MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

We hear from teacher about mental health problems among children and youth have become a major issue facing in schools – attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities, stress, anxiety disorders, bullying, angry management, irritation and depression are the most pressing concerns identified by them. As educators we need to understand the role of mental health plays in the school context- because it is so central to our students' social, emotional and academic success. Children come to school each day with more than their lunch and backpacks. The bring life factors that shape their learning and development. The daily action of effective teacher and their positive relationship with their students actively promote the mental health of students.

In this paper the researcher has made an attempt how schools can implement mental health promotion strategies, mental health literacy through curriculum development and application, which may enhance knowledge about mental health, change attitudes in both students and teachers, and decrease the stigma associated with mental disorders.

Teachers make a difference in the lives of students and that all students can learn in their classroom and sky is the limit for them. Teachers should help the students to overcome academic stress through proper relaxation activities and they must posses' patience, empathy, awareness, knowledge innovation to handle various mental disabilities in their classroom. The role of health education in the promotion of mental health among students can be overemphasized. In this regard promotion of mental health literacy among school children and the role of various agencies are discussed in detail.

Key words: *School, Teachers, Well-bein*

It is imperative that nations and non-governmental organizations begin to address the issues of children's mental health. Mental health problems cause significant distress to child, family, and community. Mental health problems in children often lead to lifelong

impairment, which has tremendous negative social and economic consequences. These issues make the development and implementation of child mental health initiatives imperative. A successful initiative should include the elements of awareness promotion, intervention methods, and preventive measures. The logical starting point is to begin with awareness promotion, through a Child Mental Health Awareness Campaign, given the fundamental assumption that increased awareness of mental health issues will also work to increase awareness of the need for better prevention and intervention mechanisms.

Diagnosing children's mental health problems is very complex, and must take into account symptoms, observations of the child's behavior, and awareness of the child's developmental level. Making an accurate diagnosis is often difficult for many reasons, including the fact that young children may not be able to discuss their emotional problems with an adult. Adults often need to depend on observations alone.

Symptoms of many mental health problems in children may be similar, and include: irritability, reckless behavior, frequent outbursts, social withdrawal, and frequent physical complaints.

Positive mental health approaches in education and health share common principles or values related to fostering the psychological well-being of children and youth. These include the assumptions that:

• Children and youth have inner strengths and gifts that support their capacity to initiate, direct and sustain positive life directions

• Child and youth engagement and empowerment are critical considerations for facilitating positive development or change

• Children's and youths' social contexts and networks provide important resources and influences that have the capacity to contribute to and enhance their psychological well-being and

• Children's and youths' relationships with adults and peers that contribute to psychological well-being are characterized by interactions that convey genuineness, empathy, unconditional caring and affirmation

Schools as a Critical Setting for Positive Mental Health

The role of the school has been regarded, both nationally and internationally, as an important environment for promoting the psychological wellness and resilience of children and youth. Schools provide a critical context for shaping children's self-esteem, self-efficacy and sense of control over their lives. Given that children and youth spend more than six hours

daily and over 180 days a year in school, the educational context provides key opportunities for delivering activities and comprehensive initiatives related to positive mental health. As children move into their early and later teen years, schools may play an even greater role than the home context in influencing youth, given the powerful influence that teacher support and peer networks have within the educational settings (Stewart, 2008; Stewart et al, 2004).

The promotion of mental health for all students involves responding effectively to learning challenges and needs, as well as promoting the well-being of every student. In order to accomplish these goals, educational and health professionals, in collaboration with community stakeholders, must:

• combine efforts and resources to create continuums of school and community-based care and support that foster the positive development of children and youth, and that prevent the development of mental health-related concerns;

• organize evidence-informed early intervention services and supports that are easily accessed in a timely fashion; and

• provide continuity of assistance for those with chronic conditions who require more intensive supports.

Four pillars of school health.

1. Social and physical environment

2 Teaching and learning

3 Healthy school policies

4 Partnerships and services

Pillar I: Social and Physical Environment

According to the Joint Consortium for School Health (2009), the *social environment* is defined as the quality of the relationships among staff and students in the school, and the emotional well-being of students, as well as the attachments that students have with their families and members of the wider community. *Physical environments* include the buildings, grounds; play spaces and equipment within and surrounding the school. This pillar of comprehensive school health challenges educators and administrators to attend to all aspects of the learning environment in order to meet the emotional, physical and academic needs of a diverse population of children and youth. The key perspectives and practices outlined for this pillar are organized according to three specific theme categories: physical and emotional safety, school and classroom climate, use of physical spaces

Pillar II: Teaching and Learning

This pillar includes learning activities and curriculum approaches through which children and youth acquire developmentally appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills that contribute to their social and emotional growth and overall psychological well-being. Each of the approaches outlined underscores the importance of the existence of positive working relationships among students, teachers, educational support staff and school administration. The key perspectives and practices outlined for this pillar include: differences and diversity in the classroom; culturally relevant practices; cooperative methods; autonomy-supportive practices; strength-focused applications; and social skill development.

Pillar III: Partnerships and Services

This pillar underscores the importance of building strong relationships between the school, students' families and members of the wider community. In addition, this foundation component also includes the formation of partnerships among district and school educational authorities, departmental services, non-government agencies and other community stakeholders. The approaches outlined in this pillar emphasize the importance of implementing collaborative and integrative efforts for positive mental health promotion. The key perspectives and practices outlined in this area include: sustained family contact and communication; adult-student mentorship programs; partnerships with family and youth-serving agencies; and school and community-wide mobilization activities

Pillar IV: Healthy School Policies

Healthy school policies include leadership practices and decision-making processes, as well as guidelines, rules and procedures that affect how programs, services and relationships are negotiated in school and community settings. Effective leadership and enabling policies are critical for supporting the application of positive mental health practices at all system levels. The key perspectives and practices outlined in this area include: effective leadership; policies that promote safe and caring environments; policies for inclusion; discipline policies that restore and reconnect;   policies for professional development and training; student services policies that provide timely support; and shared policies that ensure system collaboration.

Expanding Awareness of Mental Health in Childhood and Adolescence

Because of the difficulty of diagnosis, and the lack of trained individuals for identifying specific disorders, it is important to look for functional impairment in identifying children who may have a mental health problem. Impairment can be defined as difficulty

functioning in daily activities, such as relationships, school, play, or work. Culturally sensitive measures of impairment should take into account disturbances in a child's functioning, and can help to identify children who may need further diagnosis or treatment.

Depression

Depression in children and adolescents is a serious disorder and is on the rise. It is estimated that 2.5% of children and 8.3% of adolescents may be depressed at any time, and up to 7% of these adolescents may commit suicide. Common symptoms of depression in children and adolescents include: Frequent, persistent sadness or crying , Decreased interest in enjoyable activities, Social isolation or poor communication, Spending an unusual amount of time alone, Increased irritability, anger, or hostility , Frequent physical complaints ,Self-destructive behavior or talk of suicide, Low self-esteem and guilt

Bipolar Disorder (Manic-Depression)

An increasingly larger number of adolescents are being diagnosed as bipolar. A person who is bipolar has alternating periods of mania and periods of depression. Symptoms of the manic phase include: Inflated self-esteem, Decreased need for sleep, Recklessness, or high-risk behavior, Rapid speech or racing thoughts

It is important to diagnose bipolar disorder in youths, as they are at significantly higher risk for suicide. Also, if bipolar patients are misdiagnosed as having just a depressive disorder, they may be given medication that worsens rather than helps control their symptoms.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are also highly prevalent in childhood. While some anxiety is usual, anxiety that interferes with normal behavior and functioning at school or work may be a sign of a more serious problem. Approximately 13% of children and adolescents may suffer from an anxiety disorder during any 6 month period. Common symptoms of anxiety disorders include: Many worries about things before they happen, Constant worries or concern about school performance, friends, or sports, Repetitive thoughts or actions, Extreme fears of embarrassment about making mistakes, Low self-esteem

There are also several specific types of anxiety disorders that should be noted, as they have distinct symptoms and may require different treatments:

Phobias: unrealistic and excessive fears about a certain situation or object

Social Anxiety Disorder: overwhelming anxiety and excessive self-consciousness around others

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: extreme, unrealistic worry about general life activities

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): repetitive, intrusive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors that interfere with functioning or cause distress

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Extremely disruptive events — such as violence, war, natural disasters, or abuse — can cause psychological trauma in children. A reaction to trauma is not uncommon, including extreme anxiety, nightmares, crying, irritability, social withdrawal, guilt, or other symptoms that may last for some time. When these symptoms (reactions) do not subside, however, some children will develop PTSD, which involves prolonged and chronic problems after a traumatic event. These problems can include:

➢ Re-experiencing the traumatic event through play or in trauma-specific nightmares or flashbacks, or distress over events that resemble or symbolize the trauma

➢ Routine avoidance of reminders of the event or a general lack of responsiveness (e.g., diminished interests or a sense of having a shortened future)

➢ Increased sleep disturbances, irritability, poor concentration, startle reaction and regressive behavior

Conduct Disorders

While all children will sometimes display oppositional behaviors, children suffering from conduct disorders have more serious problems in social and family functioning. For example, it is estimated that 5.5% of children have an aggressive behavioral problem. This disorder also puts a child at a higher risk for suicidal behavior. Some symptoms of a conduct disorder include: Aggression to people or animals, Destruction of property, Lying or stealing, serious violation of rules

It is especially important to note, however, that children displaying these symptoms may be suffering from other mental health problems, and require further diagnosis and treatment.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

While all children are disruptive or hyperactive at times, children with ADHD have more severe behavioral problems that may interfere with school, work, or family functioning. ADHD is found in 3-5% of children,[3] and can be indicated by: Distractibility and trouble paying attention, Talking too much and difficulty playing quietly, Trouble following multiple directions, Trouble sitting still

Best Practices for Creating Safe and Successful Schools

School safety and positive school climate are not achieved by singular actions like purchasing a designated program or piece of equipment but rather by effective comprehensive and collaborative efforts requiring the dedication and commitment of all school staff and relevant community members. Schools require consistent and effective approaches to prevent violence and promote learning, sufficient time to implement these approaches, and ongoing evaluation.

Safe and successful learning environments are fostered through collaboration among school staff and community-based service providers while also integrating existing initiatives in the school. Effective schools and learning environments provide equivalent resources to support instructional components, organizational/management components, and learning supports. Rather than viewing school safety as a targeted outcome for a single, stand-alone program or plan developed by the school building principal alone, this model seeks to integrate all services for students and families by framing the necessary behavioral, mental health, and social services within the context of school culture and learning.

The most effective way to implement integrated services that support school safety and student learning is through a school-wide multi-tiered system of supports. MTSS encompasses (a) prevention and wellness promotion; (b) universal screening for academic, behavioral, and emotional barriers to learning; (c) implementation of evidence-based interventions that increase in intensity as needed; (d) monitoring of ongoing student progress in response to implemented interventions; and (e) engagement in systematic data-based decision making about services needed for students based on specific outcomes.

Awareness to mental health and well being

An awareness campaign must contain several components in order to reach the stated goals. It must first supply correct clinical information to the audience. First, it explains what constitutes healthy child development, offering basic information on how to distinguish between normal development and possible problems. Second, it describes some common mental health problems in children, listing basic symptoms that are indicative of each disorder. Special emphasis is given to understanding impairment related to child mental disorders, which may vary in different cultures. Third, it offers very basic information about treatment, describing what information should be included in an awareness campaign in order to further its goals.

Because it is impossible to reduce the fear surrounding mental health problems if people have no idea of where to turn to receive help, this chapter also addresses practical problems related to child mental health. It includes information about possible resources available to individuals with problems and those who want to help. Many people, for example, parents and teachers, can help in resolving children's problems even in settings where few services exist.

Strategies to improve the mental health & well being in schools

Identification of common problems and impairment

Schools see the child in a different environment than the family, and so may see problems that are not expressed to the family, or may assist children lacking family support. Schools can facilitate communication between, the child, the child's family and the teacher to help identify problems and direct the child to appropriate help or treatment.

Confronting stigma

As educators, schools can teach children to have empathy and understanding about mental health problems. Schools can give reassurance to both children and families who are dealing with mental health problems.

Encouraging programs for mental health promotion

Educational programs that teach children to understand and express their feelings, understand the consequences of their behavior, and use problem solving skills are proven to be effective in reducing some common mental health problems.

Teaching Teachers to deal with problems

A teachers' curriculum should be developed to bring teachers up to date on accepted methods for responding to children's mental health needs.

Conclusion

Modern-day schools are highly complex and unique organizations that operate with an urgent imperative: Educate and prepare all children and youth to achieve their highest potential and contribute to society, no matter their socioeconomic background or geographic location. Creating safe, orderly, warm, and inviting school environments is critical to ensuring that all of our schools meet this goal. In order to create this type of environment, schools must work towards integrating services (academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and mental health) through collaboration using a multi-tiered system of support. Schools should strive to increase access to mental health services, increase the number of school employed mental health staff, and ensure that measures to improve school safety balance physical safety

with psychological safety. To further support student safety, schools must develop effective emergency preparedness and crisis prevention, intervention, and response plans that are coordinated with local first responders. We look forward to working with the Administration, state and local policy makers to help ensure that all schools are safe, supportive, and conducive to learning.

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