

World Mental Health Day 2025 Knowledge Sharing Virtual Seminar Session

Date: October 09, 2025 (Thursday)

Time: 3.00 PM - 4.30 PM BST(GMT+6)

Topic: Stronger Minds in Challenging Times: Youth and Urban Health

Seminar Minutes

In commemoration of **World Mental Health Day 2025**, the **Bangladesh Urban Health Network (BUHN)** hosted a crucial knowledge-sharing session on **Thursday, October 09, 2025**, titled "**Stronger Minds in Challenging Times: Youth and Urban Health**." Aligned with the global theme, "**Access to Services – Mental Health in Catastrophes and Emergencies**," the virtual event was specifically designed to raise awareness about the significant mental health challenges impacting urban youth. Moderated by Md. Wahiduzzaman, Project Assistant at BUHN, the session convened a diverse audience of students - including those from school, college, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels - along with young professionals via Zoom to confront these issues, providing attendees with **practical strategies** for managing stress, anxiety, and depression while highlighting the crucial role of accessible mental health services and peer support networks.

Seminar Objectives:

The goal of this session is to improve the mental well-being and resilience of urban youth by achieving the following:

- To deepen understanding of the specific mental health challenges faced by youth in urban settings.
- To provide clear information on available mental health resources and support.
- To equip participants with practical tools to manage stress and enhance resilience.
- To establish and promote a supportive culture of mutual support and shared experiences.
- To specifically address the unique mental health pressures and stressors inherent to urban environments.

Key Resource Persons:

Contribution	Resource Personnel
Welcome Remarks	Tanjina Farhana Upoma Health Officer; UNICEF Bangladesh
Chief Guest	Dr. Shahin Akter Technical Operation Director, Eminence Associates for Social Development
Special Guest	Dr. Susmita Sarkar Assistant professor, Department of Psychiatry, Ad-din Momin Medical College Hospital
Guest Speakers	Dr. Syeda Fatema Alam Director of Wellness, Asian University for Women
	Nahidul Haque University of Dhaka
	Abid Zian Hasan Khilgaon Govt. High School
	A H Maruf Duyaripara Government College
	Sabith Hasan Khan Joy Jahangirnagar University
Session Moderator	Md. Wahiduzzaman Urban Health Officer Eminence Associates for Social Development

Seminar Highlights:

SN	Order of Proceedings	Seminar Discussion
1	Welcome Speech	Tanjina Farhana Upoma , Health Officer; UNICEF, Bangladesh welcomed attendees by stressing the vital need to discuss mental health, particularly for urban youth facing challenges. Expressing pleasure at the high youth attendance, she noted their presence is key to increasing mental awareness and encouraging a better society. She concluded by urging all participants to actively engage, share experiences of mental strength, and support one another.
2	Talk on Stronger Minds in Challenging Times: Youth and Urban Health	Dr. Syeda Fatema Alam, Director of Wellness, Asian University for Women, emphasized that while youth awareness of mental health has significantly increased (overcoming the former knowledge gap), the primary challenges now are access, affordability, and the information gap regarding services. She highlighted the alarming national shortage of mental health professionals - only about 350-400 psychiatrists for a population of 18-20 crore - resulting in a colossal 92% treatment gap. To combat this, Dr. Alam strongly recommended strengthening peer support systems across educational levels (school, college, university), citing her institution's success in using trained students to significantly reduce the need for expert consultation, and urged the integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) training for future solutions. Nahidul Haque, University of Dhaka, highlighted that university students face intense academic pressure due to self-study and a sudden need for career-consciousness, where the marketability of their studies becomes a major stressor. For mental support, he emphasized peer connection among friends facing similar issues as the healthiest way to cope, alongside institutional resources like faculty consultancy centers. He also noted the severe negative impact of political disasters (like the July Movement) on students' dreams and national loyalty, and criticized the lack of mental health emergency services in Bangladesh. He concluded by urging youth to step away from social media to prioritize self-care, foster personal connections, and embrace realistic thinking to reduce the stigma associated with seeking professional help. As the youngest speaker, Abid Zian Hasan, Khilgaon Govt. High School, emphasized that mental health issues for school-age youth, which are often dismissed as minor, stem from intense academic and expectation pressure imposed from childhood. He identified a lack of proper guidance, difficulty navigating peer influence, and the negative role of social media - which he believes causes people to become "unsocial," increasing loneliness and poor communication - as major problems. Crucially, he noted that youth lack sharing opportunities and are unable to discuss their problems with family or friends (who often laugh at them), leading to a reluctance to seek professional help and a fear of long-term consequences. A H Maruf, Duyaripara Government College, stated that college students experience significant mental stress due to the new distance from parents and an intense focus on academic and career pressure, driven by the enormous fear of failure to gain admission to top

		universities (e.g., BUET, DU). This anxiety is worsened by family and peer pressure, which equates academic failure with having "no future." This pressure, combined with the difficulty of living alone while pursuing higher education abroad, causes profound mental stress. He noted a general fear of stigma that prevents students from utilizing the few available college psychological support teachers or seeking professional psychiatric help. Sabith Hasan Khan Joy, <i>Jahangirnagar University</i>, emphasized that stigma remains a critical barrier, with mental health in Bangladesh, noting that 80% of people at the grassroots level consider it a "mad person's disease." He cited alarming statistics, noting that 40-50% of university students suffer from depression, and almost 98% of first-year university students facing mental issues, a crisis exacerbated by the fact that university teachers are often unconcerned or even harassing, necessitating the creation of a strong governance body for student support. He also identified peer mockery as "mental violence" and highlighted the long-term psychological damage caused by political violence (referencing the July Mass Uprising). Joy concluded by linking mental health to urban health, arguing that the lack of playgrounds and community spaces is detrimental, and called for increased government funding for mental health, broader access to hotline numbers, and teachers adopting an effective peer support role.
3	Speech by Special Guest	Dr Susmita Sarkar, <i>Assistant professor, Department of Psychiatry, Ad-din Momin Medical College Hospital</i>, as the special guest, highlighted the global and national under-prioritization of mental health, noting that Bangladesh has a critical shortage of specialists (fewer than 500 psychiatrists) resulting in a massive 94-95% mental health treatment gap, despite 18.07% of the adult population suffering from psychological disorders. However, she noted a positive trend: the current youth generation is highly aware, largely due to social media (which she also cautioned spreads negativity like cyberbullying) and strongly refuted the common notion that mental illness is incurable, emphasizing that most conditions are treatable or controllable with professional help. She made several key recommendations: mandating a psychologist in every educational institution for counseling, promoting creative pursuits over the sole pursuit of high grades, implementing career counseling courses in universities to reduce stress, and urging the younger generation to overcome stigma and champion the importance of mental health.
4	Speech by Chief Guest	As the chief guest, Dr. Shahin Akter, <i>Technical Operation Director, Eminence Associates for Social Development</i>, emphasizing the immediate need for interventions at the family, community, and institutional levels to address the major barrier of stigma, which prevents even educated families from seeking help. She stressed that tackling challenges like expectation and academic pressure requires multi-level awareness and action, prominently advocating for the immediate institutional implementation of Peer

		Support Groups and a mandatory psychologist in every facility. Furthermore, she urged the government to ensure the effectiveness of the existing National Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan (2017-2030) - which covers stigma reduction, capacity building, School/Facility-Level Interventions and Robust Data Collection and called for the establishment of Community-based Adolescent Clubs in urban areas to enhance accessibility and support.
5	Closing remarks and next step	Dr. Shahin Akter , <i>Technical Operation Director, Eminence Associates for Social Development</i> , concluded the session by stressing that the final goal is a physically and mentally healthy nation and urged participants to positively use social media to advocate that mental health is a priority.

Seminar Decisions/Recommendations:

1. Promote active engagement and mutual peer support among youth to share experiences of mental strength.
2. Strengthen Peer Support Systems and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) training across all educational levels (school, college, university).
3. Encourage youth to prioritize self-care, personal connections, and realistic thinking by reducing dependency on social media.
4. Create safe and non-judgmental sharing opportunities for school-age youth to discuss problems and reduce the fear of dismissal.
5. Reduce the stigma associated with seeking professional help to encourage students to utilize available institutional support.
6. Advocate for broader access to mental health hotline numbers and increased government funding for services.
7. Mandate the presence of a psychologist in every educational institution for counseling and early intervention.
8. Promote creative pursuits and implement career counseling courses in universities to reduce academic stress and pressure.
9. Establish and train formal Peer Support Groups involving both students and teachers at the institutional level to ensure structured support.
10. Urge the government to establish Community-based Adolescent Clubs in urban areas to enhance local mental health accessibility and support.

Attendance Sheet of the Seminar:

Following attendees from school, college, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels - along with young professionals, Academicians, UNICEF and other partner organizations' joined the virtual seminar-

SN	Name	Designation	Organization
1.	Dr Susmita Sarkar	Assistant professor	Department of Psychiatry, Ad-din Momin Medical College Hospital
2.	Dr. Shahin Akter	Technical Operation Director	Eminence Associates for Social Development
3.	Ms. Tanjina Farhana Upoma	UNV Health Officer	UNICEF Bangladesh
4.	Dr. Syeda Fatema Alam	Director of Wellness	Asian University for Women
5.	Mr. Sabith Hasan Khan Joy	Individual	Jahangirnagar University
6.	Mr. Nahidul Haque	Student	University of Dhaka
7.	Mr. A H Maruf	Student	Duyaripara Government College
8.	Mr. Abid Zian Hasan	Student	Khilgaon Govt. High School
9.	Ms. Ummay Farihin Sultana	Senior Research and Knowledge Management Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
10.	Ms. Maliha Khan Majlish	Senior Technical & Development Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
11.	Mr. Md. Wahiduzzaman	Urban Health Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
12.	Mr. Md. Saddam Hossain	Senior Data Management Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
13.	Mr. Md. Neamul Islam	Business Development Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
14.	Mr. Abhijeet Kumar Singh	Research & Communication Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
15.	Mr. Abir Chowdhury	IT Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
16.	Mr. Md. Shoriful Islam	Graphic Designer	Eminence Associates for Social Development
17.	Mr. Minhajul Islam	Health and Development Officer	Eminence Associates for Social Development

Snapshot of the Seminar:

