

## SARTHI AND SAKHI – MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE

**In a nutshell:** 100% vaccination for prisoners who live in extremely vulnerable condition.

**Nodal agency:** District administration, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

COVID-19, besides infecting the physiological well-being of individuals, also brought the risk of psychological distress to people who were diagnosed with it. The healthcare professionals and other essential workers who were at the front line were more vulnerable, since they were in proximity to the disease. Increased screen time, no schools, and lack of outdoor activities impacted psychological wellbeing of children and adolescents as well.

It was recognized that patients undergoing COVID-19 treatment had many apprehensions and misinformation which led to resistance in getting treatment initially. They were also non-cooperative with the healthcare professionals. Many patients had depressive symptoms, and various studies even suggested that people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder were more vulnerable to COVID-19.

With the increase in stress, depression and anxiety, women all around the world saw a steep rise in domestic violence against them. The sharp increase in the cases of domestic violence during the lockdown caused by the pandemic was termed as the 'shadow pandemic' by the Executive Director of the UN Women. In India, the number of domestic violence complaints received by the National Commission for Women doubled from 123 distressed calls to 239 domestic violence complaints from March to April 2020.

To counter these challenges district administration established two helpline numbers, 'Sarathi' and 'Sakhi'. Sarathi helpline - 01204155313, was established as a dedicated mental health helpline for individuals to access mental health care whenever they would feel extremely distressed and would like to refer to the professional for help and **Sakhi helpline - 7235004603** a dedicated helpline number for women in distress and victim of domestic violence.

### SARTHI HELPLINE

Sarathi, a mental health and psychosocial support helpline number was made operational in 2020 with support from UNICEF at Mukundlal Municipal Government (MMG) Hospital, Ghaziabad to assist people to navigate through their psychological issues and equip them to deal with their mental health issues. The helpline engaged 14

### SAKHI HELPLINE

A rise in domestic violence cases led the district administration in Ghaziabad to take initiative to protect the rights of the women and to make help accessible and available to all women. The district administration, Ghaziabad established Sakhi helpline number to support women who were the victims of domestic violence during the

counsellors who provided online counselling services from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. to cater to the mental health and psychosocial support of the people. The helpline number was disseminated among people and in community through local print media, existing WhatsApp platforms of volunteers, NSS cadres, and government functionaries. A poster was placed at every police station, Government office, hospital, CHC, block office, chemist and major retail grocery store.

Since inception, the helpline centre received various cases of rise in feeling of anxiety, worry, depression, loneliness, uncertainty due to the lockdown and post lockdown, the anxiety and stress increased with the surge in the number of positive cases. The counsellors helped the cases through immediate response, professional counselling services with complete anonymity and non-judgmental attitude and supported through cognitive behavioural therapy and by referring mental exercises along with some lifestyle changes.

COVID-19 pandemic. The Sakhi Helpline Number was published in print and local media. Flyers were posted on every social media platform and awareness regarding the dedicated Sakhi helpline number was done through ASHAs, Anganwadi workers, supervisors from block and district level, healthcare officers. Sakhi helpline provided assurance about the confidentiality of identity of their callers and a safe mode of counselling (telephonic and video conferencing) during lockdown by psychosocial counsellors of One Stop Centre (OSC).

The Sakhi helpline used to refer cases to OSC for far reaching interventions where the victims received

1. Emergency response and rescue services
2. Medical assistance
3. Assistance to women in lodging FIR/NCR/DIR
4. Psycho-social support/counselling
5. Legal Aid/advice
6. Shelter
7. Video conferencing facility.

The dedicated helpline received cases related to domestic violence, dowry, sexual harassment, stalking and eve teasing, cyber crime, missing, kidnapping and abduction cases. These cases were also forwarded to the OSC centre in-charge and to the OSC counsellor panel. The centre in-charge along with her team helped survivors with immediate response, medical help, police help and legal services. The counselling panel consisting of four counsellors who provided professional counselling services with complete anonymity and non-judgmental attitude to the survivors.

