

[1] The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority (SSLSA) under the directions of Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim and Executive Chairperson, Sikkim State Legal Services Authority, under NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015, organized a *Mental Health Programme* for the Officers and staff of Rural Development Department, Government of Sikkim from all the Districts on **26<sup>th</sup> August, 2022 (Friday)** at Sikkim Judicial Academy, Sokeythang, Gangtok, under the aegis of National Legal Services Authority.

[2] The Mental Health Programme for Government Employees was launched by the Sikkim SLSA on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2018 at the Sikkim Judicial Academy, Sokeythang, Gangtok, coinciding with World Mental Health Day and aims at sensitizing all Government employees on mental health and stress coping mechanisms.

[3] Employees of the Police Department were sensitized on 10.10.2018, Education Department (*on 12.07.2019*), Department of Power (*on 22.11.2019*), Social Welfare Department (*on 21.12.2021*) and ASHA Workers of the Health & Family Welfare Department from East and North Districts (*on 22.03.2022*), with Resource Persons from the Department of Psychiatry, STNM Multispecialty Hospital.

[4] In her welcome address, Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLSA, apprised the gathering about the purpose of the programme and that it is in consonance with Hon'ble Executive Chairperson's prime concern, namely, mental health issues arising out of work stress and other factors which are being faced in Sikkim and needs to be addressed. She also highlighted the importance of sensitization and awareness on mental health amongst the employees of the various State Government Departments. She further informed the gathering about free and competent legal aid services provided by Sikkim SLSA, and the various activities carried out by Sikkim SLSA under the ten schemes of NALSA.

[5] Resource Person, Dr. C.L. Pradhan, Consultant, Department of Psychiatry, New STNM Multispecialty Hospital, Sochakgang, Gangtok informed that Sikkim is one of the top States in terms of suicide and highlighted the prime cause behind it. He also enumerated the negative consequences of mental health disorders such as stigma/taboo, discrimination, ignorance and misinformation, ways to cope with such situations and methods of treatment of mental illness, maintenance of mental health and hygiene. The State Helpline numbers for prevention of suicide (*18003453225 and 03592202111*) were also shared. Further, a mental health questionnaire along with pamphlets were distributed.

[6] Resource Person, Mrs. Nancy Palmu Chankapa, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, New STNM Multispecialty Hospital, Sochakgang, Gangtok addressed the gathering on the causes of stress, its symptoms, stress management and demonstrated some exercises to help manage stress. She also encouraged the participants to visit the Department of Psychiatry at STNM Multispecialty Hospital for seeking counseling in matters related to mental health. The programme was followed by a vibrant interactive session between the participants and the Resource Persons and several queries on mental health and illness were raised.

[7] The vote of thanks was proposed by Shri Praveen Pradhan, Deputy Secretary, Sikkim SLSA. The programme was also attended by Mrs. Matilda Isaacs, Consultant, Sikkim SLSA and Officers and staff of Sikkim SLSA.