

Inauguration of
Voices of Life Lecture Series
&
Observation of
International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

#InvestInPrevention #StopOrganizedCrime

Date: June 26, 2025

Online Platform: Zoom

Organised by: Indian Association of Life Skills Education (IALSE)

In collaboration with: Smt. Maniben M.P. Shah Women's College of Arts & Commerce (Autonomous), Mumbai

EVENT REPORT

The **Voices of Life Lecture Series** is an initiative by Indian Association of Life Skills Education (IALSE), focusing on equipping individuals with essential life skills and promoting holistic wellbeing. The term, 'Voices of Life' embodies a beacon of hope, education and empowerment, aiming to amplify voices of resilience, purpose, and positive change. By undertaking this initiative, IALSE seeks to empower individuals to resist harmful temptations, make positive choices and create a culture of positivity and resilience.

The *Voices of Life* Lecture Series sets out to achieve the following goals:

- **Conduct Monthly Sessions** focused on emotional intelligence, stress management, peer pressure, and mental health.
- **Create Safe Dialogic Spaces** where students can engage in meaningful self-reflection and open conversations.

On the occasion of the **International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking**, IALSE, in collaboration with Smt. Maniben M.P. Shah Women's College of Arts & Commerce (Autonomous), Mumbai, inaugurated the *Voices of Life Lecture Series*. Themed **"Invest in Prevention. Stop Organized Crime,"** the event emphasized the role of life skills education as a crucial preventive strategy against substance abuse and trafficking.

Ms. Rama Bhide, Secretary, IALSE, anchored the program and welcomed all dignitaries and participants. In her opening remarks, she underlined the urgency of investing in awareness and education to safeguard the youth against organized crime and addiction. She noted that the lecture series is designed not only to address drug abuse but also to serve as a platform for addressing the broader challenges faced by young people, including emotional exploitation, peer pressure, and mental health issues.

Dr. Archana Patki, Principal of Smt. MMP Shah Women's College (Autonomous), delivered the welcome address and emphasized the transformative role of education in shaping responsible, self-aware individuals. She described life skills such as empathy, decision-making, and critical thinking as the “first line of defence” against addiction and social manipulation.

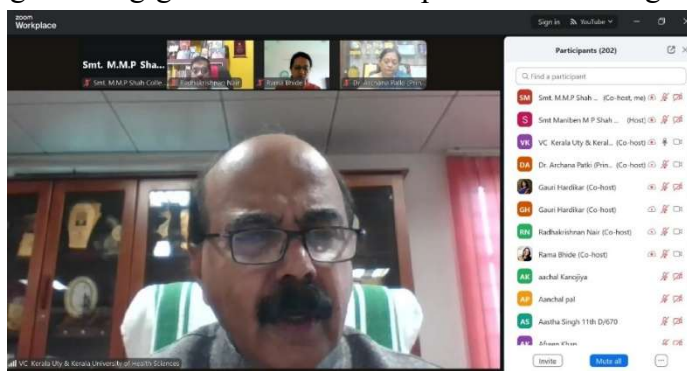
“We want to plant seeds of agency in students. Life skills must be part of every student's learning journey,” she remarked.



Dr. Radhakrishnan Nair, President, IALSE, delivered the Presidential address, categorizing drug addiction as not only a health concern but a behavioural and social crisis. He highlighted the alarming rise in drug-related incidents across India, particularly among adolescents and students, citing Kerala as one of the severely affected states. He drew attention to the staggering number of children, especially girls from underprivileged communities who fall victim to trafficking each year. He critiqued the limitations of law enforcement alone, noting that many cases are booked on weak grounds, allowing offenders to return and escalate their activities. Instead, he advocated for a dual approach - strengthening legal frameworks while embedding life skills education in schools to empower children to resist harmful influences and assertively say “no” when needed. Dr. Nair noted that Life skills are crucial tools in empowering individuals to resist negative influences and make better choices. He shared that introducing life skills education in schools can have a significant impact on preventing such issues. He noted that the focus is on proactive intervention, highlighting the potential of life skills to empower individuals with survival skills and promote positive outcomes. He stressed the importance of early intervention, sharing real-life experiences of trafficked girls who expressed that early exposure to life skills training could have prevented their exploitation. These experiences reaffirmed the need for proactive, school-based life skills programs.

“Life skills are not just soft skills - they are survival skills,” he asserted, calling for their formal integration into academic institutions.

The inaugural lecture was delivered by Prof. Dr. Mohanan Kunnummel, Vice Chancellor of Kerala University of Health Sciences. Drawing from historical and neurodevelopmental perspectives, Dr. Kunumel described addiction as part of a long-standing global crisis. He emphasized that drug addiction and illicit trafficking are significant threats to individuals, communities and nations. He highlighted the historical context of the opium wars and how powerful nations have used drugs to weaken others. He noted that India's growing economy and large young population make it a target for drug traffickers.



It was stressed by Prof. Mohanan that addiction is a disease that requires treatment and support, rather than simply punishment. He pointed that education institutions play a critical role in preventing drug addiction by teaching young people life skills, including the art of saying no. He emphasized the importance of identifying early warning signs of addiction and providing support to those affected.

“This is not a casual trend. It’s an organized global war targeting youth,” he warned. He explained how the underdevelopment of the prefrontal cortex in adolescents heightens vulnerability to manipulation, reinforcing the need for early and consistent life skills training.

Dr. Bindu emphasized the importance of family, particularly mothers, in preventing drug addiction by being aware of changes in their children's behaviour. She highlighted the need to integrate life skill education into families and curriculum, starting from home. Dr. Bindu appreciated the speaker's insights on medical and clinical aspects of addiction and agreed on the significance of parental mental health and education in Life Skill Education programs.



Mr. B. Senthil mentioned that many juvenile offenders in Tamil Nadu, especially those below 18, are using drugs. He asked how to prevent this and handle such children. Prof. Mohanan replied that juveniles are sent to Reformation Centers instead of regular jails due to their underdeveloped prefrontal cortex, which affects their decision-making. He emphasized that the solution lies in family protection and prevention, rather than punishment. The VC stressed that traffickers and the source of drugs need to be punished. Sometimes drastic actions may be necessary to destroy the source.

A noteworthy intervention came from Dr. Gauri Hardikar, Vice President, IALSE, who posed a thought-provoking question during the open forum:

“Since the pre- frontal cortex is not yet fully developed in adolescents, how can we best support them to think critically and make informed decisions specially in relation to drugs?”

Her observation underscored the need to align refusal training with the cognitive development stages of youth, making a strong case for embedding critical thinking within life skills education. The VC replied that adolescents seek excitement through use of drugs which gives them a dopamine high. We need to show and offer safe and alternative pathways, such as sports, music or creative activities, to help adolescents channelize their energy positively. He suggested that initiatives like the National Service Scheme or joining the Indian Army can provide excitement and direction for young people. The VC emphasized that by providing alternative opportunities,

young people can be prevented from taking the easiest pathway of drug use and instead become productive citizens.

Ms. Rama Bhide presented the vote of thanks and expressed heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Mohanan Kunnummel for highlighting the harms of drug abuse and emphasizing prevention, as well as to Dr. Radhakrishnan Nair for his vision and leadership in life skills education. She also thanked Dr. Archana Patki, the lead coordinator of the Voices of Life Lecture series; Ms. Rajni Kanoja, faculty member of the computer department; and Mr. Yasin Khan for their technical assistance. She expressed her gratitude towards Smt. M.M.P. Shah Women's College of Arts and Commerce (Autonomous) for their collaboration. She also extended appreciation to the participants, students, colleagues, office bearers, and IALSE members for their support.

The launch of the *Voices of Life* Lecture Series marked a significant step in promoting preventive education against substance abuse. The initiative calls for sustained collaboration among educators, policymakers, and communities to build a protective ecosystem around youth. The event concluded with a strong call to action to integrate life skills education at all levels of the educational framework to empower students and combat the rising challenges posed by addiction and related social risks.



Report prepared by:

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