

PREPARED FOR

Manas – Center for Mental Wellness & Counselling

Culturally Sensitive Mental Health at Work

Understanding Indian Cultural Context in Workplace Wellbeing

Presented by Dr. Priya Dubey Sharma

Manas – Center for Mental Wellness & Counselling

UDYAM-MP-10-0120839



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Programme Overview

Western mental health frameworks do not always align with the nuances of the Indian experience. This programme equips participants with the understanding and skills to foster effective workplace wellbeing that is culturally resonant and inclusive for all employees.

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Understand how diverse Indian cultural values and beliefs shape individuals' perceptions and expressions of mental health, enabling more empathetic support. This knowledge is crucial for creating a safe and understanding work environment.
- ✓ Identify and overcome common cultural barriers that prevent employees from seeking help for mental health concerns within the Indian workplace context. Recognizing these barriers is the first step to dismantling them and promoting access to support.
- ✓ Develop and practice culturally sensitive communication strategies for discussing mental health topics with employees, fostering trust and openness. Effective communication ensures that support is received positively and without judgment.
- ✓ Recognize the significant influence of family and social pressures on employee mental wellbeing in India, and learn how to integrate this understanding into workplace support systems. Acknowledging these external factors allows for more holistic and effective interventions.
- ✓ Learn to design and implement workplace wellbeing programmes that are culturally competent and responsive to the specific needs of the Indian workforce. Culturally adapted programmes are more likely to be adopted and beneficial.
- ✓ Explore practical, evidence-based strategies for building an inclusive and supportive workplace culture that prioritizes mental health in a way that respects Indian traditions and values. This leads to a more engaged and resilient workforce.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

This programme is designed for Human Resources professionals, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) providers, counsellors, and senior leadership who are committed to fostering a mentally healthy and culturally aware workplace in India.

Programme Content

1. How Indian Culture Shapes Mental Health Experience and Expression

Indian culture is rich with diverse traditions, values, and beliefs that profoundly influence how mental wellbeing is perceived and communicated. This section delves into how collectivism, spirituality, family honour, and societal expectations shape an individual's internal experience and outward expression of emotional states. Understanding these deeply ingrained cultural nuances is essential for HR and leadership to interpret employee behaviours accurately and respond with genuine empathy. We will explore how these factors can manifest in the workplace, sometimes leading to stoicism or indirect communication about distress, and how to foster an environment where these expressions are understood and validated.

 **Activity: Small group discussion: Sharing observations on culturally influenced expressions of stress and wellbeing.**

2. Common Cultural Barriers to Help-Seeking in Indian Workplaces

Despite growing awareness, several cultural factors often create significant hurdles for individuals seeking mental health support in Indian workplaces. These can include the stigma associated with mental health issues, fear of judgment from colleagues and superiors, the concept of 'log kya kahenge' (what will people say), and a preference for addressing problems within the family rather than seeking external professional help. Recognizing these barriers is critical for designing effective support systems. This module will equip you with strategies to proactively address and mitigate these obstacles, making it easier and safer for employees to access the resources they need.

 **Activity: Case study analysis: Identifying and strategizing around common help-seeking barriers.**

3. Culturally Adapted Communication About Mental Health

Effective communication is the cornerstone of any successful wellbeing initiative, and in the Indian context, it requires careful cultural adaptation. This section focuses on developing communication strategies that are respectful, non-stigmatizing, and resonant with Indian cultural values. We will explore how to frame conversations about mental health in a way that acknowledges familial and societal contexts, using language that promotes understanding rather than apprehension. Learning to communicate with cultural sensitivity ensures that messages about support and resources are received positively and encourage engagement.

 **Activity: Role-playing exercises: Practicing culturally sensitive conversations about mental health.**

4. Family and Social Pressure as Workplace Mental Health Factors

In India, the influence of family and social networks on an individual's life, including their work, is often profound. Family expectations, marital pressures, and social obligations can significantly impact an employee's mental state and their ability to perform. This module examines how these external pressures can interact with workplace dynamics and affect overall wellbeing. We will discuss practical approaches for HR and managers to acknowledge and, where appropriate, support employees navigating these complex personal and social demands, fostering a more holistic approach to employee care.

 **Activity: Group brainstorming: Developing supportive responses to common family/social pressures affecting employees.**

5. Building a Culturally Competent Wellbeing Programme

Creating a truly effective and inclusive workplace wellbeing programme in India necessitates a deep understanding of cultural competence. This means moving beyond generic interventions to design initiatives that are tailored to the specific cultural, social, and economic realities of the Indian workforce. We will cover how to integrate cultural sensitivity into programme design, communication, and delivery, ensuring that resources are accessible, relevant, and utilized. The goal is to build a sustainable framework that genuinely supports the mental health of all employees, respecting their diverse backgrounds and experiences.

 **Activity: Workshop: Designing elements of a culturally competent wellbeing initiative.**

6. Integrating Traditional Wisdom with Modern Support

India possesses a rich heritage of traditional practices and philosophies that offer valuable insights into mental and emotional resilience. This section explores how to thoughtfully integrate these age-old wisdom traditions, such as mindfulness, yoga, and community support systems, with modern psychological approaches. By blending these two streams, organizations can create a more comprehensive and culturally grounded wellbeing strategy. We will discuss practical ways to leverage these elements to enhance employee coping mechanisms and foster a more balanced approach to mental health within the corporate setting.

 **Activity: Discussion: Identifying relevant traditional practices for workplace wellbeing.**

Action Plan

Concrete steps for implementation.

Action	Owner	Timeline	Notes
Conduct a cultural awareness needs assessment for the current wellbeing programme.	HR	Week 1	Identify specific cultural sensitivities and gaps through employee surveys and focus groups.
Review and adapt existing mental health communication materials for cultural relevance.	HR	Month 1	Ensure language, imagery, and examples used are inclusive and resonate with Indian employees.
Train managers on culturally sensitive communication and support for mental health.	Manager	Week 2	Focus on active listening, empathy, and recognizing culturally influenced expressions of distress.
Identify and partner with culturally competent external mental health providers.	HR	Month 1	Vet providers for their understanding of Indian cultural nuances and local context.
Incorporate culturally relevant wellness activities into the company calendar.	HR/Manager	Month 2	Examples include sessions on stress management incorporating yoga or mindfulness, and celebrating diverse cultural festivals.
Establish a feedback mechanism to continuously improve culturally sensitive wellbeing initiatives.	Leadership	Quarter 1	Regularly solicit employee input on the effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of support programmes.

About Manas



Dr. Priya Dubey Sharma

Founder & Consulting Psychologist | Applied, Organizational & Behavioural Psychologist | PhD | 18+ Years

Dr. Priya Dubey Sharma brings 18+ years of applied psychology to corporate wellness. She has worked with SBI, educational institutions, and corporate teams across India. Her evidence-based approach combines CBT, mindfulness, and culturally contextualised psychology for measurable outcomes. She is the creator of the Performance FOMO Index™ and the High-Functioning Distress Framework™.

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Website

manas365.com



Corporate Enquiries

manu@manas365.com



WhatsApp

[+91 99818 13224](https://wa.me/919981813224)



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