



## A Systematic Review Of Child Mental Health Knowledge And Practices In India

### KEYWORDS

Child mental health, mental health problems of children, mental health promotion

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### ABSTRACT

*Child Mental health is an essential priority as well as central for the healthy future development of societies.*

*Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities. Child mental health is seen as comprising of sense of identity and self-worth, sound family and peer relationships, an ability to be productive and to learn, and a capacity to use developmental challenges and cultural resources to maximize development (Das et al, 2012). The multidisciplinary care of children start from home. More than the service providers such as psychiatric social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health service providers, parents need to be more helpful to the children. For this parents must be aware of the problems of children and better ways to deal with them. Mental health problem creates tensions and problems in families and society and reduces the capacity of a nation to be safe and productive. The question is what are the required environments for creating a new world of mental health for children? This paper will review the present scenario of child mental health in India, addressing mental health problems among children and discussing about the strategies for promotion of child mental health.*

### INTRODUCTION

Health is a broader concept which includes physical and psychological wellbeing of an individual. It will be comparatively easier to define the physical wellbeing of an individual than his psychological wellbeing. Physical wellbeing can be measured through not only the absence of diseases but also the well-functioning of the body. But how can we measure the psychological wellbeing of an individual? Or what makes us to say we are mentally healthy?

According to World Health Organisation (WHO), mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." (WHO, 2011).

Children are the critical asset of a nation. Early years are the foundation for the growth and development in children. Improved health of children contributes to better academic outcomes, improved performance in co-curricular activities and all together contributes to better and bright future. For healthy development of a nation, promotion of child mental health is a necessary priority. Mental health in childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones, and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems.

### Psychological and emotional well-being of children

Children's psychological well-being is most likely developed in interaction with their parents. Good mental health allows children and young people to develop the resilience to cope with whatever life throws at them and grow into well-rounded, healthy adults. Being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise having time and the freedom to play, indoors and outdoors being part of a family that gets along well most of the time going to a school that looks after the well-being of all its pupils taking part in local activities helps children to be in a state of good mental health.

### Factors influencing mental health of children at middle age

When it comes to 'vulnerable' ages for children, we tend to think of infancy or adolescence. There is, however, another period in children's lives which brings significant challenges: 'middle childhood'. The recurring theme children face at this age is change. Yet the changes affecting middle childhood centre less on 'growth' and more on children's developing social and emotional worlds. The first big change is that children in middle childhood spend around half as much time with their

parents as they do in early childhood, while the time they spend with other children and alone increases significantly. However, this shifting dynamic of children's interactions coincides with a number of other developments.

Middle childhood is also a period when children are particularly likely to experience parental separation or upheavals in their family life. Although this upheaval can produce better long-term outcomes for children, the short-term impact, as well as the possible negative prelude to separation, can be very difficult. At the same time, supporting children's needs in middle childhood can become increasingly difficult, particularly for parents with their own problems. Poverty can affect children's quality of life at school, by limiting their chances to participate, while parental support (for example helping with homework, reading together and instilling motivation through expectations) is a very significant contributor to children's academic success (Keller et al, 2005). Children whose parents are less able to provide this support may find themselves at a disadvantage. As children increasingly judge themselves against their peers, any sources of difference are worrying. As a result, any marker of 'difference' can have an amplified impact on their lives. Being disabled, or having a 'different' family structure, such as being adopted or fostered, can become a worry for children at this age, by making them feel abnormal at a time when notions of normality have taken on a new importance. The development of a child's self-esteem during this period also affects their resilience.

All children in middle childhood face quietly dramatic transformations which can be distressing, and it is impossible to protect them from every difficult experience. But for vulnerable children, access to responsive adults who are aware of how children are coping in their daily lives is a prerequisite for good outcomes. Paying plenty of attention to children's needs in middle childhood is hugely important. (Anastasia de Waal, [civitas.org.uk](http://civitas.org.uk)). Along with this other factors are also important, including: feeling loved, trusted, understood, valued and safe being interested in life and having opportunities to enjoy themselves being hopeful and optimistic being able to learn and having opportunities to succeed accepting who they are and recognising what they are good at having a sense of belonging in their family, school and community feeling they have some control over their own life having the strength to cope when something is wrong (resilience) and the ability to solve problems.

### International scenario

It is predicted that burden of disorders is likely to increase by 15 percent by 2020 and prevalence of mental disorders as per World Health Report (2005) is around 10 percent. At the international level, mental health is receiving increasing importance. In 2008, the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) was launched which aims at scaling up services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders for countries especially with low and middle income. Taken together, mental, neurological and substance use disorders accounting for 13 percent of the total global burden of disease in the year 2004. The gap between the need for treatment and its provision is large all over the world. World Health Organization's Mental Health Atlas 2011 provides data that demonstrate the scarcity of resources within countries to meet mental health needs.

The action plan launched by the Director General, World Health Organization (the Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020) on 7 October 2013 recognizes the essential role of mental health in achieving health for all people. It aims to achieve equity through universal health coverage and stresses the importance of prevention. It stresses on the objectives such as, Strengthen effective leadership and governance for mental health, Provide comprehensive, integrated and responsive mental health and social care services in community-based settings, Implement strategies for promotion and prevention in mental health, Strengthen information systems, evidence and research for mental health.

### Indian scenario

Nineteen percent of world's children live in India. India is home to more than one billion people, of which 42 percent are children, defined as persons under 18 years of age. India has low levels of achievement on accepted national goals for survival, development and protection of its children. Mental health problems in children can have prolonged effects which can hamper their future, cause high costs to the health care system and are associated with distinct disadvantages for those who are stricken. This fact has not received adequate attention in India so far, so that the measurement of mental health and its treatment in childhood in representative epidemiological studies and surveys as an aspect of public health has until now been unjustifiably neglected. A mental health policy should aim to encourage the healthy mental development of children, particularly of those at increased risk – through suitable measures and to identify and treat mental health problems at an early stage.

National policy for children, 1974 provides the conceptual basis for an integrated approach to address the whole child and commits the state to provide adequate services to children, both before and after birth and through the period of growth, to ensure their full physical, mental and social development. National health policy, 2002 aimed at preventive and first line curative care at primary health level, and emphasis conver-

gence, and strategies to change care behaviours in families and communities. The National plan of action for children, 2005 says to recognise the diverse stages and settings of childhood, and address the needs of each, providing all children the entitlements that fulfil their rights and meet their needs in each situation. One of the important initiatives taken for the welfare of the children was the establishment of child line service, which is a 24-hour toll free telephone service (1098) that can be accessed by children in distress or by adults can seek immediate help. (Report from Ministry of Women and Child Development, 11th five year plan (2007-2012)).

In India the Government has been implementing several programmes to improve the mental health of people. Recognition of the need for improving mental health of people made the government to implement programmes and policies on mental health. Among them National mental health programme (NMHP) has prominent role.

The mental health services available for children within the community are the following. Informal community care which includes family as the basement, schools, children's homes and Non-governmental organisations. Focus of these services is to promote mental health and primary prevention of mental health disorders. Then comes the primary health care which include, clinics, district hospitals, maternity services and family services. This aims at parental and youth education about general and mental health issues, identification and providing initial treatment for mental health problems. The community mental health care, General or paediatric hospitals, long stay facilities and specialist services are the higher levels of health care available. This aims at investigation and treatment of severe problems, rehabilitation, providing mental health training programmes etc.

### Conclusion

Social work intervention should consider all effective options for mental health disease prevention, mental health promotion, treatment and rehabilitation. The areas for action are collaboration of service providers such as family, schools, NGO's and the health sector in which intervention on mental health promotion can be done. The preventive and promotive attempt in mental health among children can have far reaching implications. The burden of the disease can be reduced by early recognition and prompt prevention. Interventions focussed on early recognition and prevention of mental health problems will be very effective if it is done through the primary level of care such as through families and schools. Attempts should be made to offer interventions in settings frequented by children including homes, schools, neighbourhood groups, workplaces, youth agencies and health services. For children parents are the best source of help. Hence the interventions focused on parents improving their understanding of mental health problems of children and how to support those children can be very effective in preventing mental health problems among children as well as promoting good mental health of children.

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