, a mother asked her two daughters to write a speech about what they would do if they were the president or prime minister of a country. After dinner, the girls would stand up and deliver their speeches, impersonating world leaders. Their mother would declare a winner, who then signed a piece of paper accepting her role as “leader of the world” for the day.

That playful ritual helped shape the confidence of a young girl who would go on to become Indra Nooyi, the first female CEO of PepsiCo.

But even Nooyi, who later led one of the world’s most powerful corporations, once admitted that leadership came with difficult trade-offs.

“Being a stay-at-home mother is a full-time job. Being a CEO is three jobs in one. How can you do justice to all of them?”

The anecdote set the tone for a conversation on women and leadership at the Mpowering Minds Summit, moderated by Shobha Ratna, Chief Human Resources Officer at Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd.

Ratna pointed out that while conversations about gender equality have become louder, the numbers tell a sobering story.

“Only 10 per cent of global CEOs and about 30 per cent of senior management roles are held by women. In India, nearly half of women step back from their careers because of work-life challenges.”

For Sunita Wazir, Head of Transformation–Global Health & Wellbeing at Hindustan Unilever Ltd, the struggle lies not just in reaching leadership positions but in sustaining them.

“As women, we have to keep proving ourselves over and over again.”

She described the constant negotiations women make every day.

“What choices do I make? Do I care for my family or attend a work meeting? Do I give up my sleep? What else do I need to give up?”

The issue, Wazir argued, is not a lack of resilience among women but the systems that surround them.

“We need to move away from the narrative that resilience means giving up everything we care about to be successful. Structurally, workplaces are not designed to support women.”

The challenges of ambition are not limited to boardrooms. Olympian Anju Bobby George shared how resistance followed her long before she won medals.

When her mother enrolled her in athletics, relatives warned that playing in the sun would darken her skin and make it harder for her to find a husband. Later, when she began competing internationally, she was criticised for wearing makeup and nail polish.

But George refused to let those expectations define her. **“If I looked good, it boosted my confidence. To all the critics, my answer was my jumps, my medals.”**

For Padmini Sahoo, an IPS officer, scrutiny continues even after women reach positions of authority.

“As a society, we should judge women by their merit and performance, and not by their gender.”

While policies supporting women exist in many institutions, she noted, the stigma around using them persists.

“My male counterparts certainly do not face the amount of scrutiny that I do.”

Neuro coach and speaker Saloni Suri pointed to another foundation of empowerment—financial independence.

“The minute a woman understands money, she gets power.”

Economic autonomy, she explained, allows women to make decisions about their own lives and futures.

As the discussion drew to a close, Ratna returned to the central theme of the session.

“Ambition and well-being are not opposites. Women do not need to become stronger—leadership systems need to become wiser.”

True leadership, she suggested, is not measured by authority, but by how much easier we make the path for those who come after us.



“These Conversations Must Become Dinner-Table Conversations”

In a closing fireside chat moderated by Shweta Punj, Neerja Birla and Prof Eamon McCrory explored how childhood, families and culture shape mental health, and why real change begins at home.



As the Mpowering Minds Summit drew to a close, the final session shifted the conversation from awareness to something deeper: how societies can build truly inclusive mental health systems. In a fireside conversation moderated by Shweta Punj, Neerja Birla and Professor Eamon McCrory reflected on the forces that shape mental health across a lifetime, from childhood experiences and family environments to societal expectations.

The discussion began with a simple truth: acknowledging emotional struggles is often harder than it seems. Neerja Birla spoke candidly about how many people struggle to admit when they are not okay, not because they lack the language, but because they have been conditioned to suppress vulnerability.

“Very often we don’t say we’re not okay because we don’t want to accept it ourselves,” she said.

In a world that often celebrates resilience as silent endurance, emotional honesty can feel risky. Neerja Birla noted that many grow up believing strength lies in pushing through discomfort rather than acknowledging it.

“We have been conditioned to believe we must endure silently. That narrative needs to change.”

Professor Eamon McCrory expanded the conversation by explaining how mental health is shaped long before adulthood. Drawing from developmental neuroscience, he noted that early life experiences, both positive and negative, leave lasting imprints on how people understand themselves and the world.

“Trauma shapes us across the lifespan, psychologically, socially and physically.”

- Prof Eamon McCrory

Trauma, however, is not always dramatic or visible. Often it forms through quieter experiences: emotional neglect, inconsistent care, or environments where children feel unseen.

“The words spoken to us, or the warmth we never received, can stay with us for a lifetime.”

Despite these early influences, McCrory emphasized the brain’s remarkable adaptability. Safe relationships, empathy and emotional support can reshape how individuals process past experiences.

“What matters most for a child is feeling safe, valued and understood,” he said. “Trauma affects the brain, but positive relationships reshape it too.”

As the discussion evolved, attention turned to families, where many protective relationships begin. Neerja Birla stressed that cultural change around mental health must start at home.

“These conversations must become dinner-table conversations,” she said,

highlighting the need to normalize discussions about feelings and emotional wellbeing early in life.

She also pointed to the role of gender expectations in shaping emotional expression, emphasizing the importance of raising boys with empathy and emotional awareness.

“If we raise our boys to understand and respect these realities, the next generation will think differently”.

“Until the ecosystem changes, families, and society, real transformation cannot happen. Shweta, concluded

The conversation concluded that inclusive mental health systems begin with cultural change and spaces where saying “I’m not okay” is seen not as weakness, but the start of care.

1 Integrate Mental Health into Primary Healthcare

Mental health support must become a routine part of primary healthcare. Integrating screening and early intervention into maternal health programmes, community clinics and general healthcare systems can improve early detection, reduce stigma and expand access to care.

2 Strengthen Maternal Mental Health Support

Pregnancy and the postpartum period are critical for women's well-being. Expanding screening for postpartum depression, counselling services and family education programmes can improve outcomes for both mothers and early childhood development.

3 Recognise Menopause as a Public Health Priority

Menopause affects millions of women yet remains under-recognised. National health guidelines, workplace awareness programmes and specialised healthcare services are needed to ensure adequate support during this life stage.

4 Address Social Determinants of Mental Health

Economic participation, caregiving responsibilities, gender inequality and social stigma significantly shape women's mental health. Policies supporting education, financial independence, workplace flexibility and gender equity can strengthen emotional well-being.

5 Expand Community Based Support

Community networks play a crucial role in strengthening mental health ecosystems. Peer support programmes, community counselling and awareness initiatives can create safe spaces for discussing emotional challenges and improve access to care.

6 Build Inclusive Mental Health Systems

Healthcare systems must address the needs of diverse communities, including transgender individuals, sexual minorities and vulnerable populations. Inclusive systems require trained professionals, culturally sensitive care models and accessible services.

7 Strengthen Workplace Mental Health Policies

Workplaces significantly influence adult mental health. Policies such as flexible work arrangements, caregiver support, mental health resources and open leadership cultures can improve well-being while strengthening workforce participation.

8 Invest in Awareness and Education

Awareness and education must go beyond information to reflect the lived realities of women's mental health. From internalised distress and normalised symptoms to the impact of caregiving roles and life-stage transitions, building mental health literacy can enable earlier recognition and more empathetic responses.

9 Encourage Family Conversations

Families shape emotional well-being. Open discussions about mental health within homes can reduce stigma and build resilience across generations.

10 Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration

Improving women's mental health requires collaboration between healthcare systems, policymakers, private sector organisations and communities. Cross-sector partnerships can expand access to services and support sustainable solutions.

The summit reinforced a key message: **women's mental health cannot remain a private struggle—it must become a shared societal responsibility.** Supporting women's mental health strengthens families, communities and societies, contributing to the broader vision of **Viksit Bharat by 2030.**

Media reach & sentiment

300 Media Articles

Amplifying awareness about women's mental health in India and across the world.

Positive Audience Sentiment

Strong appreciation for the Summit's focus on empowerment, as a national priority.

Featured In Leading Media

Coverage in The Statesman, The Times of India, The Week, Mint, Daily Jagran, Dainik Jaagran, Times Now, Hans India, KK News, Kannada News Now, PTI, Hindustan Times, News18 and Indian Today.

ANI
South Asian Leading Multilingual News Agency

Arch For 'mpower summit'

Mpowering Minds Summit 2026
Championing Women's Mental Health

Why attend and why now?

What's happening at the summit?

Friday, 27 February | Bengaluru

Mpower Announces 'Mpowering Minds Summit 2026 - Advancing Women's Mental Health'

Updated: 2 Weeks, 2 days ago IST
Bengaluru (Karnataka) [India], February 18: Mpower, an initiative of the Aditya Birla Education Trust, today announced the second edition of the Mpowering Minds - Women's Mental Health Summit, a national full-day forum to be held in Bengaluru on 27 February 2026. The event will be led by Mrs

*Priya Nair
@mindedindia.com

Women thrive, those around them benefit. However, women's mental health is often overlooked. Does small gestures, such as timely support, a much-needed break or prompt medical care, can make a significant difference.

Experts note that while more women today are seeking help for mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression, the gap between awareness and access to care remains wide. According to Neeraj Birla, founder and chairperson of Aditya Birla Education Trust and Mpower, over the past decade in this field, "I have witnessed a truly heartening shift in which awareness of mental wellness among Indian women is steadily growing. Women are coming to us as well as their loved ones, seeking to get inside. As more organisations step forward, governments engage thoughtfully, public-private partnerships and corporate partnerships, and more public figures share their stories, we are collectively dismantling silence and fostering

open, honest conversations about their struggles. More women are now stepping forward with courage to seek the help they deserve, reclaiming their well-being," she shares.

'CARE FOR THE MIND' Women's mental health is shaped by a complex mix of biological, psychological and social factors. Hormonal transitions during puberty, pregnancy, the postpartum period and menopause can increase vulnerability to mental health concerns. "Globally, research suggests that timely mental health support empowers a woman

essentially. The first steps recognition, persistent sadness, irritability, sleep disturbances unrelated to the baby, shifts or emotional detachment are not normal adjustments. Seeking at postnatal visits should be a routine practice." The support of family and people around is vital during such situations. As Pall suggests, "Treatment works best with a combination approach such as a qualified validated, structured counselling or therapy, adjunctive sleep support, nutritional care, and when necessary, safe antidepressant medication. Family involvement is critical

in illness is often viewed as a personal failing, leaving women, a fearful judgment and social exclusion. At the same time, access to care remains limited and costly, especially in rural areas, making timely support difficult. Experts say that, along with improving access to professional care, everyday practices such as self-care routines, setting healthy boundaries, mindfulness and meditation, regular physical activity and prioritising responsibilities can play an important role in supporting mental well-being. However, closing the women's mental health gap requires



6
More women are now stepping forward with courage to seek the help they deserve, reclaiming their well-being.

Chetana, ayurveda physician at Hespero Ayurveda, explains, "The overall health is not the absence of disease, but rather a balance between body, mind, and soul/spirit. Mental health, in particular, is understood through the balance of the three gunas, sat, rajas and tamas, which govern the nature of the mind." According to ayurveda, satva represents purity, clarity and balance. Individuals with a dominant sattvic quality are believed to have a calm, balanced and joyful state of mind. Rajas, on the other hand, is associated with activity, movement and passion. When rajas becomes excessive, it may lead to restlessness, agitation and excessive attachment to past pleasures. Tamas represents inertia, heaviness and mental dullness. Advancement of these may manifest as a lack of motivation, negative thinking patterns and can be linked to issues such as depression and obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Dr Chetana adds that maintaining balance among these three gunas through natural lifestyle practices, diet, meditation and adequate rest is key to maintaining mental and emotional well-being.

Well-being starts within

While awareness of women's mental health is increasing, affordable, gender-sensitive care remains inaccessible. It is time for policymakers, organisations, and communities to urgently invest in ensuring accessible emotional well-being support for all women

*Self-compassion isn't indulgence. It is the quiet foundation that enables women to sustain their vital roles in families and communities. It is the quiet resilience that empowers women to navigate life's challenges with grace and strength.

health condition during pregnancy or in the year after childbirth, yet many cases remain undiagnosed." Neeraj Birla, founder and chairperson of Aditya Birla Education Trust and Mpower, brought together policymakers, clinicians, researchers, activists and industry leaders to examine the structural

barriers that impede individual coping strategies and strengthening the systems women interact with every day. "One important step is integrating mental health support within existing healthcare frameworks," says Birla. "Women engage with the health system at key stages such as adolescence, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. These moments offer an

opportunity for early screening and counselling support. Organisations play a vital role by weaving mental health awareness into community outreach and workplace wellness, creating a culture that empowers women to seek help when they need it. Building capacity among frontline workers to recognise early distress signs and

offer compassionate, timely support that prevents isolation," she suggests.

MENTAL WELLNESS THROUGH AYURVEDA
From an ayurvedic perspective, mental well-being is deeply connected to the balance between the body, mind and spirit. Sharing insights on this approach, Dr

IRAN WAR REPORT FROM TEHRAN | ISRAEL ENVY SPEAKS | WHY MODI IS SILENT

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FASHION DESIGNER PARABAL GURUNG
EXCLUSIONS SHARPENS YOUR SENSITIVITY

WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL

IMPROVING WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

By Anjali Bobby George

By Anjali Bobby George

At Mpowering Minds 2026, Mrs Neeraja Birla Calls for Structural Reform and Integrated Mental Health Systems for Women

PTI Mar 05 2025

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Women's Mental Health Central to India's Social and Economic Progress by 2047

BENGALURU, India, March 5, 2025 /PRNewswire/ — The second edition of the Mpowering Minds Women's Mental Health Summit 2026, convened by Neeraj Birla, Founder and Chairperson Aditya Birla Education Trust and Mpower, brought together policymakers, clinicians, researchers, activists and industry leaders to examine the structural

'Own your future': Experts at Mpowering Minds Summit urge women to master financial independence

Sportswoman Anjali Bobby George speaks about how her family was against her becoming a sportswoman, with a bevy of objections like how she would become dark playing in the sun and would not be able to find a husband later.

By Anjali Bobby George

Updated: February 27, 2026 1:54:37

Healthy families build a strong nation: Lakshmi Hebbalkar

The Hans India Update: 2026-02-28 13:30 IST

Healthy families build a healthy nation, and a healthy nation creates a strong future, said Karnataka Minister for Women and Child Development Lakshmi Hebbalkar. She was speaking after inaugurating the Mpowering Minds 2026 - Women's Mental Health Summit held at a private hotel in Bengaluru on Friday.

Addressing the gathering, the Minister said healthy women are the foundation of healthy families. Congratulating Mpower for a decade of dedicated service in the field of mental health, she noted that

Mpowering Minds Summit: Neuroscientist Eamon McCrory says, 'If trauma can travel across generations, so can repair and recovery'

Sharing his keynote address, McCrory focused on understanding the science behind trauma and exploring the cycle in the brain, and how recovery is possible through powerful relationships and early interventions.

By Anjali Bobby George

Updated: February 27, 2026 1:54:37

Mpowering Minds Summit: Masaba Gupta says women can have it all, but they have to stagger it

To achieve this, she emphasises women who rethink the struggle behind it, and who are firmly aware about the importance of acknowledging their personal challenges.

By Anjali Bobby George

Updated: February 27, 2026 1:54:37

Digital engagement snapshot

350K+
Total Engagements

The summit generated strong online conversations and audience interest across digital platforms.

300K+
Views

Content reached a wide audience and drove significant visibility.

30K+
Likes

High audience appreciation and positive response to summit.

Poppy Jaman OBE, Hon.PhD, MBA. • 2nd
A global voice of authority on workplace mental health
21h • Edited

I travelled to Bengaluru for one simple reason: to be in a room full of women talking honestly about mental health.

That room was the MPowering Minds Women's Mental Health Summit, convened by **Neerja Birla** and brought to life by the wonderful MPower team led by the ever-energetic **Parveen Shaikh**.

Our organisations, **MindForward Alliance** and **Mpower - An Initiative Of Aditya Birla Education Trust** have partnered to advance mental health globally. Neerja and I have long recognised each other as ambassadors & women whose paths cross through this work and the occasional catch-up about life.

For me this time away has become a period exploring healing and roots. So listening in that room felt significant.

What became clearer was that women's mental health is inseparable from societal health, shaped by the interplay between our inner worlds, the positions we occupy, and the social and cultural forces around us.

I loved the cultural familiarity present through the day; the lighting of the diya, the grace of the sarees, and the warmth of conversations between sessions. Different from the spaces I usually inhabit professionally, yet completely in tune with my own story.

It also left me reflecting on something else.

Too often, Western models of mental health care are treated as the gold standard, yet many of those systems are clearly struggling.

Listening to the room, I felt hopeful that other ways forward are not only possible, but already present. Approaches drawing on embedded wisdom, relational and human rather than purely clinical.

25+ speakers shared perspectives, from government leaders and clinicians to activists and entrepreneurs, showing the depth of talent shaping women's mental health conversations in India.

Lakshmi R. Hebbalkar, Karnataka's Women and Child Development Minister, opened the day by reminding us that mental health is not a side issue, it is a life issue.

Ruksheda Syeda psychiatrist and psychotherapist, spoke with compassion about post-natal health and the importance of simply checking in with one another.

Akkai Padmashali, India's most courageous voices for transgender dignity and inclusion, spoke about identity and belonging and the profound cost when people are denied their place in society.

In conversation with **Masaba Gupta** we heard refreshing honesty about ambition, vulnerability and the emotional realities that often sit behind public success.

Duru Shah one of India's leading advocate for women's midlife health, reminded us that women's mental health is also biological, shaped by hormonal transitions that remain far too rarely spoken about.

And **Neerja Birla**, whose vision convened the summit, captured the systemic challenge clearly: "Mental health demands systemic solutions, not just personal ones."

Acceptance. Action. Advocacy; the ideas that framed the summit, and fittingly echoed in this year's International Women's Day theme: Give to Gain.

When women give their stories and knowledge, everyone gains.

Aarti Pathak • 3rd
Author | PEOPLE NEGATIVE | Story Teller | Motivational Speak...
23h • Edited

Delighted to attend the #MpoweringMindsWomens2026

A wonderful gathering of voices committed to women's mental health. The summit brought together experts, leaders, and lived experiences to explore the many layers shaping women's emotional well-being—from motherhood and leadership pressures to intergenerational trauma and workplace mental load. It was an enriching experience.

Thank you, **Mrs Neerja Birla**, for starting this initiative, for making such discussions possible, and for helping make mental health no longer a side conversation.

And thank you so much, **Mrs Birla**, for inviting me to this engaging, thought-provoking and enriching day.

#BirlaStrengthsahidya
Aarti Pathak

Prakruthi Natarajan • 2nd
Psychologist | Child & Adolescent Mental Health Behaviour...
23h • Edited

Stop calling women's mental health a 'niche' interest. It's a global priority.

Honored to join **Neerja Birla** and **Mpower - An Initiative Of Aditya Birla Education Trust** - an initiative of **Aditya Birla Education Trust** in Bengaluru to push this conversation forward. Change doesn't happen in silence-it happens when we show up, speak out, and demand better support systems.

The summit may be over, but the work continues!

Acceptance. Action. Advocacy.

#WomensMentalHealth #MentalHealthAwareness #MpoweringMinds #NeerjaBirla #MentalHealthMatters #BreakTheStigma #WomenInLeadership #BengaluruEvents

Sunita Wazir • 2nd
Health & Wellbeing Leader | Talent Management and Leader...
35h • Edited

It's a truly remarkable experience when like-minded individuals speak about topics that resonate with the attendees, so much as each of the speakers.

I'm delighted to share that the conversations last week around #WomensMentalHealth hosted by #MpoweringMinds and **Neerja Birla**, very effectively moderated by **Shobha Ratna** will have an impact!

Onwards and Upwards... many thanks to my co-panelists **Anju Bobby George** **Saloni Suri** for the tremendous shared learnings...and to all the wonderful people who pulled off this summit as well as attended it!

Shobha Ratna • 3rd+
CEO | ASSTL | Personate About Making Businesses Imp...
2d • Edited

At Mpowering Minds 2026, a Summit centred on women's mental health, I had the opportunity to moderate a session that explored an important dimension many women in leadership positions navigate today. The reality behind women in Power. The conversation examined what sustained ambition asks of women psychologically, the discipline behind performance, the scrutiny that comes with visibility and the ongoing negotiations that continue even after authority is established in leadership positions.

In conversation with **Mrs Anju Bobby George**, **Ms Padmini Sahoo**, **Ms Sunita Wazir** and **Ms Saloni Suri** who brought tremendous wisdom and insights to the discussion. Attending the broader Summit conversations around women's mental health reinforced how important it is to view women's mental health historically and to ensure that the systems around women leaders are designed with as much care as the expectations placed upon them.

Thank you **Mrs Neerja Birla** for the opportunity to moderate this panel and to be part of a Summit that continues to centre women's mental wellbeing with seriousness and intent.

#WomensMentalHealth #MpoweringMinds

the.cool.therapist • 56m
Grateful to be part of the Women's Mental Health Summit 2026

Thank you for inviting **@adityabirlagrp** and **@neerja_birla** ma'am — it was truly an honour to be in a space so deeply committed to empowering women. Listening to powerful voices like **@masabagupta** and witnessing the initiative by the **Aditya Birla Group** reaffirmed why this work matters so much.

Laxmi Hebbalkar • 1.2m
@laxmi_hebbalkar

ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನ ಖಾಸಗಿ ಹೋಟೆಲ್ ನಲ್ಲಿ ನಡೆದ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಮಾನಸಿಕ ಆರೋಗ್ಯ ಶೃಂಗ ಸಭೆಯಲ್ಲಿ (M powering Minds 2026 – Women's Mental Health Summit) ಪಾಲ್ಗೊಳ್ಳಲಾಯಿತು.

ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಮಾನಸಿಕ ಯೋಗಕ್ಷೇಮವನ್ನು ಉತ್ತೇಜಿಸಲು, ಕಳಂಕವನ್ನು ಹೋಗಲಾಡಿಸಲು ಮತ್ತು ನೀತಿಗಳನ್ನು ರೂಪಿಸಲು ಉದ್ದೇಶಿಸುವುದೇ ಈ ಸಮ್ಮೇಳನದ ಉದ್ದೇಶವಾಗಿದ್ದು, ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಮಾನಸಿಕ ಆರೋಗ್ಯದ ಸುತ್ತಲಿನ ವಾತಾವರಣವನ್ನು ತಿಳಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಸುಸ್ಥಿರ ಬದಲಾವಣೆಯನ್ನು ತರಬೇಕು ಎಂದು ಸಭೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ತಿಳಿಸಲಾಯಿತು.

ಈ ವೇಳೆ ಆದಿತ್ಯ ಬಿರ್ಲಾ ಎಜುಕೇಶನ್ ಟ್ರಸ್ಟ್ ಸಂಸ್ಥಾಪಕರಾದ ನಿರಜಾ ಬಿರ್ಲಾ, ನಿರ್ಮಾನ್ಯ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರಾದ ಡಾ.ಪ್ರತಿಮಾ ಮೂರ್ತಿ, ಮಾನಸಿಕ ತಜ್ಞರಾದ ಇಮೊನ್ ಮ್ಯಾಕ್ ಕ್ರೂರಿ, ಲೀಟರ್ ಫಾನಗಿಯು, ಡಾ. ಶಾಮ್ ಭಟ್, ಡುರು ಶಾ ಸೇರಿದಂತೆ ಹಲವು ಮಾನಸಿಕ ತಜ್ಞರು ಉಪಸ್ಥಿತರಿದ್ದರು.



Seema Kumar • 3rd+
Founder Editor at 90CAPS an...
2d (edited)

It felt wonderful to be a part of this very important and meaningful summit. More power to **Neerja Birla** and **Mpower**

Social media noise



About Mpower

Mpower, an initiative of Aditya Birla Education Trust, stands as a pioneering social enterprise dedicated to revolutionizing India's approach to mental health. Since its founding eight years ago, Mpower has become a leading advocate for mental health awareness, stigma reduction, and comprehensive care.

With over 200 trained professionals, Mpower impacts more than 180 million lives across multiple Indian cities including Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Pune, Pilani, Goa, Kalyan, and Hyderabad. The organization operates through five strategic verticals:

Movement: Working to shift cultural perceptions and reduce stigma surrounding mental health through initiatives like World Suicide Prevention Day events, World Mental Health Day activities, and awareness campaigns including art exhibitions and marathons.

Clinical Care: Providing tiered mental health services through:

- The Centre: Making mental health accessible through offering holistic, world-class care in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, and New Delhi
- The Foundation: Delivering affordable support for underprivileged communities in Mumbai, Virar, and Kota
- The Cell: Addressing specific mental health needs at educational institutions including BITS Pilani, BITS Pilani Hyderabad, BK Birla College, Kalyan, and ECBC University

Outreach: Driving awareness and capacity-building through IGNITE Programs for diverse target groups including educational institutions, youth mental health initiatives, and corporate mental health champion programs.

Academia: Equipping students with essential skills through "Minds Matter" school curriculum incorporating mental health literacy and building resilience.

Helpline: 24/7 multilingual mental health helpline and live chat support for callers.

Mpower's vision is to create a stigma-free world where individuals with mental health concerns can lead meaningful and productive lives with respect and dignity. Through extensive public-private partnerships with organizations like the CISF, Government of Maharashtra, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Maharashtra Police, Mumbai Police and several other government agencies, Mpower remains committed to creating a supportive, stigma-free mental health landscape across India.



#SheStrengthensIndia

www.mpowerminds.com

