The White Lines Collective inquires about how conversation about mental health (MH) in higher educational institutions in India can be provoked through design and creative practices. Executed in the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad (NID-A), the Collective’s aim was to create ways for student communities to interact through various media to form emotionally and mentally ‘safe spaces’. The designer functions as the ‘facilitator’ of conversation through the creation of spatial interventions that enabled education and awareness about student MH.

To understand the project parameters, several research exercises were conducted; a series of student interviews, a co-creation workshop for participants to contribute to solution-building, and the White Lines Journal, a prompted sketchbook to gauge the feasibility of arts-based interventions and aid in creative exploration. It was imperative to remain empathetic and non-judgmental towards data, and involve many students in the solution-building process. It was important to design specifically for the presented context and avoid generalizations in the project outcomes.

Research inferred that there was a need for avenues for students to express themselves in spaces designed for sensitive conversation. Arts and conversation-based experiences allow freedom of expression, and provide space for interpretation, communication, and awareness.

The Collective engaged the NID-A community in various participatory ways; marking World Mental Health Day with green awareness ribbons, ‘Operio’ – blindfolded conversation experience between two strangers, and ‘Silent No More’ – visual arts exhibition. Participation occurred at many levels; students as contributory artists; as visitors; as passive participants in smaller-scale interventions. These helped forge a sense of togetherness, highlighting the need for such interventions in strengthening student communities.

The Collective continues its work by involving more educational institutions and engaging a larger group of diverse students. It focuses on MH narratives through digital participatory and collaborative engagement.

Website - https://whitelinescollective.wixsite.com/home