

## MHAN REPORT 2018-19

As students in the First year, we saw a little desk put up next to the entrance of our building, with fliers that said 'MHAN' and not a lot of us knew what it was.

In our orientation class taken by Alpana ma'am in the beginning of Second year, we were then introduced to MHAN, an initiative taken by the psychology department, to help the students of the college express themselves without being judged.

MHAN, in Marathi means to speak - an expression. Under this initiative, we decided to continue conducting cathartic activities thought of by last year's SY students, such as - venting booths, a letter box and art therapy.

Venting booths in the psychology lab were where sessions with clients were conducted with the goal of providing them with a judgement free, comfortable environment where they could talk about whatever they wanted to.

If the clients felt that they were not comfortable talking to a Listener in person, an alternative provided was the letter box. A client could write down their woes as a letter and post it anonymously to which one of the Listener would respond to. These reply letters could then be collected from the letter box set up next to the psychology lab.

To set the initiative in motion, we first got a permission letter from the Principal of our college, Mr. Hrishikesh Soman who allowed us to continue the initiative; after which we divided ourselves into groups of four - namely, Management, Marketing, Creativity and Hospitality.

The main task fell on the Creativity team, to come up with an attractive poster. This year we felt like the poster should have a bright colour scheme to give off a more positive feel. We made a bright multi-coloured spectrum poster that we really liked.

The biggest hurdle to overcome was to get registrations. The marketing team worked together and set up a desk next to the building entrance for a stretch of two weeks from 10-11 a.m. We were ecstatic to receive an overwhelming response of one hundred and fifty registrations. After which, we immediately began session allotment. To ensure total anonymity in the initiative, the marketing team allotted code numbers to every person who registered. Even during registration, the clients were asked only for their phone numbers through which an SMS was sent informing them about their day and time of the session.

The hospitality team had the responsibility of messaging the clients regarding their date and time of session, as well as altering allotments of date and timings as per their convenience. They also made sure that the clients were comfortable during the session by providing them with tissues or water, if needed.

The management team's job was to delegate work to the other three teams, making sure that things were in place, and during the session, making sure that the timings and feedback forms were taken care of. A feedback form was given to the client after their session so they could tell us what they felt about the session and how they felt after it. These forms had both positive remarks and improvement advices. By these forms we understood the needs of our clients or something they wanted us to incorporate in our methodology. After reading the comments, it also inculcated the feeling of satisfaction amongst us because we were able to help someone in need.

After the sessions in the first term, we encountered the following prominent issues that our clients faced.

The most common one was not being able to adjust with a new environment. A lot of our clients had moved to Pune from a different city or a different country and hence found it difficult to adjust to a new place, a new environment. They also found it difficult to manage their expenses and altering their usual food habits.

Many of the clients also said that they were facing confusion and dilemma regarding their career choices. They were unsure if the field they had chosen or were planning to choose is right for them. Family pressure and peer pressure played an important role in their decisions about careers, contributing to further confusion.

Stress was another striking problem faced by most of the clients. The stress was pertaining to a range of other prime issues, such as stress related to study, college, family matters and daily hassles like transportation.

Apart from these, academics was a major cause of concern for many clients. A lot of them were worried about their parents' reactions and their own performance in academics too.

Loneliness was also a feeling experienced by many, either because of a lack of support by their family or due to difficulty in interacting with their peers and friends; that brought us to another critical issue, socialization. A lot of the clients reported having problems related to socialization with the people around them, having difficulty in making good friends within whom they could confide, or not having a healthy relationship with their close friends and peers.

Clients also expressed that they faced issues with overthinking a lot about their lives. Over analysing their problems lead them to face issues like anxiety, fear etc. They also stated that due to overthinking, they had difficulties finding solutions to even easy problems.

Numerous clients reported that they had been victims of body shaming on several occasions, both by others as well as by themselves, the second one being a by-product of low self-esteem. Body shaming had also affected other arenas of their life in major ways, leading to a lot of built up resentment and disappointment about their own appearances.

Many of the clients also had family problems such as strict or overprotective parents, or not receiving the needed support from their families, and even issues with their fathers, which included them not being allowed to wear a certain piece of clothing or not being allowed to go out with their friends, and being told to act a certain way. Problems such as these had led the clients to feel angry and upset about not having enough independence.

Dating and relationship problems were another concern amongst the clients. The problems ranged from long distance relationships, adjustment issues, compromising on self-respect as well as mutual respect for the other person, being cheated on and facing rejection and heartbreak. Due to this, they reported experiencing agony and pain, which was affecting their emotional and mental state.

An indispensable part of any work or initiative is the feedback by those who use our services. We were very very proud to say that we got very positive feedback from all the clients who came to the venting booths. Almost all were extremely glad that they had a safe space to be heard without judgement and prejudice. They felt that the environment was that of comfort, warmth and acceptance, where one was understood. Some clients were relieved that they could talk about something that was bothering them, that they could unburden after keeping things bottled up for so long. Some clients also rescheduled a session because they had more to share.

We would summarize the MHAN experience with a few negatives and a lot more positives. Even though the experience was amazing overall, we did face some problems or had some

negative experiences. Some of the people who registered gave us fake phone numbers or someone else's phone numbers. When we messaged them informing them about their session, the person on the other side was baffled since they had never heard anything about MHAN. Another sad thing was that out of the 150 registrations, only 40 came for the venting session and a few others wrote letters. The worst obstacle we encountered was someone bad mouthing this wonderful initiative, telling people not to go or register since we do not give advice. It dampened our spirits a little but we put aside the negativity and moved forward.

It gave us such a sense of fulfilment and pleasure to be able to help our clients. Feeling trustworthy, helpful made us very happy. It was an incredible learning experience for us as we are pursuing a career in psychology. It taught us to be patient, understanding and taught us self-control. We learnt to stop ourselves from interrupting, from trying to give advice and to focus on the client.

We all talk about how one would like to help someone, or make them feel good or have a positive impact on someone and these things somehow these things always stay just a thought, an idea; but we were so privileged to be able to be a part of an initiative like this where we could really help make someone's life a little easier if not better. We were so grateful for this humbling experience!