



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Psychology

INDIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHOOL-BASED FAMILY COUNSELING

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of schools is not merely to impart education, but also to foster the holistic development of children. Despite this, many students face challenges that often go unnoticed. This article highlights the major difficulties faced by school-aged children in India, such as academic pressure, parental expectations, abuse, corporal punishment, domestic violence, social discrimination, anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies. Research indicates that a strong family environment and positive parent-child relationships mitigate these risks. Given the lack of mental health services in most Indian schools, school-based family Counseling (SBFC) is suggested as a crucial intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health among school-aged children in India is an emerging public health issue that now needs to be understood within a broader social, familial, and educational framework. Childhood and adolescence are critical stages during which children are highly vulnerable mentally and emotionally. Mental health challenges arising during this period, just like physical health problems, have a profound impact on children's learning, behaviour, and long-term development.

Although both parents and teachers play a crucial role in children's mental health, children's problems often go unnoticed due to a lack of awareness, insensitivity, poor communication, or existing tensions within the family itself. This directly affects children's academic performance, further exacerbating the problem.

Available research indicates that mental health problems negatively impact children's future, social adjustment, and career progression. Despite significant changes in India's social and educational structure, the psychological support available to school children remains limited and unorganized. This paper highlights the major challenges faced by school children in India, such as academic stress, parental pressure, abuse, corporal punishment, domestic violence, discrimination, and emotional insecurity.

In these circumstances, School-Based Family Counselling (SBFC) is considered a crucial and practical intervention that strengthens coordinated collaboration among children, families, and schools. This paper aims to review the school mental health landscape in India and underscore the need for solution-oriented models like SBFC.

India's Demographics

India is now the world's most populous country, with a population estimated at approximately 1.45 billion in 2024. The country exhibits immense diversity in terms of states, languages, cultures, and social beliefs. A large proportion of the population is between 15 and 64 years old, while approximately 30% are children under 14 years of age.

The Landscape Of Schools In India

According to 2020-21 data, India has over 1.5 million schools, the majority of which are at the primary level. Schools primarily fall into four categories: government, government-aided, private, and others. Most schools are government-run. The student-teacher ratio also varies depending on the level of education.

Mental Health Status Of School Students In India

The medium of instruction in Indian schools is often the local language. When children transition to higher education, where English is mandatory, they face language-based difficulties. This can lead to anxiety, low self-confidence, poor

academic performance, and sometimes even dropping out of school.

Academic Stress

Academic stress has become a major mental health issue in India. The burden of expectations on children, the competitive environment, and the societal perception that "success = good grades" contribute to anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts.

Several studies have found that stress levels are higher in private schools compared to government schools. The Class 10 and 12 board examinations are considered life-changing events, further increasing the pressure.

Many students have multiple private tutors, which increases both the workload and mental pressure.

Child Abuse And Neglect

Cases of mental, physical, and sexual abuse of children are quite high in India. In many cases, the school environment is also not safe. Studies from Kolkata, Kerala, and several other states indicate that a significant number of children experience some form of abuse. Abuse has a direct impact on children's social adjustment and mental health. Corporal Punishment In India, corporal punishment is considered common in both homes and schools.

Research shows that children who experience this are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, and internalizing problems. Despite the existence of laws against it, proper implementation is lacking.

Domestic Violence And Social Discrimination

Many children grow up witnessing conflict and violence at home, which negatively impacts their mental health. Evidence of this problem exists in both rural and urban areas. Caste-based discrimination also affects children's education and self-esteem in many places.

Anxiety, Depression, And Suicide

Student suicide has become a serious crisis in India. In 2021, more than 13,000 students committed suicide, which is approximately 36 per day. Major causes include academic failure, social pressure, and lack of emotional support.

Awareness of Children's Rights

Many parents and teachers are not fully aware of children's rights and the laws related to them.

Studies indicate that a large number of people are unaware of documents like the UNCRC.

Impact Of Social Networking Sites

Many teenagers have become excessively dependent on

social media. A study in West Bengal found that over 70 percent of children are addicted to social networking sites. This impacts mental health, attention span, and sleep.

The Role OfThe Family

A safe and emotionally stable family is the most crucial factor for a child's mental health.

If there is instability, economic stress, violence, or lack of communication within the family, children tend to exhibit more anxiety, aggression, and lower self-confidence.

Lack Of Mental Health Services In Schools

Most schools in India lack professional counsellors and mental health programs. The Manodarpan initiative was launched during COVID-19, but its coverage is limited. Services are even scarcer in rural areas.

School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC)

SBFC is a collaborative model where schools, families, and the community work together to address students' problems.

This includes:

Stress management sessions

Group counseling

Parent training

Teacher-counselor collaboration

This model is resource-efficient and this is considered practical in the Indian context.

Recommendations:

Teachers should be trained to listen to and support children's voices.

The stigma associated with mental health should be reduced. Counselors should be appointed in schools.

Partnerships with NGOs, CSR initiatives, and government schemes should be strengthened.

A national-level campaign on child rights should be launched.

CONCLUSION

Indian school students face a variety of pressures and risks. To address these challenges, it is essential that professional mental health services are available in schools and that families are sensitized to these issues. School-based family counseling can prove to be an effective way to strengthen children's mental well-being.

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