



Mental health and well-being in school and higher education in India

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Abstract

Mental health and well-being have emerged as critical concerns in the Indian education system, particularly within school and higher education contexts. Academic pressure, competitive environments, socio-economic disparities, digital exposure, and post-pandemic challenges have significantly affected the psychological health of students. This paper aims to examine the status, challenges, and institutional responses related to mental health and well-being among students in India. Using a descriptive and analytical research approach, the study synthesizes findings from existing literature, policy documents, and national reports to understand mental health trends in educational institutions. The study highlights that anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion are increasingly prevalent among students, often going unnoticed due to stigma and lack of professional support. The results indicate insufficient counseling infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and limited awareness programs as major gaps in the current system. The discussion emphasizes the role of schools and universities as key spaces for mental health promotion through inclusive curricula, counseling services, peer support systems, and teacher sensitization. National initiatives such as the National Education Policy (2020), Mental Healthcare Act (2017), and school wellness programs are examined for their potential impact. The paper concludes that mental well-being must be integrated as a core component of educational planning and pedagogy. Strengthening institutional mechanisms, promoting mental health literacy, and fostering a supportive academic environment are essential for ensuring holistic student development and sustainable educational outcomes in India.

Keywords: Mental Health, Student Well-Being, School Education, Higher Education, Stress, India

Introduction

Mental health is an integral component of overall well-being and significantly influences students' academic performance, behavior, and social development. In India, increasing academic competition, examination stress, parental expectations, and socio-economic challenges have intensified mental health concerns among students. Schools and higher education institutions often prioritize cognitive achievement while neglecting emotional and psychological needs. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders. The stigma surrounding mental illness further discourages students from seeking help. Recent policy discussions have emphasized the importance of holistic education, recognizing mental well-being as essential for lifelong learning. Understanding mental health within educational settings is therefore crucial. This study focuses on examining mental health challenges and well-being practices in Indian school and higher education systems.

Materials and Methods

The study adopts a descriptive and qualitative research design based on secondary data sources. Relevant literature was collected from academic journals, government reports, policy documents, and institutional studies related to mental health and education in India. Content analysis was used to identify recurring themes such as stress factors, institutional support, and policy interventions. National frameworks like the National Education Policy (2020) and Mental Healthcare Act (2017) were reviewed to understand systemic responses. Comparative analysis was applied between school and higher education contexts. The method enables a comprehensive understanding of existing conditions without direct field investigation. This approach is suitable for

policy-oriented and conceptual research. The collected data were systematically organized and interpreted to derive meaningful insights.

Results

The findings reveal a high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress among school and college students in India. Academic pressure, examination fear, career uncertainty, and social isolation emerged as major contributing factors. School students experience stress due to rigid curricula and performance-based evaluation systems. Higher education students face additional challenges such as employability concerns, financial pressure, and competitive environments. The results show limited availability of trained counselors and mental health professionals in educational institutions. Awareness programs are sporadic and often ineffective. Gender and socio-economic disparities also influence mental well-being. Overall, institutional preparedness to address mental health remains inadequate.

Discussion

The results indicate a clear gap between mental health needs and available support systems in Indian education. Despite policy recognition, implementation at the institutional level remains weak. Teachers are rarely trained to identify early signs of mental distress. Counseling services, where available, are underutilized due to stigma and lack of trust. Integrating social-emotional learning into curricula can enhance resilience and coping skills. Universities must adopt student-centric support mechanisms such as peer mentoring and wellness centers. Collaboration between education and health sectors is essential. Mental well-being should be viewed not as an individual issue but as an

institutional responsibility. A supportive academic culture can significantly improve student outcomes.

Conclusion

Mental health and well-being are foundational to effective learning and personal development in school and higher education. The study highlights growing mental health challenges among Indian students and systemic shortcomings in addressing them. Educational institutions must move beyond academic achievement and adopt a holistic approach to student development. Strengthening counseling infrastructure, training educators, and promoting mental health awareness are urgent needs. Policy initiatives must be effectively implemented at the grassroots level. Creating safe, inclusive, and empathetic learning environments can foster psychological well-being. Addressing mental health proactively will contribute to improved academic success and social harmony. Sustainable educational reform in India must prioritize mental well-being as a core objective.

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