

WORKSHOP ON “PANIC ATTACK IN STUDENTS: GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT”

In response to the growing number of students experiencing panic and anxiety issues on campus, university staff have long sought support in assisting students who suffer from panic attacks during classes or in academic buildings. On October 19, 2024, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Ronald Mascarenhas organized a workshop titled “Panic Attacks in Students: Guidelines for Support.” Held at Xavier Hall in the PG Block of St. Joseph’s University (SJU) and beginning at 1:45 PM, the event was attended by approximately 45 staff members from various departments. Dr. Valeen Rashmi served as the MC, warmly welcoming attendees, and the gathering began with a prayer led by Dr. Viyolla Pavana Mendonce.

The workshop aimed to foster a supportive campus environment, allowing staff to share experiences and gain insights from mental health experts. Dr. Shailaja Shastri, the workshop's resource person, was welcomed by Prof. Dr. Mascarenhas, who underscored the value of such initiatives for addressing students’ mental health needs. With over 30 years of experience, Dr. Shastri is a distinguished teacher, trainer, researcher, counselor, and advocate for mental wellness and educational psychology. A certified facilitator from Cambridge University and a Dale Carnegie Trainer, she has also participated in Harvard’s Future of Learning program and conducted over 800 workshops, reaching more than 20,000 participants across corporate, educational, and community settings.

The workshop began with an interactive icebreaker, dividing participants into smaller groups. Dr. Shastri reviewed the physical and emotional symptoms of panic attacks, such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, and an overwhelming fear of losing control. Through a collaborative discussion, staff shared experiences and addressed often-overlooked symptoms, like limb stiffness and loss of rational thinking.

After a tea break, the focus shifted to reducing stigma around anxiety and panic disorders. Dr. Shastri discussed biological, psychological, and environmental factors that contribute to panic attacks, providing insights based on her professional experience. A detailed session followed on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and relaxation techniques, including deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and grounding exercises. Dr. Shastri also introduced physical stress relief tools like squeeze balls and texture mats, which can help students stabilize during episodes.

The workshop provided a valuable space for participants to discuss personal encounters with panic attacks, promoting peer support and therapeutic strategies for

managing anxiety. The participants created a display chart featuring various signs and symbols, showcasing their understanding and readiness to support students effectively. The event concluded with a formal vote of thanks from Dr. Joyce Dsouza and the felicitation of the speaker, Dr. Nalini Sundaram. Staff expressed their gratitude to Prof. Dr. Ronald Mascarenhas for organizing this essential workshop and appreciated the university's commitment to student mental health.

**For the Images of the snake awareness, kindly refer to the Photo Gallery:
<https://sju.edu.in/gallery/110>**