

Your next job awaits you on WhatsApp

A pan-India online support group has come to the aid of distressed psychology graduates, who are struggling to find internships and resources to help get ahead in life

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AT a time when mental health is being taken far more seriously as a consequence of the pandemic, graduates with a psychology degree across India are finding it difficult to find internships.

Divisha Singh, 24, who has a bachelor's as well as a master's degree in psychology from Panjab University in Chandigarh, says she has been looking for an internship for over two years, to gain practical experience. But, all the psychology internships she applied for required her to manage social media accounts. "There is a huge gap between what is promised and what interns are made to do," says Singh.

Having realised that there were many psychology graduates struggling like her, Singh started a support group on WhatsApp last month.

Singh says her sole motivation was to raise awareness and make resources available to all. She began with one group, but because it reached its maximum limit of 257 members, she had to form another group, with a similar number of members. Students from various states, including West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Assam, Manipur, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh, have joined these groups. "We share any free or paid internship opportunities, resources, and job openings on the group. It also serves as a platform for reviewing various organisations and internship opportunities; if anyone [on the group] has interned with them,

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Divisha Singh, group admin



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She feels that due to lack of awareness and guidance, many psychology graduates have got a raw deal in the past.

Twenty-one-year-old Mayuri Makwana, who graduated from St Mira's College for Girls, Pune, with a bachelor's degree in psychology, is one among them. Makwana did two internships, but as a content creator. She says that some firms even charge a fee to intern with them. The fee ranges anywhere between ₹1,000 and ₹30,000. "I cannot afford to pay for an internship; it's not an extra course for my learning, but it's something I deserve free of cost as a student." She has decid-



Namita Lulla, 21, a graduate from St Xavier's College Autonomous, Mumbai, says many organisations are offering week-long courses, in the name of internships

ed to take a gap year, and is now considering pursuing an MBA.

Most of these internships offer no hands-on experience either. Mumbai-based Namita Lulla, 21, an economic-psychology graduate from St Xavier's College Autonomous, feels that the term internship is being used loosely these days. "[In the name of internships], these organisations are actually offering week-long courses, where you're taught concepts you already learnt [in college]," she says.

A lucky few like Shailesh Jaiswal, 21, currently pursuing a master's degree at Delhi University, managed to secure an internship in the middle of the pandemic. Jaiswal interned at Tihar jail between May and August 2020. "I had to visit inmates, interact with them, and identify if they were suffering from psychological disorders, and provide psychological first aid to the inmates in a one-on-one setting"

he says. He, however, admits that such opportunities are few and far between.

Tithi Haria, a clinical psychologist, however, says that graduates should not lose hope yet. She feels that students are not given hands-on experience immediately, because often there are sensitive cases involved,



Mayuri Makwana, aspiring to be a clinical psychologist, was forced to intern as a content creator, due to lack of opportunities

which need to be handled cautiously. "People come to us to talk about things they don't usually share with others; they wouldn't want another person in the same room with them. As a result, confidentiality must be maintained. However, there are few government hospitals in Mumbai, that offer 'observer-ship' internships. If you want to gain some practical experience, you will need to obtain a certain level of qualification, before you can start seeing patients on your own." Haria feels that it is critical to connect with mental health professionals and build networks, in order to be qualified enough to work with patients eventually.