



Mental Health Challenges in Schools: The Extent and Consequences of Anxiety, Depression, and Stress in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The current generation of adolescents is the largest in the history. The global population of roughly 2 billion adolescents constitutes around 24% of the world's population. Studies reveal that by 2030 at least half of the world's adolescents will live in multi burden society facing complex mental health issues in the form of mental disorders or suicide. This challenge has not been taken as the area of greatest need with any counsellors at the schools as well as work places, girls in particular. Proper laws and policies needs to be implemented for this digital generation as more than 95% of adolescents in the present society are connected digitally. It calls for enabling global suggestion and changes for sustained improvements in adolescents' health and well being. These environments should protect adolescents' health and rights. This study aims to explore the prevalence and impact of anxiety, depression, and stress among school students, focusing on their academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life. The uncontrolled use of online spaces and social media today are also playing a pivotal role for deteriorating mental health of adolescents. By identifying the key contributing factors and their implications, the study will offer actionable recommendations for creating effective support systems for individual as well as society.

KEY WORDS

Adolescent, Stress, Mental Health, Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a cornerstone of overall well-being, especially during adolescence, a critical stage of growth and development. School students, who

are navigating the complexities of academic, social, and personal pressures, are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and stress. These issues not only hinder their immediate well-being but also have long-term implications for their academic success, social integration, and personal development.

Anxiety among students often manifests as excessive worry, fear, or restlessness, impeding their ability to concentrate and participate effectively in school activities. Studies indicate that approximately 10–20% of adolescents globally suffer from anxiety disorders, with a significant proportion remaining undiagnosed. Depression, characterized by persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, and disinterest in daily activities, affects about 15% of school students in India, according to a survey conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS). These challenges are compounded by stress, which stems from tight schedules, high parental expectations, examination pressures, and competition. Stress affects nearly 25% of Indian school students, contributing to burnout and diminished overall performance.

The situation is further exacerbated by the advent of social media, which has amplified peer comparison, cyberbullying, and self-esteem issues among adolescents. A report by UNICEF in 2021 revealed that 42% of teenagers feel that social media exacerbates their anxiety and stress levels. Such platforms often create an environment of constant comparison and unrealistic standards, aggravating mental health conditions.

The impact of these challenges extends beyond individual students, influencing their families, peers, and educational environments. Academically, students struggling with mental health issues often exhibit a decline in grades, reduced participation in class, and a lack of motivation to achieve their goals. Socially, they may experience isolation, strained relationships, and difficulty forming meaningful connections. Untreated mental health conditions during adolescence can lead to severe long-term consequences, including chronic illnesses, substance abuse, and even suicidal tendencies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15–19-year-olds globally, highlighting the urgent need for intervention.

Despite the growing prevalence of these issues, mental health in schools remains under-addressed due to societal stigma, lack of awareness, and inadequate resources. Only 29% of Indian schools have access to professional counsellors or mental health services, leaving a significant gap in the support available to students.

This study aims to explore the prevalence and impact of anxiety, depression, and stress among school students, focusing on their academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life. By identifying the key contributing factors and their implications, the research will offer actionable recommendations for creating effective support systems.

The findings underscore the importance of incorporating mental health programs into school curricula. Initiatives such as counseling services, mindfulness workshops, and peer-support programs can help address these challenges effectively. Promoting a culture of mental health awareness will not only enhance students' well-being but also pave the way for their holistic development and success in life.

Review of Literature

Mental health among school students has become a critical area of concern in recent years, as anxiety, depression, and stress increasingly affect their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. The growing prevalence of these issues has prompted a surge in research exploring their causes, manifestations, and potential solutions. This section provides a detailed analysis of existing literature to understand the current state of knowledge on this subject and identify areas requiring further exploration.

Studies indicate that mental health disorders among adolescents are a global phenomenon, affecting both developed and developing countries. Kessler et al. (2005) reported that approximately 20% of adolescents worldwide experience some form of mental health issue, with anxiety and depression being the most commonly diagnosed conditions. In India, data from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences

(NIMHANS) highlights that 15% of school students show symptoms of depression, while stress impacts nearly 25% of students. These findings emphasize the universality of the problem while also drawing attention to its severity in specific contexts.

The factors contributing to anxiety, depression, and stress in students are multifaceted. Academic pressure is a primary contributor, particularly in countries like India, where a competitive education system places immense demands on young learners. Research by Deb et al. (2015) found that more than 60% of students identify academic workload and examination stress as their main sources of anxiety. This pressure is often exacerbated by high parental expectations and a lack of work-life balance, leaving students with little time for leisure or personal interests.

Family dynamics also play a significant role in shaping students' mental health. McLeod et al. (2007) highlighted that students from unstable family environments, marked by conflicts, divorce, or financial difficulties, are more likely to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression. The absence of emotional support within the family can further intensify these issues, making it harder for students to cope with external pressures.

Social dynamics, including peer relationships, bullying, and social exclusion, are additional contributors to poor mental health among students. Wolke et al. (2013) reported that victims of bullying are twice as likely to develop depressive symptoms compared to their non-bullied peers. The rise of social media has also added a new dimension to these challenges, as students face increased exposure to cyberbullying and unhealthy comparisons with peers. A meta-analysis by Keles et al. (2020) found that excessive social media use significantly correlates with higher levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents.

The impact of mental health disorders on students' lives is profound and multifaceted. Academically, students struggling with anxiety, depression, or stress often experience a decline in performance, reduced motivation, and increased absenteeism. Bowers et al. (2013) found that students with untreated mental health conditions are more likely to drop out of school, further limiting their future prospects. Socially, these students may face isolation, low self-esteem, and difficulties forming meaningful relationships, which can compound their mental health challenges and create a vicious cycle.

In response to the growing recognition of these issues, various interventions have been proposed and implemented in school settings. One promising approach is mindfulness-based interventions, which focus on enhancing students' emotional regulation and resilience. Zenner et al. (2014) demonstrated that mindfulness programs significantly reduce stress and improve overall well-being among school students. Similarly, peer support groups have emerged as an effective strategy, creating safe spaces for students to share their experiences and seek guidance. Bond et al. (2007) found that peer-led initiatives foster a sense of community and belonging, which are critical for mental health.

The availability of professional counselling services in schools is another crucial intervention. Research by Hattie et al. (1997) revealed that schools with trained counselors report better student outcomes in terms of both academic performance and mental health. However, in many parts of the world, including India, the lack of access to such resources remains a significant barrier. Only 29% of Indian schools have access to professional mental health support, highlighting the need for policy reforms to address this gap.

Despite these advances, there are notable gaps in the literature that require attention. For instance, the intersectionality of socio-economic, cultural, and gender factors in influencing mental health among students is not adequately explored. Additionally, while digital mental health tools, such as mobile apps and online counselling platforms, are gaining traction, their effectiveness for school students in resource-limited settings remains under-researched. These gaps highlight the need for further studies to develop comprehensive and inclusive solutions.

The existing body of literature underscores the critical need to prioritize mental health in schools. By understanding the prevalence, causes, and impacts of anxiety, depression, and stress among students, educators, parents, and policymakers can work collaboratively to create supportive environments. Such efforts should include integrating mental health programs into school curricula, providing access to professional counselling, and fostering a culture of openness and awareness.

Statement of the Problem

Mental Health Challenges in Schools: “The Extent and Consequences of Anxiety, Depression, and Stress in Adolescents”.

Significance of the Study

- This study contributes to a deeper understanding of anxiety, depression, and stress among school students, focusing on their prevalence and impact during a crucial developmental phase. Addressing these mental health challenges can prevent long-term adverse effects on their emotional and psychological well-being.
- The research highlights how mental health issues affect students' learning outcomes, motivation, and academic achievements. It underscores the need for schools to implement strategies that support students in managing stress and improving their academic engagement.
- By identifying family-related causes of mental health challenges, the study informs parents and caregivers about their role in fostering a supportive home environment. This includes reducing pressures, encouraging open communication, and recognizing signs of distress early.
- The study explores the role of social media in shaping students' mental health, including its links to cyberbullying and self-esteem issues. It offers insights into how these influences can be managed to create healthier digital environments for adolescents.
- Findings from this study can inform educational policymakers to prioritize mental health programs within schools. This includes integrating mental health education, providing access to counsellors, and establishing frameworks to reduce stigma around seeking help.
- The study emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts among educators, families, and healthcare professionals. These partnerships are essential for creating comprehensive and effective support systems tailored to students' needs.
- This research addresses gaps in existing literature by examining the socio-cultural and technological dimensions of mental health challenges. It also provides actionable recommendations, making it a valuable resource for further studies and practical applications in education and mental health domains.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To describe the socio-demographic characteristics of higher secondary school students.
- To study the home environment of higher secondary school students.
- To analyse the school environment of higher secondary school students.
- To assess the self-esteem among higher secondary school students.
- To study the depression, anxiety, and stress among higher secondary school students.
- To study the relationship between key variables such as home environment, school environment, self-esteem on depression, anxiety, and stress as experienced by the higher secondary school students.
- To use qualitative research techniques such as focus-group discussions and case studies.

Methodology of the Study

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding the extent and consequences of anxiety, depression, and stress among school students. The quantitative component uses standardized tools, while the qualitative aspect explores students' lived experiences.

Research Design

A mixed-methods design was chosen to capture both numerical data and in-depth insights. The study aims to measure the prevalence of mental health challenges among students and understand their causes and impacts.

CONCLUSION

The stresses are mostly due to reduction in physical and mental space mostly due to family displacement and socio cultural environment. The stress generating from these environments add to anxiety and depression among adolescents. The study relies on self-reported data through surveys and interviews, which may lead to biases such as social desirability or inaccurate recall of experiences, potentially affecting the validity of the findings. The sample may still not represent all students in terms of socio-economic status, region, or school type. This could limit the generalizability of the results. The parental reluctance to disclose mental health issues or parental consent, leading to lower response rates and excluding some perspectives leads to anxiety and depression. School going students must be made aware of health impact of stress on them. As a result, it cannot establish causal relationships between mental health issues and contributing factors like academic pressure or family dynamics. In this study, we can conclude that it is futile to prescribe a particular strategy for relieving the adolescents from stress. The teacher in the school is the role model for the students. The teacher has to demonstrate how to face the situations that may lead to anxiety and depression and how to adjust with the environment. Thus, a component of practical counselling center should be an essential requirement for every school. Adolescents must be engaged in skill development and should be taught the life lessons of failure acceptance.

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