

13th Edition

SAAJHI SAMAJH

Tackling Bullying Together: Examine, Educate, Empower

EVENT REPORT

Friday, 6 September 2024



About Tech Mahindra Foundation

Tech Mahindra Foundation (TMF) is the corporate social responsibility arm of Tech Mahindra Limited, a Mahindra Group Company. Since 2006, the Foundation has been working tirelessly in the areas of education, employability and disability, with a keen focus on corporate volunteering.

The Foundation works with the mandate that 50% & 10% of its beneficiaries would respectively be women and persons with disabilities. Since FY 2012-13, the Foundation has impacted 4,92,757 beneficiaries through initiatives across 12 locations in India.



Our Focus Areas

EMPLOYABILITY

SMART (Skills-for-Market Training) is the Foundation's flagship employability program to empower youth from socio-economically backward urban communities. It empowers youth from under-served urban communities with requisite employability skills through structured training and helps them get dignified jobs. The program includes imparting Foundation Skills i.e. Spoken English, Basic IT and Workplace Readiness besides trade-specific domain training. The Foundation has been implementing the **SMART** program by establishing a network of SMART Academies and Centres - run both directly and through other partner implementing agencies.

EDUCATION

The Foundation is dedicated to enhancing school governance, expanding children's learning opportunities, increasing parental involvement in school education and enabling continuous professional development of schools' stakeholders.. This is executed through our Education programs- **ARISE**, **Shikshaantar** and **Mobile Science Lab**. The Foundation works in government schools through its **ARISE** (All-Round Improvement in School Education) focuses on providing holistic development for children in government schools. **Shikshaantar** focuses on teacher empowerment and capacity enhancement through contemporary subject matter and pedagogical practice through directly run In-Service Teacher Education Institute (ITEI) and partner projects. The **Mobile Science Labs** were launched to enhance the educational experience through a bus equipped with hands-on activities of EVS (Science) that visits government schools and facilitates learning of students from Classes 3 to 5.

DISABILITY

Enabling true ability in persons with disability, Tech Mahindra Foundation strives to build an inclusive society. There is a keen emphasis on facilitating equal learning opportunities for children and youth with disabilities to lead dignified lives. This is done through **ARISE+** (All Round Improvement in School Education for Children with Disabilities) and **SMART+** (Skills-for-Market Training for Persons with Disabilities). **ARISE+** is a program that encourages children with disabilities to become a part of mainstream education. The **SMART+** program focuses on providing employable market-related entrepreneurial skills and opportunities to youth with disabilities.

VOLUNTEERING

Corporate Volunteering is at the heart of Tech Mahindra's ethos where Individual Social Responsibilities (ISR) is a way of life. TechM associates volunteer and contribute to driving positive social change while simultaneously enhancing their capacities for empathy and compassion. This is how we **#Rise** and find our joy in giving back to society!

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Panelists:

Mr. Darran Heaney - *Director of Engagement with DCU Anti-Bullying Centre*

Dr. Rita Sharma - *Deputy Director of Education, Department of Education (DoE)
Director, State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT)*

Ms. Paramjit Kaur Narang - *Senior Education Consultant and Veteran School Leader*

Mr. Ajay Govind - *Award-Winning Writer-Director, Founder of Words Rhythms Images
and Social Educator*

Special Invitee: Ms. Anoushka Jolly - *Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar Awardee,
Founder of Kavach App & Student Advocate for Child Welfare and Mental Health*

Moderator: Ms. Poorna Saini - *Faculty - Counseling & Clinical Psychology
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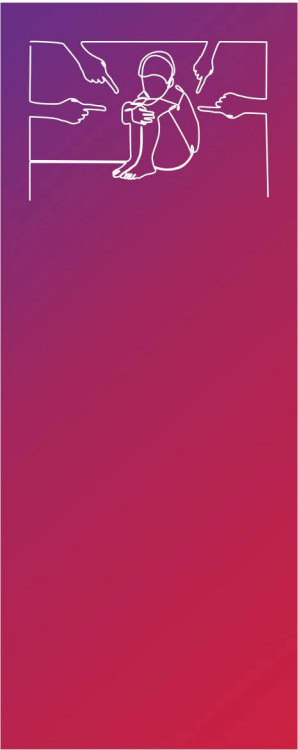
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Agenda

The conference was divided into four main segments, each focusing on different aspects of understanding and tackling bullying, particularly in educational settings and cyberspace. Below is a detailed report of the proceedings.

Introduction:

Saajhi Samajh - The Thirteenth Edition

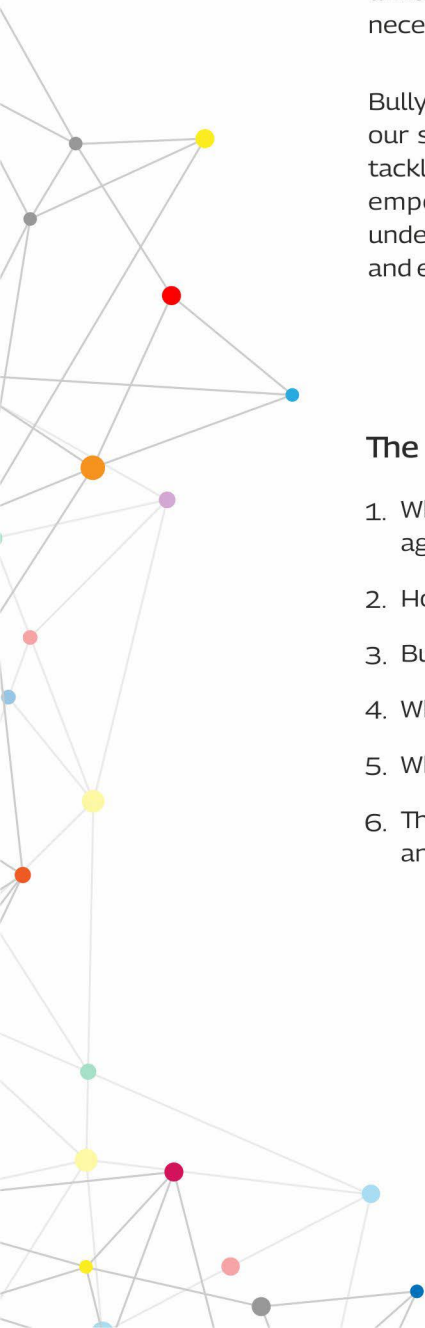
"Saajhi Samajh" (or Shared Understanding) is Tech Mahindra Foundation's attempt to create a broader platform to enable advocacy through discourse and discussion on issues related to and relevant to the development sector in India. The previous editions of Saajhi Samajh were resounding successes, and their details are available on the TMF website.

Saajhi Samajh-13 was organized on 6th September 2024 by Tech Mahindra Foundation in collaboration with Dublin City University to discuss and dive into the critical issue of bullying that fundamentally challenges the principles of dignity and equality in our society. The theme of the discussion was titled '**Tackling Bullying Together: Examine, Educate, Empower**,' followed by unveiling a practical guide for educators, parents, and communities, providing them with the necessary knowledge and strategies to address and prevent bullying effectively.

Bullying is a critical issue that fundamentally challenges the principles of dignity and equality in our society. Tech Mahindra Foundation's core mission is "*Empowerment through Education*" and tackling bullying is essential for fostering inclusive environments. Our CSR initiatives focus on empowering marginalized groups—including women, people with disabilities, and the underprivileged—and in this spirit, examining bullying helps support a broader culture of respect and equality.

The discussion aimed to answer the following:

1. What is bullying, and what distinguishes bullying from other forms of conflict or aggression?
2. How prevalent is bullying in the online space compared to its traditional forms of bullying?
3. Bullying in schools: - in India and abroad.
4. What are the negative impacts of being targeted for bullying?
5. What can education leaders do to tackle the issue of bullying effectively?
6. The future of anti-bullying efforts: Role of technology, students, teachers and community and collaborative strategies.



Understanding Bullying & Cyberbullying

- Welcome Address & Moderation: Chetan Kapoor, CEO, Tech Mahindra Foundation
- Keynote Speaker: Prof. James O'Higgins Norman, UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying at Dublin City University & Director-DCU Anti-Bullying Centre
- Unveiling of the document "Tackling Bullying Together: Examine. Educate. Empower" by Prof. James O'Higgins Norman

In the conversation between Mr. Chetan Kapoor, CEO of, TMF, and Prof. James O'Higgins Norman, Director of DCU Anti-Bullying Center, Prof. Norman emphasized the pervasive nature of bullying, noting that the victims often experience harassment both online and offline simultaneously.

Keynote Address



Prof. James O'Higgins Norman

UNESCO Chair on Bullying and Cyberbullying

“

- Recent research reveals that nearly 97-99% of those bullied experience both online and offline harassment simultaneously.
- I prefer to use the term 'bullying online and offline' rather than 'cyberbullying.'

”

Key Highlights:

- **Definition of 'Bullying':** An aggressive act by someone who perceives themselves as more powerful than the target, whether through physical strength, social status, or hierarchical position. Bullying reflects a power imbalance, and focusing solely on the behaviour overlooks deeper causes. Contemporary discussions view bullying as a social process involving the interplay between individual actions and the influence of societal norms.
- **Social Status:** Children's social status often influences how others perceive them and how they see themselves throughout their education. Children from less wealthy families may stand out and become targets for bullying. According to UNESCO research, a primary reason for bullying globally is physical appearance, with individuals who are different in ethnicity, dress, or gender often being singled out. Despite having the right to express themselves, these differences can make them more vulnerable to negative peer behaviour.



- **Global vs Indian Perspective:** Despite India and China being the most populous countries, research on bullying is limited. Prof. Norman stressed that socio-economic factors, peer perceptions, and cultural norms like the caste system play significant roles in bullying in India since the population is not homogeneous. Additionally, sexism remains a pervasive issue not only in India but globally, including in countries like Ireland, where subtle forms of discrimination continue to exist.
- **Cyberbullying vs Bullying:** Prof. Norman advocated for the term “bullying online and offline” to capture the interconnectedness of modern-day harassment better. About ten years ago, online bullying was viewed as separate from traditional bullying, but recent research shows that nearly 97-99% of those bullied experience both online and offline harassment simultaneously. This shift highlights the need for a holistic approach to bullying, recognizing it as an integrated experience in modern life. Online bullying adds a constant element, as it continues even when victims are away from the physical bullying environment, resulting in ongoing adverse effects.
- **Impact of Bullying:** Bullying leads to severe mental health challenges such as low self-esteem, depression, and long-term social difficulties. Prof. James emphasized that bullying could lead to lower self-esteem, mental health issues, and feelings of isolation for the victim, which may have long-lasting effects on adulthood. Data from India shows that bullied children are 2 to 2.5 times more likely to experience depressive symptoms and 2.7 times more likely to consider suicide compared to those who are not bullied. The societal impact of bullying is also significant. Victims may lose trust in others and struggle with relationships later in life. Furthermore, research shows that bystanders who witness bullying can also suffer from adverse long-term effects, including less successful relationships and symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Support during and after bullying is crucial to mitigate these effects and address the needs of everyone affected.
- **Role of Education Leaders:** Reflecting on his childhood experiences with bullying, Prof. Norman recognized the importance of a robust support system in overcoming such challenges. Education leaders, such as school principals and government officials, can play a significant role in acknowledging and tackling bullying as a serious issue. To effectively combat bullying, he advocated for UNESCO's "whole education approach," which includes nine core components like solid leadership, policy development, and safe environments. Implementing all components simultaneously is crucial for success. Traditional whole-school approaches often fail because they place too much responsibility on individual schools, ignoring the broader educational and societal context. He referenced Ireland's action plan on bullying, which includes 61 actions, and the "Fuse" program aimed at enhancing self-efficacy among students, staff, and parents. The program encourages recognition, response, and reporting of bullying. Adults need to understand their role in addressing bullying, as children often hesitate to report incidents due to fear of disbelief or the possibility of worsening the situation. Building trust with children is essential, and adults should respond decisively to bullying by acknowledging it, believing the child, and collaborating with them.

TMF and DCU unveiled the document "*Tackling Bullying Together: Examine. Educate. Empower;*" which was developed by the two organizations. The guide is designed to serve as a practical guide for educators, parents, and communities, providing them with the necessary knowledge and strategies to address and prevent bullying effectively. The comprehensive content is organized into clearly defined sections, each focusing on a critical aspect of bullying. The primary goal of this document is to offer a thorough understanding of bullying, covering its various forms—such as physical, verbal, and cyberbullying—and the factors contributing to these behaviors. Focusing on global and Indian perspectives, this guide aims to empower readers to identify, prevent, and intervene in bullying situations.



Panel Discussions

The panel discussion provided diverse perspectives on anti-bullying efforts, focusing on education and technology.

Moderator: Poorna Saini – Faculty (Mental Health), Shikshaantar, Tech Mahindra Foundation

Panelists:

- Darran Heaney: Director of Engagement, DCU Anti-Bullying Centre
- Paramjit Kaur Narang: Founding Member of Vasant Valley School in Delhi and Pathways School Baliawas
- Dr. Rita Sharma: Educator & Administrator
- Ajay Govind: Actor-Director; Founder-Words Rhythms Images

Key Takeaways from the Panel Discussion



Mr. Darran Heaney

Director of Engagement, DCU Anti-Bullying Centre

“
The Fuse program aimed to build students' self-efficacy by helping them recognize, respond to, and report offline and online bullying, resulting in a significant increase in their confidence and ability to address these issues.
”



Key Highlights:

An Anti-Bullying Program:

- The Fuse Program, an anti-bullying and online safety program developed by the DCU Anti-Bullying Center in 2019, is based on 25 years of research and is free to schools in Ireland. It aims to help schools build capacity to address bullying and promote online safety. Recognizing that young people often navigate both offline and online spaces without clear boundaries, the program responds to the reality that approximately 78% of 9–to 17-year-olds own smartphones. While many report positive online experiences, risks such as cyberbullying remain a significant challenge.
- The Fuse program focuses on enhancing students' self-efficacy in recognizing, responding to, and reporting bullying, extending this focus to school staff and parents. Research indicated that after completing the program, students became 81% more confident in identifying bullying behaviors and 83% more knowledgeable about whom to approach for help. Additionally, 79% of students felt more confident discussing bullying, promoting a school-wide dialogue on the issue. Teachers also reported increased confidence in recognizing bullying, both online and offline.
- While technology can exacerbate bullying, it also offers potential solutions. Educating young people on safe technology use and promoting good digital citizenship is essential. The center has also developed an app to support young people's online well-being, highlighting the importance of partnerships with technology, research, and government entities in addressing online challenges effectively.

Challenges in Implementing the Program:

- Initially, schools in Ireland were reluctant to join the anti-bullying program due to fears it might expose bullying issues and affect their reputation. To address this, efforts were made to encourage schools to engage with the program and confront bullying openly. A significant advancement involved revising Ireland's anti-bullying policy to ensure it was relevant and aligned with national standards. The program emphasized student involvement, encouraging students to develop strategies for tackling bullying rather than relying solely on teachers. Recognizing the diverse needs and resources of schools, the program offered a flexible framework adaptable to each school's context. It was integrated into Ireland's Social Personal Health Education curriculum, facilitating more straightforward incorporation into teachers' schedules. Building momentum took five years, focusing on supporting teachers, students, and parents while promoting open discussions about bullying. The overarching goal was to create a safer and more supportive environment for students, highlighting the importance of feeling secure, valued, and connected. Partnerships with industry, government, social media platforms, and tech companies were emphasized as crucial for enhancing the program's impact.



Dr. Rita Sharma

*Deputy Director of Education, Department of Education (DoE)
Director, State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT)*

Celebrating a range of student accomplishments, from academics to extracurricular successes, can help reduce bullying by addressing displaced anger and fostering a more positive school environment.

Key Highlights:

- Displaced anger stemming from challenging home environments can sometimes manifest as bullying among students in schools. Positive reinforcement for achievements, not limited to academics but including extracurricular successes such as sports or event organization, has been found to mitigate such displaced anger. Celebrating a range of student accomplishments can help reduce instances of bullying. Additionally, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence is crucial. Enabling students to understand and empathize with the needs of their peers can help in building healthier relationships.
- Implementation of a "*happiness curriculum*" in Delhi government schools has been effective. The curriculum mandates daily dedicated time for practicing mindfulness and stress management, where teachers and students share positive stories and engage in activities that promote student bonding.
- Mentorship programs, such as buddy systems where students pair with other peers, maybe another valuable way to address bullying. Such programs provide students with a safe space to discuss problems with someone who is not an authority figure, allowing both the bullied and the bullies to benefit from peer support.
- Creating safe spaces where students can express themselves and seek help. Both victims and perpetrators of bullying may need such spaces to address their issues and lighten their burdens.
- A data-driven approach is also valuable. Schools can identify patterns and root causes by analyzing data on bullying incidents, enabling targeted interventions. Engaging parents in these efforts further enhances the effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies.
- Overall, a collaborative effort involving students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders can significantly improve the school environment and reduce bullying.



Ms. Paramjit Kaur Narang

Founding Member of founding Vasant Valley School in Delhi and Pathways School Baliawas

“ Schools must have a well-defined bullying policy that goes beyond written documents; it should be a central part of the student orientation, clearly communicated and prominently displayed throughout the school. ”

Key Highlights:

- Addressing bullying in schools involves a multifaceted approach. Students come from diverse backgrounds, so schools must clearly communicate their anti-bullying stance upon students' entry. Schools must have a well-defined bullying policy beyond written documents; it should be a central part of the student orientation. This policy needs to be thoroughly explained, emphasizing the school's zero-tolerance stance and outlining the consequences of bullying. Moreover, the policy should be prominently displayed throughout the school on posters, bulletin boards, and other visual media. Regular reminders for both students and parents about the anti-bullying policy are also essential.
- Beyond the role of parents and teachers, all adults on campus must be trained to recognize signs of bullying. Since bullying often occurs without authority, all staff members must be educated on identifying and addressing it. They should also be aware of the procedures for reporting and handling bullying, ensuring that students feel safe when reporting incidents.
- Students must be confident in identifying and reporting bullying without fear of retaliation. Training should empower them to take a stand safely. Additionally, educating parents, students, and teachers about bullying involves more than understanding its consequences; it requires integrating anti-bullying practices into daily school activities and fostering a supportive environment for everyone involved.



Mr. Ajay Govind

Award-Winning Writer-Director, Founder of Words Rhythms Images and Social Educator

“Effective anti-ragging efforts require more than just workshops and posters; they involve comprehensive behavioral changes, reflecting the importance of behavior both inside and outside the classroom.”

Key Highlights:

Intersections of Education & Media:

- A multifaceted approach, including storytelling and sensitization workshops, can help to challenge and change the outdated practice of ragging. Effective anti-ragging efforts require more than just workshops and posters; they involve comprehensive behavioral changes. This approach parallels the filmmaking principle that storytelling starts before the camera is turned on, reflecting the importance of behavior inside and outside the classroom.
- Educational institutions, teachers, and parents bear significant responsibility for addressing and preventing bullying. Students who engage in bullying often do so because of influences from various sources, including media and home environments. In the Asian context, especially, there is a need to shift the perception of authority figures from intimidating to approachable and supportive.
- The Society Against Violence in Education (which Mr. Govind represented at the conference) propagates and stands for the belief that education should be free from all forms of violence—physical, verbal, psychological, and financial. Students are encouraged to consider the implications of perpetuating bullying and to envision a world where they would rather not encounter such behavior.
- Children can resolve their conflicts without adult intervention when left to their own devices. This observation suggests that problems often arise from adult actions rather than from children themselves. Therefore, it is crucial for educators, administrators, and other adults to address their roles in perpetuating issues and to support children in creating safer, more empathetic environments.



Voice of the Youth



Ms. Anoushka Jolly

Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar Awardee

Founder of Kavach App & Student Advocate for Child Welfare and Mental Health

“If technology is used correctly, it can be a powerful catalyst for change.”

Experience-sharing by the Special Guest Anoushka Jolly

Ms. Anoushka Jolly shared her experience as a victim of bullying at an early age, which affected her confidence and perception of friendship. Initially, she did not understand that such treatment was harmful and confused it with normal behavior among friends. The bullying, which lasted for a year and included relentless criticism about her appearance, significantly impacted her self-esteem. Eventually, she mustered the courage to confide in her parents, who encouraged her to stand up for herself. She responded to bullying with maturity and assertiveness.

Motivated by her experience, Anoushka created an Anti-Bullying Squad blog to support other students facing similar issues. She, along with other like-minded students, conducted anti-bullying sessions in schools, and when the pandemic forced a shift online, they expanded their reach and collaborated with NGOs. Recognizing that bullying often goes unreported, she developed an app called 'Kavach' for reporting incidents. However, it must be noted that bullying is part of a more significant systemic problem related to mental health and that adolescents lack adequate resources and guidance. This led to the creation of "Kavach-version 2," which provides content created by adolescents, including videos, stories, and articles on mental health issues. The goal is to empower young people with the knowledge and tools to address their problems independently. In recognition of their efforts, the speaker received the Prime Minister's Award in 2023.

She mentioned that it is essential to focus on the systemic aspects of bullying, including policy reform and improving school resources for handling bullying and adolescent mental health issues. A streamlined evaluation process for schools can be a pathway to better addressing these challenges and making impactful changes. The speaker's journey highlights the potential of technology as a powerful tool for positive change when used appropriately.



Conclusion:

Understanding Bullying: Prof. James defines bullying as aggressive or harmful acts performed by individuals who perceive themselves as more powerful than their targets, leading to a power imbalance. It is recognized as a social process influenced by societal norms rather than just individual behavior.

Causes in Schools: Bullying often arises from social status disparities and physical appearance differences. Research shows that children from less wealthy families or those who differ in ethnicity, gender, or appearance are more likely to be targeted. Societal norms and the residual effects of systems like the caste system in India also contribute to bullying.

Bullying vs. Cyberbullying: Modern understanding reveals that bullying is an integrated experience that occurs both online and offline rather than as separate issues. Nearly all individuals who experience bullying face it in both realms, underscoring the need for a holistic approach to addressing it.

Impact of Bullying: The effects of bullying include lower self-esteem, mental health issues, and feelings of isolation that can persist into adulthood. Victims are at a higher risk of depression and suicide, while bystanders can also suffer long-term adverse effects. Support and intervention are crucial for mitigating these impacts.

Effective Strategies and Leadership: Education leaders and educators must acknowledge and address bullying seriously. Implementing a comprehensive approach like UNESCO's "whole education approach," which includes strong leadership, policy development, and student involvement, is essential for effective intervention and prevention. Programs like "Fuse" and initiatives such as Ireland's anti-bullying action plan highlight the importance of building self-efficacy and fostering open dialogue about bullying.

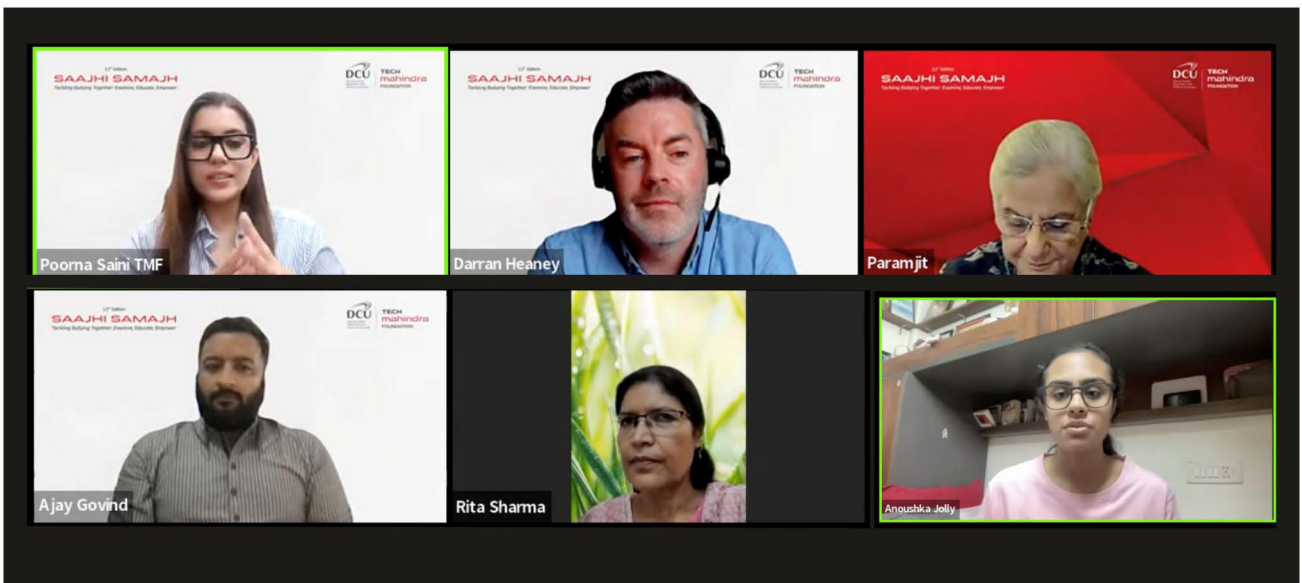
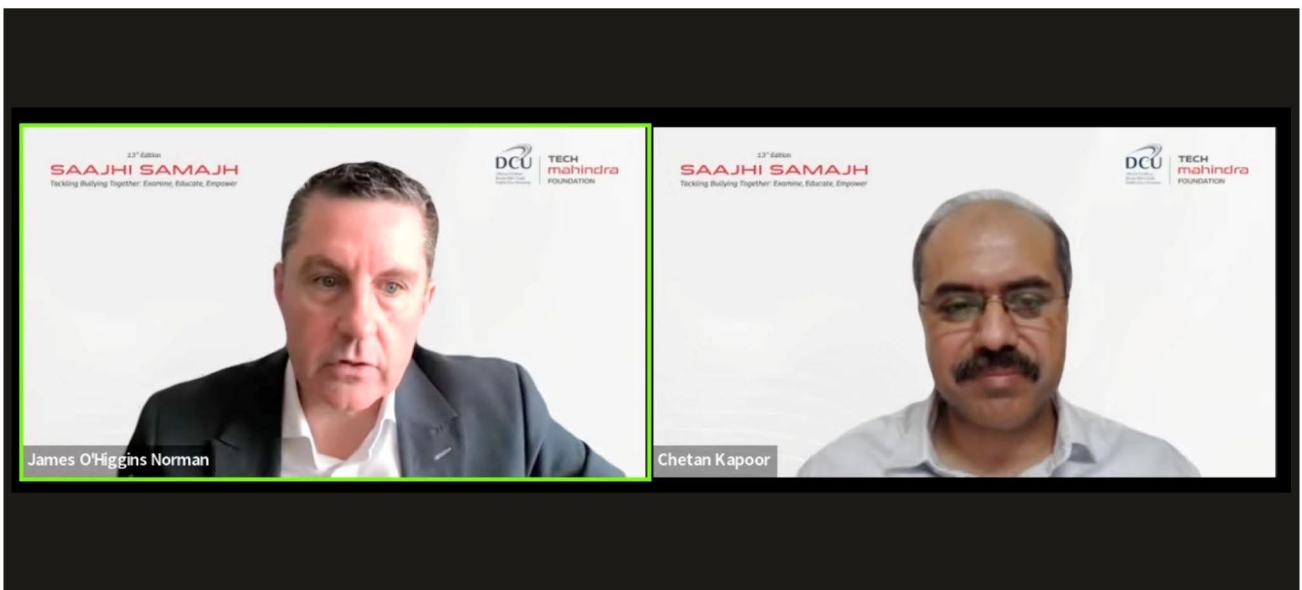
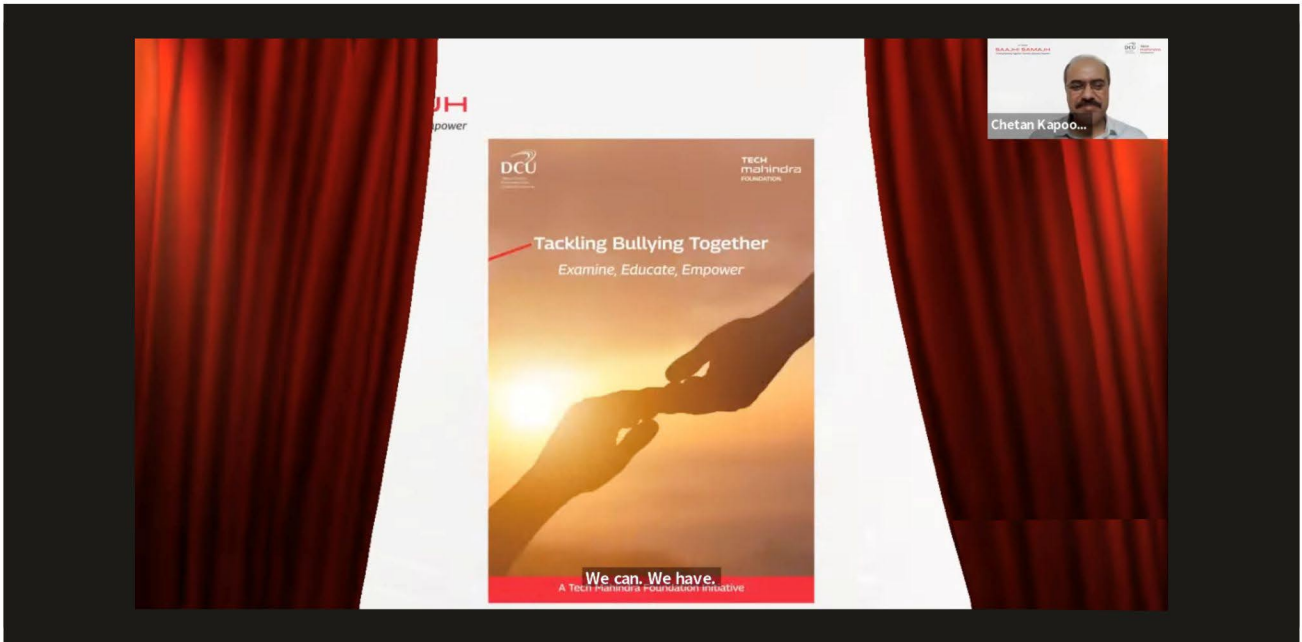
Addressing Displaced Anger: In diverse schools, displaced anger from challenging home environments can lead to bullying. Positive reinforcement for various achievements—academic, extracurricular, and sports—helps mitigate this anger and reduce bullying incidents.

Fostering Empathy and Emotional Intelligence: Teaching students to understand and empathize with their peers' needs is crucial for building healthier relationships and managing pressures. Encouraging emotional intelligence can significantly reduce bullying behavior.

Mentorship and Safe Spaces: Like buddy systems, mentorship programs provide students with a safe space to discuss problems with peers rather than authority figures. Creating safe spaces for all students, including both victims and perpetrators of bullying, is essential for addressing and resolving issues.

Data-Driven Interventions: Analyzing data on bullying incidents helps schools identify patterns and root causes, allowing for targeted interventions. Engaging parents and utilizing a collaborative approach involving students, teachers, and other stakeholders enhances the effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies.

Glimpses of the Event



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