

## Abstract Title:-

### Mental Health Disorders and Interventions in Homeless Shelters: A Cross-Cultural Perspective from the United States and India

**Keynote Speaker – Dr. Rupa Kalahasthi – Assistant Professor of Psychology | Licensed & Board-Certified Clinical Psychologist**



#### Abstract:

Homelessness and mental health share a complex, cyclical relationship that varies significantly across cultural and socio-economic contexts. This presentation examines an innovative mental health intervention program developed by Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), implemented within homeless shelters in Rochester, New York (USA) and Mumbai (India), with the aim of delivering accessible, evidence-based psychological support to underserved populations.

The program integrated mental health services directly into shelter environments, allowing individuals experiencing homelessness to receive timely psychological support. Across both sites, participants demonstrated a reduction in self-reported psychological distress following engagement in mental health sessions. Cross-cultural findings revealed distinct patterns: homelessness in the United States was more transient and closely associated with substance use disorders, whereas homelessness in India was more chronic and linked to higher prevalence of psychological disorders.

A mixed-effects statistical model applied to the Indian shelter data demonstrated a significant reduction in distress levels regardless of the number of sessions attended, highlighting the effectiveness of even brief mental health interventions. The findings underscore the value of integrated, low-barrier mental health services in addressing psychological distress among homeless populations.

This presentation emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive, scalable mental health models that can be adapted across global contexts to improve access, affordability, and quality of care for marginalized communities.

#### Keywords

Homelessness, Mental Health Interventions, Psychological Disorders, Cross-Cultural Psychology, Underserved Populations

## **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the relationship between homelessness and mental health across different cultural contexts.
- Identify key differences in mental health presentations among homeless populations in the United States and India.
- Understand the impact of integrated mental health services within shelter-based settings.
- Recognize the value of accessible, evidence-based interventions for underserved populations.

### **Short Professional Biography:**

Dr. Rupa Kalahasthi is a NY state licensed and American Board Certified Clinical Psychologist, currently working as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Rochester Institute of Technology in Dubai. Her research and clinical interests are in translational research and creating accessible mental health services for underserved populations as well as integrating digital therapeutic solutions to bridge the mental health treatment gap. After spending half a decade in the Rochester campus of RIT, she has recently moved to the UAE to expand her horizons in cross-cultural psychology research and practice.