



GITAM: GANDHI INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

(Deemed to be University u/s 3 of the UGC Act, 1956)

A Category – I Deemed to be University

Visakhapatnam | Hyderabad | Bengaluru

**The Policy for
Mental Health Support Activities**

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1 Introduction

Across the higher education sector, institutions are witnessing an increase in both the prevalence and severity of mental health difficulties that students present with. Mental health difficulties can arise from various factors, including stress, life events, past experiences, and genetic predispositions. Moreover, student life exposes individuals to risk factors affecting mental health, such as debt, periods of transition, substance use, cultural adjustments, and a sense of disconnection from previous support systems. It is imperative for GITAM Deemed to be University to acknowledge these challenges and fulfil its legal responsibilities towards students whose mental conditions fall under the definition of Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.

2 Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this policy is to articulate GITAM's unwavering commitment to providing mental health support for its students. This policy aims to outline the actions and strategies that the university will undertake to respond to mental health concerns effectively. It also outlines how the university's support systems may connect with community-based services, especially for students facing more severe or acute mental health challenges. This policy applies to all students currently enrolled at the GITAM, whether on a full-time or part-time basis regardless of their campus location. The university's Human Resources Directorate is responsible for addressing staff members' mental health concerns, as stipulated in their respective policy and procedure.

3 Definitions

3.1 Mental Health

Mental health encompasses emotional resilience, enabling individuals to enjoy life, cope with challenges, and engage productively in society.

3.2 Mental Health Difficulties

Mental health difficulties are issues that can affect an individual's emotional well-being and are often triggered by major life events, leading to ongoing conditions that may impact a student's university experience and academic study.

3.3 Mental Illness

Mental illness may arise from various factors and can be acute or chronic. Some mental illnesses fall within the definition of "disability" under the Equality Act 2010.

4 Objectives

- *Develop a Coordinated Global Campus Strategy:* GITAM will develop a comprehensive global campus strategy to promote the mental health of all students, encompassing suicide prevention initiatives.
- *Provide a Coordinated Approach:* The university will establish a coordinated approach for managing students' mental health difficulties, including the effective handling of cases involving emergencies and serious risks of harm or suicide.
- *Ensure Accessibility:* GITAM will ensure that mental health support services are accessible to all students, making reasonable adjustments as necessary to accommodate individual needs.
- *Engage External Partners:* The university will collaborate with external partners, including health providers, to enhance students' access to community and specialist mental health resources.
- *Enforce Relevant Policies:* GITAM will ensure the effective operation of relevant policies, such as Equality and Diversity, Admissions, Mitigating Circumstances, and Temporary Suspension of Studies, to support students with mental health challenges.

5 Legal Framework and Responsibilities

GITAM Deemed to be University recognizes its legal obligations under the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 particularly concerning students with mental health conditions. The university acknowledges the need to make reasonable adjustments and implement an anticipatory duty to provide general support mechanisms for all students who may face mental health challenges. Furthermore, the university is committed to actively promoting disability equality, going beyond a reactive approach to individual student requirements.

5.1 Lines of Responsibility

The coordinator on behalf of the university, assumes responsibility for coordinating and implementing the strategy to achieve the outlined objectives across all campuses.

5.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring of this policy and its implementation will be overseen and reported through the Committee to ensure its effectiveness.

5.3 Implementation

The coordinator is responsible for the effective implementation of this Mental Health Support Activities Policy.

Fostering Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is influenced by a myriad of factors. These encompass maintaining a nourishing diet, ensuring regular and quality sleep, nurturing a supportive social network that allows both care for others and assertiveness regarding our own needs, striking a balance between work and leisure activities, incorporating physical activity, mastering stress coping mechanisms, and cultivating a strong sense of self-worth.

GITAM offers a diverse array of opportunities that empower students to engage in enriching, captivating, and skill-enhancing activities. These experiences span from cooking to public speaking, ensuring holistic development. Alongside academic programs, the institution organizes workshops that encourage students to refine their study skills and deepen their interpersonal abilities. Additionally, a wealth of study aids and self-help resources is available to guide students in addressing a range of issues, from exam-related stress to sleep-related concerns.

For those facing specific challenges, the facility at “GIMSR Medical Campus” stands ready to provide brief interventions. These interventions aim to bolster strategies, enhance skills, confront emotional barriers, and challenge self-limiting beliefs, assisting students in their journey towards improved mental wellbeing.

6 Support for Students Facing Emotional, Psychological, or Mental Health Challenges

6.1 Admission Procedures

Prospective students are encouraged to disclose any disabilities, including severe or enduring mental health difficulties, during their application to the University. Such mental health conditions can be classified as disabilities for this purpose. This early disclosure initiates a dialogue regarding their support needs, increasing the likelihood of having appropriate support in place upon their enrolment. All staff members interacting with applicants should actively promote the early disclosure of additional needs to facilitate this important dialogue.

6.2 Campus Welfare

Most incoming students reside in University accommodation. The Campus welfare teams are adept at identifying students who may be struggling with the initial challenges of university life. These teams possess valuable experience in assisting students in forming social relationships and overcoming the uncertainties that often accompany the early stages of university life.

Additionally, Campus welfare teams are skilled in providing support for students experiencing low-level emotional, psychological, or mental health difficulties. They are available outside the usual operating hours of central support services. Welfare teams are encouraged to refer students to more specialized services when necessary and maintain close collaboration with the "GIMSR Medical Campus" when assisting students with acute or profound mental health challenges.

6.3 Supervisors and Departmental Support

Supervisors and academic department staff play a pivotal role in recognizing signs of emerging difficulties, often indicated by significant changes in attendance patterns or academic performance. They may encourage students to seek appropriate support from University services or their general practitioners.

For students who do not yet have 'reasonable adjustments' in place, faculty mentors may recommend that students facing mental health difficulties provide appropriate evidence to mitigate poor academic performance, especially in assessments. In cases where emotional, psychological, or mental health difficulties hinder a student's

effective pursuit of their study program, departmental staff may guide the student in considering options like requesting leave of absence or suspension of studies. Postgraduate research students encountering emotional, psychological, or mental health challenges may find it beneficial to seek guidance GITAM Career Guidance Centre (GCGC) given the significant role their supervisors play in their academic journey.

7 Confidential Reporting

If a supervisor or staff member is concerned about a student's well-being, they are encouraged to discuss their concerns with a mentor nominated by GCGC. These initial conversations should prioritize the student's privacy and confidentiality whenever required.

URL: <https://ct3.gitam.edu>

8 Student Organizations

Designated welfare officers are available to provide assistance, and numerous student societies offer a space for like-minded individuals or those with shared interests to connect.

URL: <https://www.gitam.edu/campus-life>

9 Leave of Absence/Suspension of Study

At times, a student's psychological or mental health difficulties significantly impact their ability to pursue their study program effectively. In such instances, compassionate and timely discussions should take place with the student, advising them to consider requesting a leave of absence or suspension of studies. Students typically submit a Leave of Absence (LOA) request to their academic department, and the decision to approve the LOA is determined by the department's Board of Studies. LOA applications are usually considered in closed meetings, but hearings may be conducted in cases with significant issues or lack of clarity. The student may be asked to undergo an assessment with the concern team to provide evidence of their emotional, psychological, or mental health difficulties.

10 Fitness to Practise

Professionally-oriented programs (e.g., Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, Teaching) may have specific policies and procedures for students who may not be fit to

undertake professional placements or progress in their respective professions due to concerns like the risk of harm to the public.

11 Recognizing Acute or Profound Mental Health Issues

The University acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and understands that various signs and symptoms may indicate a significant mental health challenge.

In general, some signs to be vigilant for may encompass:

- Substantial changes in behavior, mood swings, noticeable weight loss or gain, and a decline in personal hygiene.
- Physical indications such as cuts, burns, or a notable lack of energy.
- Frequent and excessive intoxication.
- Significant alterations in attendance patterns.
- Noticeable deterioration in academic performance.

Any staff member who harbours concerns about a student's mental health can reach out to "GIMSR Medical Campus" for an initial discussion and guidance. It's important to note that this discussion does not necessarily require revealing the student's identity, prioritizing privacy and confidentiality.

12 Management of Mental Health Challenges

12.1 Coordinating Mental Health Management

Student Support Services typically takes the lead in coordinating the University's response to student mental health challenges. These staff members collaborate closely with departments, colleges, and external services as needed and agreed upon by the student.

While University staff members play a crucial role in providing appropriate support for students with mental health difficulties, the University recognizes that external agencies have a duty to assess and treat serious mental health difficulties or emergencies.

12.2 Urgent or Emergency Situations

In situations where a student's mental health appears to be a concern, and their behavior raises immediate worries (typically due to extreme agitation or a perceived

risk of harm to themselves or others), one of the following responses may be appropriate:

If there is no immediate threat to others, a practitioner from the GIMSR Medical Campus can be called upon to attend or the student can be taken to the GIMSR Medical Campus, if they are willing. If there is a perceived threat to others, University Security should be summoned immediately. Security will then determine the next steps in consultation with those involved.

If a student requires hospital admission during office hours GIMSR Medical Campus will collaborate with the relevant community and hospital staff to facilitate the necessary arrangements. Outside office hours, urgent admissions typically occur through the Accident and Emergency department at GIMSR.

12.3 Impact on Others

The University has a responsibility to balance the needs of students facing mental health difficulties with its overall duty of care toward all students and staff. When an individual is in a distressed state of mind, their behavior may significantly affect others. Students who find another student's behavior difficult or distressing should communicate the impact of the situation to someone they trust. They can seek guidance from college welfare staff, their supervisors, or staff in Student Support Services.

Staff members encountering behavior from a student that they find difficult or distressing should discuss the situation's impact with their line manager. It is preferable to approach these situations from a supportive standpoint when someone is visibly experiencing difficulties. However, in some cases, a student may refuse offered support while continuing behavior that poses challenges for others. In such instances, action under the student disciplinary regulations may be considered to ensure the well-being of all involved.

12.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

The GIMSR Medical Campus team holds responsibility for reviewing and monitoring actions taken under this policy.

13 Conclusion

This policy underscores GITAM's commitment to the mental well-being of its students. It outlines clear objectives, responsibilities, and strategies to create a supportive environment that addresses mental health concerns comprehensively and in accordance with legal requirements. By implementing this policy, GITAM aims to foster a culture of inclusivity and care that benefits all members of its academic community.

URL:

- <https://gimsr.gitam.edu/>
- <https://yourdost.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGrMsBtH5aB/>
- <https://www.gitam.edu/about/sustainabledevelopment/PartnershipforGoals.pdf?inline=>
