

# Ashoka Centre for Well-Being (ACWB)

## Ashoka University, Sonipat

### A Quick Glance at 2021

The Ashoka Centre for Well-being (ACWB) is a non-aligned Centre offering counselling and psychological support for students, staff and faculty at Ashoka University. The ACWB was established to provide a safe space that offers free and confidential individual and group counselling support. It is one of the only centres of its kind in India with its focus on capacity building at every level of an organization. A team of professionally qualified Counsellors led by Founder and Director Arvinder J Singh provide an emotionally safe space for students, staff and faculty at Ashoka to share their concerns, uncover their strengths and build resilience.

During the year 2021, the counselling support continued online and helpline was active for crisis intervention. In the throes of the Covid Pandemic, the Centre provided support to around **1400 members** of the Ashoka community spread across **3400 hourly sessions** while adding nearly **500 new members** approaching the Centre. The year witnessed shifting trends in the kinds of concerns people approached the Centre with as the pandemic changed form. The year 2020 with the beginning of the pandemic had brought in high levels of anxiety and uncertainty as we got used to the lockdowns and online work. On the other hand, as 2021 began with the deadly second wave we encountered increasing concerns of grief and loss with experiences of exhaustion and online burnout. As 2021 turned into 2022 bringing with it a third wave, we saw more issues to the like of disappointment, lack of motivation and a real inability to work.

The major areas of concern expressed by the students during this period are outlined below:

- Anxiety related to uncertainty of future
- Grief and mourning about losses – of people, places and previous way of life
- Family dysfunction and related concerns
- Fatigue related to online work
- Academic stress and burnout
- Relation issues and social anxiety
- Lack of motivation
- Disappointment about repeated lockdowns

# Some trends across 2021



Figure 1 shows trends across significant problem areas shared with the Centre which express themselves in the form of majorly anxiety, depressiveness and sometimes suicidal behaviour.

Figure 1

Figure 2 shows monthly distribution of the individual online sessions. There is an increasing trend at the end of the year – perhaps signifying more difficulties due to grief and exhaustion.

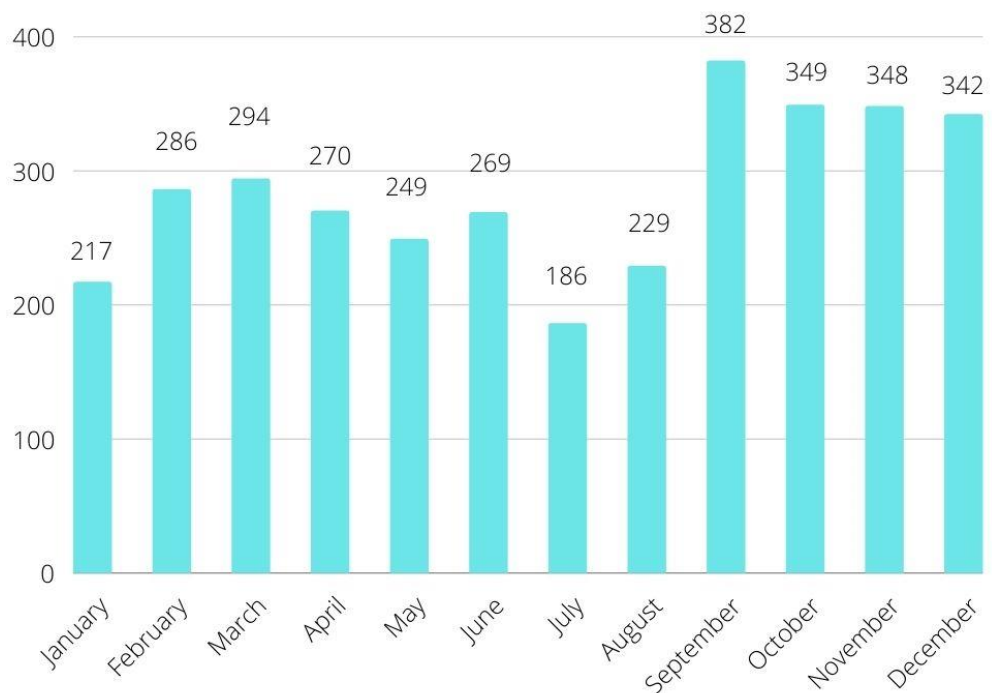


Figure 2

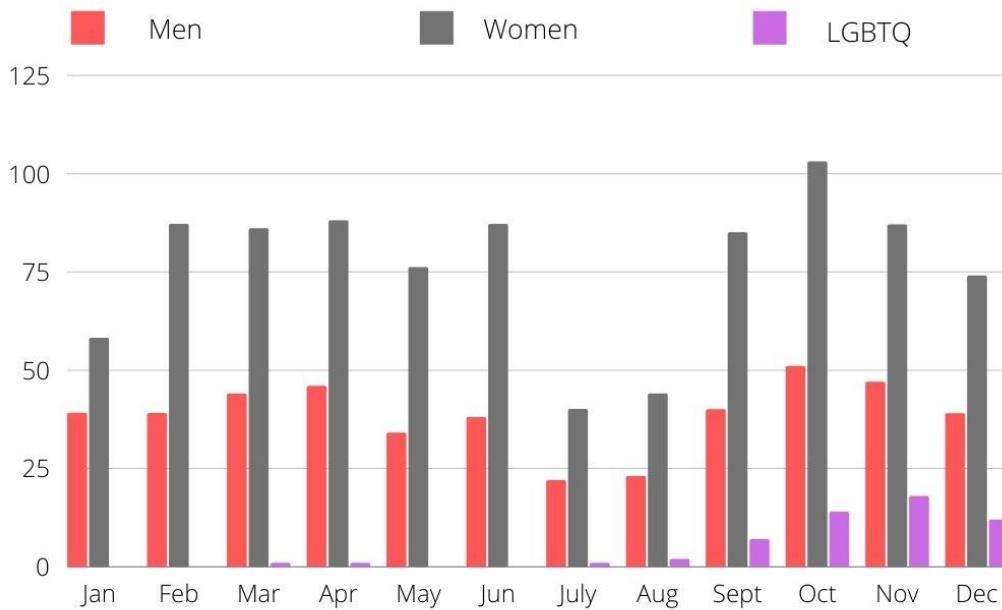


Figure 3 shows the gender distribution of members visiting the Centre during the year. Women approach the Centre in larger numbers and there has been an increasing shift among the members of the LGBTQ community approaching ACWB.

Figure 3

Figure 4 shows that in a peculiar trend, the proportion of first year students approaching the Centre has also seen a significant increase across the year.

UG1 (Jan - July 2021) = 129 (avg 18 per month)

UG1 (Aug - Dec 2021) = 138 (avg 27 per month)

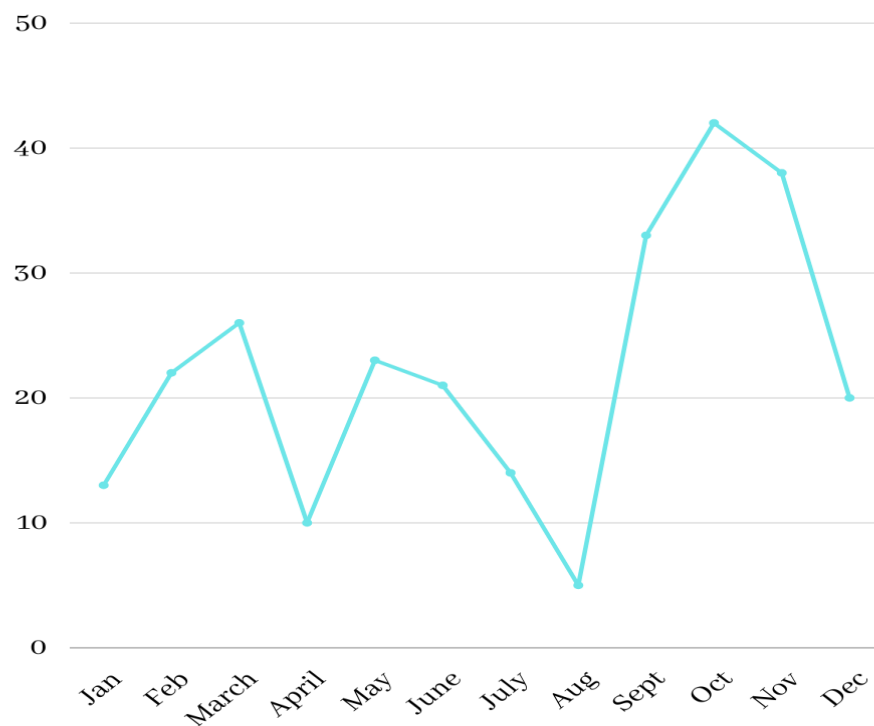


Figure 4

# More than Individual sessions

Aside from the individual sessions to handle emotional stresses and mental health concerns, ACWB regularly extends its support to the wider community in the form of group support, helpline services, Gatekeepers Programme, orientation sessions, workshops, seminars and conferences.

## SERVICES AND OUTREACH

- Individual Counseling
- Group Counseling
- Crisis Intervention
- Helpline services
- Awareness building among Parents and Student groups
- Preventive and Promotive Mental Health Initiatives
- Advocacy and Capacity Building through Trainings, Webinars, Workshops and Conferences
- Advocacy through Collaborations and Research
- Referral to internal and external resources for specialised psychological care.

Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB

## Some services and Events in 2021



**Join us today !**  
**29 April 2021**  
**7:00 pm - 7:30 pm**

**"LET'S BREATHE"**

Facilitated by Arvinder J Singh,  
Director,  
ACWB

Zoom link is added in the caption below  
Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB



*Times are tough.  
We all are going through so much.  
Talking helps!*

The Ashoka Centre for Well-Being extends its additional support to all the members of the Ashoka Community through our free and confidential helpline services.

Days: Monday - Sunday  
Timings: 5pm - 9pm

Contact: +91 7082000421

Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB

It's June, it's Pride Month.


Join us on 25 June, 2021  
(Friday)  
5:00 pm to 6:00 pm

**PRIDE AND  
PREJUDICE -  
UNDERSTANDING  
LGBTQ+**

Facilitated by -  
Nazariya: A Queer  
Feminist Resource Group

**#For entire Ashoka Staff**  
Zoom link is added in the caption below

Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB




**JOIN US!**  
**Thursday, 14th October, 2021**  
**6:00 pm - 7:00 pm**

**"HOLDING ON  
AND LETTING  
GO"**

Facilitated by ACWB Counsellors

Zoom Link will be shared in your inboxes

Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB



**Join us !**  
**10th May 2021 (Monday)**  
**3:00 pm to 4:00 pm**

**"Improving Emotional  
Resilience during  
Pandemic"**

Facilitated by Arvinder J Singh,  
Director,  
ACWB

**#Only for Staff**  
Zoom link is added in the caption below  
Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB

# Capacity Building Gatekeeper's Programme

The programme is designed to offer sensitivity training for various student groups, residential advisors, cohort leaders, and faculty members. It aims to provide training and workshops in capacity building. The focus being on identifying sources of anxiety and stress, offering peer support, and helping connect students with the appropriate resources. Through these trainings we aim to build a well-equipped group of first responders from amongst the campus community.

Gatekeepers training sessions are conducted at regular intervals. The sessions train individuals from the Ashoka community to act as first responders to anyone who might need urgent assistance with regards to a mental health crisis (such as high anxiety episodes and panic attacks). The first responders undergo thorough training under the guidance of Arvinder singh, Director, ACWB herself.

The infographic is divided into two main sections. The left section, titled 'Gate Keeper Training', features a purple and yellow checkered background. It contains four numbered points: 1. Over 60 Ashoka students across batches have been trained\* to be first responders! 2. We have conducted 3 trainings, and are looking forward to our 4th one in February. 3. First responders have been trained to: - Identify the spectrum of distress - Improve their listening skills - Provide swift support in a crisis situation (e.g. if someone has a panic or anxiety attack) 4. Here's what an attendee had to say about the training: "I feel a lot more prepared to be a first responder. The segment about listening skills was particularly helpful!" The right section, titled 'ACWB conducts First Responder Training Program for Students to help people deal with Emotional distress and Crisis', features a white background with a red Ashoka University logo. It includes the date and time '09 September 2021, 1:30 pm to 2:45 pm' and the facilitator's name 'Facilitated by Arvinder J Singh, Director, Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB'. A small disclaimer at the bottom left states: '\*THE TRAINING DOES NOT EQUIP STUDENTS PROFESSIONALLY OR PROVIDE ANY KIND OF CERTIFICATION.'

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY WELL-BEING  
X  
ASHOKA CENTRE FOR WELL-BEING (ACWB)

Gate Keeper Training

1 Over 60 Ashoka students across batches have been trained\* to be first responders!

2 We have conducted 3 trainings, and are looking forward to our 4th one in February.

3 First responders have been trained to:  
- Identify the spectrum of distress  
- Improve their listening skills  
- Provide swift support in a crisis situation (e.g. if someone has a panic or anxiety attack)

4 Here's what an attendee had to say about the training:  
"I feel a lot more prepared to be a first responder. The segment about listening skills was particularly helpful!"

ASHOKA UNIVERSITY

**ACWB conducts First Responder Training Program for Students to help people deal with Emotional distress and Crisis**

**09 September 2021,  
1:30 pm to 2:45 pm**

*Facilitated by Arvinder J Singh  
Director, Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing, ACWB*

\*THE TRAINING DOES NOT EQUIP STUDENTS PROFESSIONALLY OR PROVIDE ANY KIND OF CERTIFICATION.

# Celebrating 5 years of ACWB

In 2021, ACWB completed 5 years of serving and to celebrate the same, and building a narrative of well being and resilience around us, a webinar was organised with Prof Dwight Jaggard from University of Pennsylvania and Arvinder J Singh, Director, ACWB on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

The webinar aimed to address the challenges we faced in the long Covid Pandemic, gearing towards new realities and provided some simple yet powerful tools to flourish in the present and future. It invited a lot of support and an overwhelming response from within and beyond the Ashoka Community.

The poster is for a webinar titled "BUILDING HOPE AND RESILIENCE" celebrating the 5th anniversary of the Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing. It features two speakers: Dr. Arvinder Singh, a psychotherapist and director of the centre, and Prof. Dwight Jaggard, from the University of Pennsylvania. The event is scheduled for 17th September 2021 from 6.30 PM to 8:00 PM. The background includes a stylized profile of a head with colorful, watercolor-like textures. The Ashoka University logo is present in the top right and bottom center.

**BUILDING HOPE AND RESILIENCE**  
*Celebrating **5 years** of Ashoka Centre for Wellbeing*

17th September 2021 | 6.30 PM - 8:00 PM

**Dr. Arvinder Singh**  
Psychotherapist  
Director, Centre for Well-Being,  
Ashoka University

**Prof. Dwight Jaggard**  
Foundations of Leadership  
University of Pennsylvania  
Ashoka University

 **ASHOKA**  
UNIVERSITY



# Conference - THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE PSYCH CLINIC: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

*"Doing psychotherapy or being therapeutic? Complexities of therapeutic care, especially during the pandemic"*



Speaker: Renos K Papadopoulos, Director  
Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees,  
University of Essex

Friday, 21st January 2022  
6:30 pm IST  
1:00 pm GMT  
8:00 am EST

Join through Zoom :  
Meeting ID: 993 5889 8764  
Passcode: 893833  
[https://zoom.us/j/99358898764?](https://zoom.us/j/99358898764?pwd=NHNdllGYncrVWE3TGx5SEFCV3pFUT09)  
[V3pFUT09](https://zoom.us/j/99358898764?pwd=NHNdllGYncrVWE3TGx5SEFCV3pFUT09)

*"Therapeutic Spaces : Strengthening Mental Health on Campus"*



Speaker: Arvinder J. Singh, Director  
Ashoka Centre for Well-Being,  
Ashoka University

Saturday, 22nd January 2022  
6:30 pm IST  
1:00 pm GMT  
8:00 am EST

Join through Zoom:  
Meeting ID: 963 3329 4321  
Passcode: 557945  
[https://zoom.us/j/96333294321?](https://zoom.us/j/96333294321?pwd=Ty9SaDlnRnZOeFgyMWtISDVITdIQTo2)  
[TdlQTo2](https://zoom.us/j/96333294321?pwd=Ty9SaDlnRnZOeFgyMWtISDVITdIQTo2)

After much anticipation and some delays due to the pandemic, the Conference was organised on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2022. The Conference is a part of a research collaboration between Cambridge University and Ashoka University. It is motivated by the need to address the increasingly urgent global and Indian issue of mental health, and to place these questions in relation to psychotherapeutic and social science perspectives on psychic life.

This initiative and partnership between the two universities will create unique and flagship network between scholars and practitioners across India, Cambridge and the wider world of mental health, illness, and wellness that have come to be recognized as increasingly critical issues worldwide.



## WHAT ARE WE FEELING?

Anxiety	Fear	Isolation	Grief	Anger
Sadness	Despair	Hopelessness		
Helplessness	Uncertainty	Trauma	Sympathy	
Powerlessness- loss of control, identity, motivation				
Exhaustion - physical and emotional	Compassion			
Hope	Resilience	Bonding	Empathy	



The conference was inaugurated by the honourable Vice Chancellor of Ashoka University, Prof Malabika Sarkar and attracted a cross-sectional representation of members within the mental health industry from psychiatrists, teachers, counsellors, students, therapists and more. It was very well received with a huge number of participants joining in and an insightful round of discussion.

Following are some of the comments about the conference shared by the participants -

*It was a privilege to attend the ACWB's two day virtual conference titled "The Past, Present and Future of the Psych Clinic: Global Perspectives". Both speakers in the event brought refreshing and counter-intuitive perspectives on the idea of the therapeutic. Renos K Papadopoulos (Director, Center for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees, University of Essex) brought a novel, counter-concept of trauma, and the ways in which moments of crisis might also bear the seeds of new capacities and forms of resilience. Arvinder Singh (Director, ACWB) emphasized a wellness rather than an illness approach, and the notion of a spectrum, within which the idea of the normal itself comes into question. The events were well-attended and served to open up an important and much needed space for discussion on mental health issues, which is an emerging crisis and a desperately unaddressed and understudied issue within Indian universities. Ashoka University has an important role to fulfil in enabling innovative spaces in which to continue and widen the scope of such discussions.*

*Bhrigupati Singh*

*Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Ashoka University  
Visiting Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Carney Institute, Brown University*

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*The conference greatly contributed to the journey of demystifying and destigmatising mental health and really provided a space to have a discourse about the collective struggles several of us may be facing as a result of the pandemic.*

*When Dr. Arvinder pointed out the tendency of students and even faculty members to need to be productive during such a time, It completely resonated with me. The session helped me consolidate that I can let that go and take some time out for myself without feeling guilty for not being productive. The mention of therapeutic spaces not needing to be confined within the four walls of a therapeutic setting and the emphasis on creating spaces that are physically and emotionally safe around me was something that really stuck with me.*

*Undergoing the first responder's program myself and also having helped conduct it several times has helped me understand and identify markers of distress not only in those around me but also in myself. Through the conference, I was left feeling a greater sense of control over my actions and a greater sense of calm. I thoroughly enjoyed attending the session and am looking forward to attending future sessions!*

*Pankhudi Narayan*

*Undergraduate Class of 2023, Ashoka University*



# Internships at ACWB

Starting with 2021, ACWB offered Ashoka Students a unique opportunity to engage with the Centre and experience the process of working in the field of Mental Health. Herein, students learn about the Centre and its workings, get training in the Gatekeeper's programme, engage with learning various modes of counselling used at the Centre and take up projects on advocacy and research. The programme runs under the guidance of Director Arvinder Singh along with support of the counsellors at the Centre.

The Centre ran two batches of interns in 2021 providing them with 40 hours of internship each spread across two months. The third batch began in 2022 and would continue for the whole semester giving students ample time to work on their projects. The interns working with the Centre have provided us with interesting perspectives and innovative project ideas. These include advocacy around suicide, queerness and mental health and accessibility to counselling services. Some of their researches were also able to throw light on particular mental health trends within the Ashoka community with suggestions on how to tackle them. It has been an enriching experience for both the students and the ACWB team.

*Overall, this internship gave me a number of valuable things: new ideas to consider, information to remember, and avenues to explore. I am hopeful that we can continue research regarding mental health on campus - perhaps ACWB could even develop a small department devoted to this! In any case, I'd recommend this internship to anybody looking to reflect on their own role within the space of mental health and wellbeing at Ashoka.*

*Svasti Dutta*

*ASP 2021, Ashoka University*

*ACWB Internship Batch 1*

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*ACWB's team of counselors were able to provide different perspectives and answered my theoretical doubts and questions regarding the process of counselling based on their experience in the field whilst working with clients, especially college students. They also informed me about the campus protocols and essential steps taken during the case of a mental health crisis. Interacting directly with experienced counselors allowed minimal error in communication and I was able to get an actual glimpse into the whole planning surrounding the counselling process and the way ACWB functions.*

*Ritu Hotchandani*

*Undergraduate class of 2022, Ashoka University*

*ACWB Internship Batch 2*

## ACWB in the news


MCI Executive Director [Marjorie Malpiede](#) interviews [Arvinder J. Singh](#) on student mental health ...see more

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**India's Campus Mental Health Crisis: How One University is Attempting to Create a New Narrative on Student Mental Health**

*"By combining the preventative, promotive, and curative aspects of mental health, it aspires to open conversations and build student collaboration."*

— **DR. ARVINDER SINGH**  
Executive Director of Ashoka University's Centre for Wellbeing



Fall 2021 Mary Christie Quarterly



Mental and Behavioral Health

# India's Campus Mental Health Crisis: How One University is Attempting to Create a New Narrative on Student Mental Health

By:  [Marjorie Malpiede](#) October 20, 2021