VINAYAKA MISSION'S RESEARCH FOUNDATION
(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
POLICY ON MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

1. Preamble:

Vinayaka Mission's Research Foundation (Deemed to be University) (VMRF(DU)) recognizes mental health and psychological well-being as essential components of holistic human development, academic success, professional effectiveness, and institutional excellence. The demands of higher education, including academic pressure, examinations, research commitments, career uncertainties, workplace responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, and personal challenges, may affect the psychological well-being of students and faculty members.

In keeping with its commitment to inclusive education, employee welfare, student development, and the creation of a safe and supportive campus environment, the University shall establish appropriate mechanisms for promoting mental health awareness, preventing psychological distress wherever possible, providing access to counselling and professional support, and facilitating timely intervention when mental health concerns arise.

The University shall strive to foster a culture in which seeking mental health support is considered a positive and responsible step, free from stigma, discrimination, or fear of adverse academic or professional consequences.

Accordingly, this Policy on Mental Health and Psychological Well-being establishes the principles, objectives, institutional responsibilities, support mechanisms, and monitoring procedures for providing mental health support to students and faculty members of the University and its constituent institutions.

2. Short Title and Commencement:

1. This policy shall be called **"Policy on Mental Health and Psychological well-being"**

2. This policy shall come into force from the date of approval of the Executive Coucil of the University.

3. Purpose :

- Promote awareness and understanding of mental health, emotional well-being, and psychological resilience among students and faculty members.

- Establish accessible counselling and psychological support services within the University or through qualified external service providers.
- Facilitate the early identification of psychological distress and timely access to appropriate professional assistance.
- Provide preventive and supportive interventions for managing academic stress, examination anxiety, workplace stress, burnout, interpersonal conflicts, and other psychological challenges.
- Foster a safe, inclusive, respectful, and non-discriminatory campus and workplace environment.
- Support students in managing academic pressures, personal challenges, transitions, relationships, and career-related uncertainties.
- Support faculty members in managing professional responsibilities, research pressures, workload-related stress, work–life balance, and other personal or workplace concerns.
- Develop appropriate mechanisms for responding to mental health emergencies and situations involving immediate risk of harm.
- Protect the dignity, privacy, autonomy, and confidentiality of individuals seeking mental health support.
- Encourage healthy lifestyle practices, peer support, mindfulness, yoga, meditation, physical activity, and other appropriate wellness initiatives.
- Strengthen coordination among student welfare services, faculty welfare mechanisms, counselling professionals, academic departments, and healthcare providers.
- Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of mental health initiatives and improve them based on feedback and institutional evidence.

4. Scope and Applicability:

This policy shall apply to:

- All undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral, diploma, certificate, and other students enrolled in the University and its constituent institutions.
- All regular, contractual, visiting, adjunct, and other faculty members, as applicable under University rules.
- Heads of Departments, Deans, Directors, academic coordinators, and other academic administrators.

- Student welfare officers, human resource personnel, wardens, mentors, counsellors, and designated support staff.
- Student representatives and trained peer supporters acting within their authorised roles.

5. Institutional Governance and Responsibilities:

5.1 University Mental Health and Well-being Committee

The University shall constitute a Mental Health and Well-being Committee to guide, coordinate, and monitor the implementation of this policy.

The Committee may comprise:

- A senior University administrator as Chairperson.
- A representative of the Student Welfare Division.
- A representative of the Human Resources Division.
- A qualified psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor, or other appropriately qualified mental health professional.
- A representative of the faculty.
- A representative of the student community, where appropriate.
- A representative of the disability support or accessibility unit.
- A representative from relevant healthcare services, where available.
- Any other member nominated by the competent authority.

The Committee shall:

1. Recommend annual mental health and well-being plans.
2. Coordinate student and faculty mental health initiatives.
3. Review the accessibility and adequacy of counselling and referral services.
4. Recommend training and awareness programmes.
5. Review anonymised service utilisation and feedback data.
6. Recommend improvements to crisis response and referral arrangements.
7. Monitor compliance with confidentiality, privacy, and non-discrimination requirements.
8. Submit periodic reports to the competent University authority.

The Committee shall not ordinarily access identifiable counselling records or individual clinical information. Such access shall be restricted to situations in which it is legally authorised and strictly necessary.

5.2 Student Mental Health Support Nodal Officer

The University shall designate a nodal officer or office responsible for coordinating student mental health support, maintaining referral information, facilitating access to counselling, and coordinating with academic and residential support services.

5.3 Faculty Mental Health Support Nodal Officer

The University shall designate an appropriate officer or office to coordinate faculty mental health support, wellness initiatives, counselling access, and relevant workplace support measures.

5.4 Mental Health Service Providers

Qualified internal or external professionals engaged by the University shall provide services in accordance with applicable professional standards, ethical requirements, confidentiality obligations, and the limits of their competence.

6. Mental health support services for students:

6.1 Counselling and Psychological Support

The University shall establish or facilitate access to student counselling services through qualified counsellors, psychologists, or other appropriately qualified professionals.

Services may include:

- Individual counselling.
- Group counselling and psychoeducation.
- Support for stress, anxiety, emotional difficulties, and adjustment concerns.
- Examination-related stress management.
- Relationship and interpersonal support.
- Assistance with academic difficulties and motivation.
- Support during transitions to university life, clinical placements, internships, and employment.
- Career-related and personal adjustment support.
- Referral to specialised mental healthcare services, when required.

The University shall communicate the process for accessing these services, including appointment procedures, service availability, confidentiality arrangements, and emergency contacts.

6.2 Academic Stress and Examination Support

The University shall encourage academic practices that support student well-being. These may include:

- Workshops on examination anxiety, time management, study skills, and coping strategies.
- Academic mentoring and remedial support.
- Clear communication of assessment schedules and academic expectations.
- Appropriate guidance for students experiencing academic difficulties.
- Referral to counselling services when distress affects academic functioning.

6.3 Peer Support and Student Mentoring

The University may establish trained peer-support programmes and student mentoring systems to promote belonging, social connectedness, and early help-seeking.

Peer supporters shall be trained to listen empathetically, maintain appropriate boundaries, recognise warning signs, and refer students to qualified professionals.

Peer supporters shall not diagnose mental health conditions, provide clinical treatment, or assume responsibility for managing emergencies independently.

6.4 Residential and Campus Support

For students residing in hostels or other University accommodation, the University shall facilitate access to mental health support through appropriate coordination among wardens, student welfare personnel, counsellors, and healthcare services.

Residential staff shall be sensitised to signs of distress, respectful communication, confidentiality, and procedures for escalating urgent safety concerns.

6.5 Support for Students with Disabilities and Additional Needs

The University shall facilitate reasonable accommodations and accessible support for students with disabilities and other specific needs, in accordance with applicable law and University regulations.

Where necessary, support may include accessible counselling arrangements, coordination with disability support services, academic accommodations through established procedures, and referrals to specialised services.

6.6 Support for Students Experiencing Crisis

Students experiencing severe psychological distress or an immediate safety concern shall be assisted in accessing appropriate professional evaluation and emergency care.

The University shall establish procedures for contacting emergency services, facilitating safe transport where necessary, informing appropriate persons when legally justified, and supporting the student's return to academic activities.

Any follow-up academic arrangements shall be considered fairly and in accordance with University regulations.

7. Mental Health Support Services for Faculty:

7.1 Confidential Counselling and Professional Assistance

The University shall facilitate access to confidential counselling or psychological support for faculty members through qualified internal professionals, external service providers, or appropriate referral networks.

Support may address:

- Occupational stress and emotional exhaustion.
- Anxiety, low mood, and other psychological concerns.
- Workload-related pressures and work–life balance.
- Research, publication, and career progression pressures.
- Interpersonal conflicts and communication difficulties.
- Professional transitions and leadership responsibilities.
- Personal or family-related challenges affecting well-being.
- Bereavement, caregiving pressures, and significant life events.

7.2 Workplace Stress Management

The University shall encourage academic and administrative practices that reduce avoidable workplace stress and promote a healthy working environment.

Measures may include:

- Periodic review of workload allocation and role clarity.
- Timely communication of academic and administrative responsibilities.
- Appropriate planning of meetings, examinations, and institutional activities.
- Supportive performance feedback and mentoring.
- Opportunities for faculty development and professional growth.

- Promotion of collaborative work practices and respectful communication.

These measures shall be implemented consistently with University service rules and academic requirements.

7.3 Faculty Wellness Programmes

The University may organise wellness programmes that promote physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, including:

- Stress management and resilience workshops.
- Mindfulness, yoga, meditation, and relaxation sessions.
- Emotional intelligence and conflict-resolution programmes.
- Healthy lifestyle and sleep-hygiene awareness.
- Faculty wellness days and recreational activities.
- Workshops on preventing burnout and maintaining professional boundaries.

7.4 Supportive Leadership and Mentoring

Heads of Departments, Deans, Directors, and other academic administrators shall be encouraged to foster an environment of empathy, constructive communication, fairness, and mutual respect.

Faculty mentoring and appropriate review mechanisms may be used to identify professional support needs and facilitate access to relevant services.

Managers and academic administrators shall not attempt to diagnose faculty members or compel disclosure of confidential counselling information.

7.5 Workplace Grievances and Harassment

Faculty members shall have access to established grievance redressal mechanisms for workplace concerns, including harassment, bullying, discrimination, unfair treatment, or interpersonal conflict.

Complaints shall be addressed through the appropriate institutional mechanism, with due process and confidentiality safeguards. Matters falling within the jurisdiction of statutory committees shall be handled under the applicable laws and University procedures.

The University shall maintain appropriate separation between counselling services and formal grievance investigation processes, while enabling necessary coordination in accordance with law.

7.6 Support During Personal or Professional Difficulties

Where appropriate, the University may facilitate guidance on applicable leave provisions, temporary adjustments, referral to healthcare services, and other available welfare measures for faculty members experiencing significant personal or psychological difficulties.

Any accommodation or adjustment shall be considered in accordance with relevant rules, individual needs, institutional feasibility, and applicable law.

8. Mental Health Awareness And Preventive Initiatives:

The University shall develop an annual mental health awareness and prevention programme for students and faculty members.

Activities may include:

1. Mental health awareness campaigns and orientation programmes.
2. Observance of World Mental Health Day and other relevant awareness occasions.
3. Seminars on emotional well-being, resilience, and stress management.
4. Workshops on healthy relationships, communication, and conflict resolution.
5. Awareness of substance-use risks and pathways to appropriate professional support.
6. Promotion of physical activity, sleep hygiene, relaxation, and healthy lifestyle practices.
7. Training for faculty, mentors, wardens, and designated staff on recognising distress and making appropriate referrals.
8. Anti-stigma campaigns encouraging early help-seeking.
9. Awareness of available campus and external mental health services.
10. Appropriate digital and printed communication concerning support services and emergency contacts.

Awareness programmes shall use respectful, culturally sensitive, age-appropriate, and evidence-informed content.

9. Roles and Responsibilities:

9.1 University Administration

The competent University authority shall:

- Approve and periodically review this policy.
- Provide appropriate administrative support and resources.
- Designate responsible officers and oversight mechanisms.
- Ensure coordination across constituent institutions.

- Review implementation reports and approve necessary improvements.

9.2 Student Welfare Division

The Student Welfare Division shall coordinate student-focused awareness, counselling access, mentoring, referrals, and follow-up support in collaboration with qualified professionals.

9.3 Human Resources Division

The Human Resources Division shall coordinate faculty welfare initiatives, communicate available support services, facilitate relevant workplace measures, and protect employee privacy in accordance with applicable rules.

9.4 Academic Departments and Constituent Institutions

Heads of Departments, Deans, and institutional leaders shall:

- Communicate available mental health services.
- Encourage a respectful and supportive learning and working environment.
- Facilitate access to support without unnecessary barriers.
- Refer individuals to appropriate services when concerns arise.
- Maintain confidentiality and avoid unauthorised disclosure.

9.5 Counsellors and Mental Health Professionals

Professionals shall provide services within their competence, maintain appropriate professional boundaries, follow applicable ethical and legal requirements, and refer individuals when specialised assistance is necessary.

9.6 Faculty Members and Mentors

Faculty members and mentors shall promote supportive interactions, recognise when professional help may be beneficial, and guide individuals towards authorised services without attempting to undertake clinical functions beyond their competence.

9.7 Students and Peer Supporters

Students and peer supporters are encouraged to participate in awareness initiatives, promote empathy, respect privacy, and refer peers to appropriate professional assistance when needed.

10. Resources And Implementation:

The University shall endeavour to provide the human, financial, infrastructural, and technological resources required for implementing this policy.

Resources may include:

- Qualified counsellors and other mental health professionals.

- Dedicated or appropriately equipped counselling spaces.
- Secure appointment and referral systems.
- Approved external service-provider arrangements.
- Awareness materials and training resources.
- Emergency contact directories.
- Accessible online information and support channels.
- Budgetary provisions for mental health and wellness programmes.

Where dedicated in-house services are not immediately available, the University may establish phased implementation arrangements through qualified external providers and recognised healthcare institutions.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation:

The Mental Health and Well-being Committee shall periodically review the implementation and effectiveness of this policy.

The review may consider:

1. Availability and accessibility of counselling services.
2. Number and types of awareness and wellness programmes conducted.
3. Participation in student and faculty initiatives.
4. Anonymised service utilisation trends.
5. Feedback on accessibility, acceptability, and perceived usefulness.
6. Timeliness and effectiveness of referral arrangements.
7. Training coverage among designated personnel.
8. Awareness of confidentiality and emergency procedures.
9. Identified gaps in service provision and corrective measures.
10. Progress in implementing recommendations from previous reviews.

The University shall establish appropriate indicators and targets based on its size, available resources, and institutional needs. Individual clinical information shall not be used for routine performance monitoring.

An annual implementation report may be submitted to the competent University authority, with recommendations for improvement and resource allocation.

12. Grievance Redressal:

Any concern regarding denial of access to services, breach of confidentiality, discrimination, inappropriate conduct, or non-compliance with this policy may be brought to the designated University authority through the established grievance redressal mechanism.

Complaints shall be handled fairly, promptly, and confidentially, to the extent possible and consistent with due process.

Where a complaint falls within the jurisdiction of a statutory committee or another designated authority, it shall be referred to the appropriate mechanism.

No person shall be subjected to retaliation for raising a concern in good faith.

13. Legal and Regulatory alignment:

This policy shall be implemented in accordance with applicable Indian laws, regulations, professional standards, and University statutes and ordinances.

Relevant legal frameworks may include, as applicable:

- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017**, concerning mental healthcare, rights of persons with mental illness, confidentiality, and other relevant protections.
- **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, concerning equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, and applicable protections for persons with disabilities.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, and applicable rules and commencement provisions, to the extent in force and applicable to the University's handling of personal data.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**, and applicable rules, where workplace sexual harassment concerns arise.
- Applicable University Grants Commission regulations, other relevant higher education regulations, and University statutes, ordinances, service rules, and institutional policies.

This policy shall not replace statutory procedures, clinical judgement, emergency medical care, or the rights and remedies available under applicable law.

14. Review and Amendment:

The policy shall be reviewed at least once every three years or earlier when required due to changes in applicable law, regulatory requirements, institutional needs, or service delivery arrangements.

Amendments shall be recommended by the designated Committee and submitted to the competent authority for approval.

15. Approval and Effective Date:

This policy shall take effect from the date of approval by the competent authority of the University.

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