



DLR
PRERNA



Two-day Conference

on

Mental Health, Wellbeing and Policy

*Individual Experience to Collective Wellbeing
in the Darjeeling Himalayas*



organised by

**St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling
&**

DLR Prerna, Darjeeling

21-22 November, 2026

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21-22
2026



MR Auditorium, St. Joseph's College



CALL FOR PAPERS

Conference on

Mental Health, Wellbeing and Policy Individual Experience to Collective Wellbeing in the Darjeeling Himalayas

organized by

**Department of Political Science, St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling
&
DLR Prerna, Darjeeling**

on

21st – 22nd November 2026

Concept Note

Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness. The World Health Organization (WHO) understands mental health as a state of wellbeing that enables individuals to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Mental health and wellbeing are therefore shaped by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, social, cultural, political, economic, environmental and institutional factors. Individual experiences of distress, resilience and wellbeing cannot therefore be understood in isolation from the families, communities, schools, workplaces, healthcare systems and wider social structures, language, stigma and silence within which people live. Equally, biological and psychological processes interact continuously with social experiences, relationships, living conditions, culture and access to resources and support.

In the case of the Darjeeling Himalaya, mental health can no longer be treated as a secondary concern. Children, young people, elderly, families and communities are navigating a rapidly changing socio-ecological environment shaped by educational and career pressures, economic and

livelihood uncertainties, migration and family separations, changing patterns of social connection and limited access to formal mental health services. These realities make it increasingly important to place mental health and wellbeing at the centre of conversations about community development and social wellbeing.

India continues to face a substantial gap between the need for mental health care and the availability and uptake of appropriate services. The Indian Mental Health Act 2017, while stating the importance of mental healthcare and services to all, has gaps in the provisioning care for communities, especially in the Darjeeling Himalaya and mountain landscapes, with specific contextual vulnerabilities, necessitating distinct intervention approaches.

The Government of India's National Mental Health Programme recognises the shortage of trained mental-health professionals and emphasises early identification, community participation, awareness and accessible, decentralised care. Addressing this gap requires more than increasing clinical services. This dominant individualised care and support model does not fully incorporate the context and the community that are increasingly recognised as important influencing factors for mental well-being. The improvement calls for stronger connections between biomedical and psychosocial approaches, formal and informal systems of care, policy and practice, institutions and communities, and prevention and treatment. While globally, contextual community care models are proving highly impactful, they are yet to be implemented in the Darjeeling Himalaya (World Health Organization). Furthermore, a medical-psychiatric approach to mental health further limits community, context and non-professional, medicalised care and support in the discourse.

The purpose of this event is not just to “raise awareness.” It is to foreground mental health as an essential component of community wellbeing and sustainable development; to create a safe and inclusive space for dialogue; to bring local experiences, knowledge and solutions into the conversation; and to encourage a culture in which seeking support is understood not as a sign of failure, but as an act of strength and self-care.

Against this backdrop, the conference seeks to create a platform from which these interconnected priorities can be understood, recognised, discussed within the Darjeeling Himalaya and translated into meaningful action at practise, knowledge and policy levels. .

Objectives:

Foregrounding Mental Health and Wellbeing in Darjeeling is a call to recognise mental health as an essential component of individual, community and regional wellbeing. The conference seeks to move the conversation from silence to dialogue, from stigma to understanding, from isolated interventions to interconnected and coordinated action that places mental health with an interdisciplinary lens that is contextualized to the socio-ecology of the Darjeeling Himalaya.

Specifically, the conference will attempt to:

1. Foreground mental health and wellbeing as integral to individual, community and regional wellbeing and to the broader social and developmental fabric of Eastern Himalayas focusing on Darjeeling Himalaya.
2. Centre local voices, lived experiences and community knowledge, ensuring that conversations on mental health are grounded in Darjeeling Himalaya's diverse socio-ecological community contexts.
3. Challenge stigma and normalise help-seeking, fostering a culture in which mental health, emotional distress and vulnerability can be discussed with empathy, dignity and understanding.
4. Examine how public policies, institutional structures and service systems shape mental health outcomes, access to care and opportunities for wellbeing.
5. Translate interdisciplinary knowledge and dialogue into locally relevant recommendations, research priorities and practical pathways for strengthening wellbeing in the Darjeeling Himalaya.
6. Attempt to generate comparative and comparable insights on the complex interplay of biological, psychological, social, cultural, political, economic, environmental and institutional factors drawing from local, regional, national and international levels.

Conference Themes :

1. Theory and Praxis of Mental Health, Wellbeing and Policy in Himalayan mountain communities focusing on indigenous knowledge systems.
2. Redefining Mental Healthcare and Support, with special reference to the Eastern Himalayas and Darjeeling Himalaya
3. Existing Inequalities, Social Justice and Policies in accessing Mental Healthcare in the Eastern Himalaya: Contextualizing the reach and gaps of the Mental Health Act 2017
4. Political Economy of Mental Health Care and Support in the Eastern Himalaya
5. Socio-cultural dynamism and mental health care and support in the Eastern Himalaya
6. Breaking the Silence: Stigma, Mental-Health Literacy and Pathways to Care
7. The Places We Inhabit: Ecology of the region and Wellbeing
8. Any other theme covering aspects of Mental Health, Wellbeing and Policy in the Darjeeling Himalayas

The conference will approach these themes as interconnected and mutually shaping areas of inquiry rather than discrete domains. The conference therefore invites perspectives that cross thematic boundaries and examine the relationships between people, communities, institutions, cultures and wider social and environmental contexts in shaping mental health and wellbeing.

Target Audience:

The conference is intended to bring together a diverse cross-section of people who study, influence, experience, study and respond to mental health and wellbeing. Particular emphasis can be placed on students/researchers/practitioners including academic and social communities from institutions across Darjeeling and the wider hill region.

Primary Target Groups

1. College and university students and researchers
2. Faculty and academic staff
3. Mental-health professionals
4. College leadership and student-support systems
5. Community and civil-society organisations
6. Public institutions and policymakers
7. Schools and educators
8. Youth and community voices
9. Independent researchers working on any of the themes

Format & Structure:

The conference will adopt a focused, participatory and knowledge-oriented format, combining expert dialogue with student, researcher, practitioner and academic presentations. The programme will be structured around thematic panel discussions, followed by a curated presentation session, allowing the event to move from broader reflection and dialogue towards the sharing of research, lived experiences and locally grounded perspectives. The use of AI in the writing of research papers/submissions is not permitted. Papers will undergo strict AI and plagiarism checking.

Call for Papers: Submission Guidelines

Abstract Submission

Authors are invited to submit an abstract of their research containing the details of the authors, 4 keywords, their email Ids, institutional affiliation (if applicable) and mobile number (WhatsApp) of not more than 300–400 words. Both individual and collaborative submissions are welcome. Contributions from students and early-career researchers are particularly encouraged. **They may be emailed to sjcnorthpoint1@gmail.com within 4th November 2026.**

Abstracts which are selected by the Committee will be notified by 7th November 2026 after which they will have to register for confirmation.

Important Dates:

- **Abstract Submission Deadline:** 4th November, 2026
- **Email:** sjcnorthpoint1@gmail.com
- **Notification of Acceptance:** 7th November, 2026
- **Submission of Full Paper (APA format within 4000 words):** 15th November 2026

- **Conference Date:** 21st – 22nd November 2026
- **Venue:** MR Auditorium, St. Josephs College, North Point, Darjeeling (WB) - 734104

Registration Fees (only for selected abstracts):

All participants whose abstracts are accepted are requested to register themselves within 15th November 2026 as per the following payment details so as to confirm their participation in the Conference. ***The screenshot of the details of the payment may kindly be sent to sjcnorthpoint1@gmail.com along with the full paper by 15th November 2026 as confirmation of participation.***

For faculty: Rs. 1200/-

For PhD Research Scholars: Rs. 800/-

For College Students: Rs. 300/-

For others: Rs. 1200/-

For joint papers, two or more participants must register separately as Certificates shall be awarded separately. The participants are kindly requested to make their own arrangements for travel and accommodation. Once registered, the Organizers will be providing all the paper presenters with certificates, ID cards, lunch, refreshments and other kits for the duration of the Conference.

ACCOUNT DETAILS FOR REGISTRATION:

A/C Name: SJC Exempted Items

A/C No.: 20520100000744

IFSC Code: UCBA0002052

Branch: North Point, Singmari (Darjeeling)

Name: UCO Bank

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

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For further information, please contact: Convener –at: sjcnorthpoint1@gmail.com