



Mental illness among school children: Causative factors, consequences and remedies

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Abstract

In the era of science and technology, as the ease of living and importance of luxury life style is increasing swiftly, the psychological soundness and physical wellbeing of the people is suffering to the greater extent. Most of the people irrespective of their ages, region, religion and nations are victims of mental illness. The circumstances become more painful when we look upon the children and adolescents with poor mental health because it can have tremendous negative effect on their present and future life. There can be many internal and external factors that are responsible for poor psychological wellbeing and can affect the personal, academic and social development of the victim students. These factors can negatively influence the life of the related persons. Therefore, mental health of the children is far more important than that of the physical health because, psychological soundness makes children more useful person for the society and he can make his contribution effectively towards the progress of the nation as a whole. Mental illness is curable and despite of this fact, lack of sanity among school students is increasing day by day, because there is lacuna of awareness among the parents, teachers and in the societies also about the symptoms, causes, diagnostic criteria and treatment of mental illness. Therefore for emphasizing the importance of such sensitive issue this paper seeks to highlight the present status of mental health of school students, different risk factors, consequences of mental illness and its remedies for the betterment of the children suffering from poor mental health.

Keywords: mental illness, mental health, school children and remedies

Introduction

Mental health or psychological soundness is very much essential for human being for leading a satisfactory life. But nowadays, everyone wants to meet the standards and expectations of the demanding and challenging world of work for embracing luxurious and comfortable life without bothering its harmful effect on their mental health, because of all these circumstances, student's life is becoming more complex, stressful, unsatisfactory and vulnerable to mental illness in these days. Mental health is well recognized for the healthy emotional, social, physical, cognitive and educational development of children and adolescents. Mental health is an individual's condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being. It can be characterized as a state, in which every human being realizes his/her own capabilities; can combat with the problems of daily life and able to make a contribution to her or his community (WHO, 2014) [39]. In contrast to this, mental illness refers to a broad range of mental conditions or disorders that manifests impairment in the normal psychological functioning and cause marked distress or disability that are typically associated with a disruption in normal thinking, feeling, mood, behavior, interpersonal interactions, or daily functioning. Anxiety, depression, stress, behavioural and emotional disorders (Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Attention

Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Tic Disorders, Eating Disorders etc.) are the major disorders that come under mental illness.

Prevalence of mental illness among children and adolescents

From the last few decades, the level of mental illness among children and adolescents is increasing constantly and becomes a worrisome issue at global level. The prevalence of mental illness among children and adolescents has been estimated 10-20% worldwide (Boyer, Henry, & *et al.*, 2013; Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015; WHO, 2017) [4, 40, 20]. Beside this, world Health Organization (2001) predicted that the mental health problems can increase up to 50% by the year 2020. Adolescents are more vulnerable to mental illness in contrast to children (Olsson, Druss, & *et al.*, 2015) [26]. The manifestation of mental health problems in the age less than 14 years is 3.8%, between the ages of 14 to 16 is 48% and above 16 years is 78% (Boyer, Henry, & *et al.*, 2013) [4]. The most frequent disorders among children and adolescents are stress, anxiety disorders, depressive disorder, disruptive behavioural disorders, substance use disorder and eating disorders (Boyer, Henry, & *et al.*, 2013; Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015; Bronsard, Alessandrini, & *et al.*, 2016) [5, 4, 20]. Percentage of these disorders is as follow:

Table 1

S. No.	Name of Disorder	Percentage
1	Disruptive Behavioural Disorder i.e.	27%
	a. Conduct Disorder	20%;
	b. Oppositional Defiant Disorder	12%;
	c. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	8- 11%
2	Stress-related Disorders	25.4%
3	Anxiety Disorders	18%
4	Depressive Disorders	11%
5	Substance Use Disorder	10.6%
6	Eating Disorders	2.7%

Beside this, the probability of mental illness enhances up to 30-50% among children and adolescents with learning disabilities (Smiley, 2005) ^[32]. The vulnerability of mental illness among children and adolescents with learning disabilities is four times more as compared to their non-disabled peers. (Wilson, 2004) ^[37].

Co-morbidity of mental health disorders

Co-morbidity or occurrence of one or more disorders with one primary or specific disorder is frequent in mental illness. Up to 40% children and adolescents with mental health problems are prone to have more than one disorder (Costello, Mustillo, *et al.*, 2003) ^[6]. It is revealed that up to half of the children and adolescents with major depressive disorder are also suffering from anxiety disorder. Likewise, two thirds of the children and adolescents who have conduct disorder also shows the symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). Beside these, one third of the children and adolescents with either anxiety disorders or major depressive disorder are also have the symptoms of conduct disorder or ADHD (Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) ^[20]. Children with mental illness are also vulnerable to other chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and epilepsy as compared to children without mental illness (Shomaker, Kraff, & *et al.*, 2011; Perou, Bitsko, & *et al.*, 2013) ^[31, 27].

Risk factors of mental illness among children and adolescents

Mental health of every person may influenced by different hereditary, personal or environmental factors and domination of these factors vary from individual to individual. Likewise, there are lots of personal and environmental factors that can cause mental illness among children and adolescents. Due to these risk factors many children are suffering with mental illness and many more are at risk of developing a disorder that will harm their sanity (APA, 2017) ^[2]. The risk factors can be divided into individual, family, school and social factors. Individual or personal factors includes, low self-esteem and self-efficacy, depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation or suicide attempt, (Nguyen, Dunne, & *et al.*, 2010; Souza, Silva, & *et al.*, 2010) ^[25, 33]; high levels of anger or self-aggression, interpersonal problems (Undheim, & Sund, 2010) ^[35]; sadness or loneliness feelings, Insomnia, fatigue, forgetfulness, irritability, difficulty in concentrating and feelings of worthlessness, obesity or negative self-image (Pinto, Luna, & *et al.*, 2014) ^[29]. In addition to this, poor physical health (APA, 2017) ^[2]; substance abuse (The National Household Survey on

Drug Abuse, 2002) ^[34] and Games or internet addiction (Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) ^[20] are also have high negative effect on mental health of children.

There are many other risk factors associated with family and parents that harm the mental illness of children and adolescents such as divorce or separation of parents, step mother or father, single parent or career, difficulties with family relationships (parents and siblings) (Wille, Bettge, & *et al.*, 2008; Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) ^[20]; physically punished or abused by parents or other family members, having parents and friends with substance use disorder (APA, 2017) ^[2]; low economic status or financial problems, Parents with mental illness, Illiterate or semi-literate parents and Poor level of family functioning (Wille, Bettge, & *et al.*, 2008; Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) ^[20]. Beside these, children living in greater capital cities have more prone to mental illness (Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) ^[20].

In addition to this, some of school experiences or activities are also lead students towards mental illness. Low performance, poor academic achievement, school drop-out (Garcia, & Lindgren, 2009) ^[9]; Bullying (Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) ^[20]; Discrimination and racism experience (APA, 2007) ^[2] and Learning disabilities (Smiley, 2005; Wilson, 2004) ^[32, 37] are some major risk factors of mental illness at school. Beside these, the experiences in society such as being a victim of hostility and physical ferocity, sexual abuse by the known and unknown persons of society (Navarro, & Cohen, 2012) living in a shelter and urban poverty (Pinto, Luna, & *et al.*, 2014) ^[29] are also leaned such children and adolescents towards mental illness. These risk factors have equal impact on both male and female children and adolescents.

Consequences of poor mental health among children and adolescents

Lack of psychological soundness can lead the children and adolescents towards labyrinthine circumstances throughout their life. It can cause fear of social stigma among the family members and among the victim also (Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015; WHO, 2017) ^[20, 40]. Likewise isolation; relationship problems with family members, teachers and peers; substance abuse; criminal behavior and other risk-taking behaviors are the most prominent results of mental health problems (Perou, Bitsko, & *et al.*, 2013; WHO, 2017) ^[27, 40]. Usually, these children face discrimination in school and society and also have lacuna of admittance to health care and education facilities. Beside these, their fundamental human rights are also violated easily by the society (WHO, 2017) ^[40]. Due to all these poor mental health conditions and their consequences,

the children and adolescents are more vulnerable to suicide ideations, suicide attempts and suicide (Perou, Bitsko, & *et al.*, 2013; Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015; WHO, 2017) [27, 20, 40].

Remedial measures for the children and adolescents with mental illness

The present status of children and adolescents with poor mental soundness reflects very painful sight of our society. Nowadays, poor mental health has become burning issue at global level and every country tries their best to get rid of it. It is estimated by APA (2017) [2] that up to 70% children and young people with mental health problems has no access to appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. In India, around 90% of children and adolescents with mental illness are not currently receiving any specialist service (Shastri, 2009). The main reasons behind this status in India are the limited child and adolescent mental health services and the lack of services in rural and remote areas (Anant Kumar, 2011). However, there is provision of various mental health programs, policies and acts developed by the Government but the problems associated with proper implications of such provisions are major one. There are some other barriers such as fear of social stigma among parents and victim, lack of awareness about the available services, lacuna of trust on the services, underestimation or unawareness about the harmful outcomes of the problems (Lawrence, Johnson, & *et al.*, 2015) [20]. To overcome such situations, there is great need to take some steps that can help in improving children's and adolescent's resilience ability, promotion of psychological soundness and treat mental health problems and disorders (APA, 2017) [2]. There are some ways that can assist such students and their parent for combating with and reducing mental illness.

Awareness campaigning about mental health

Mental illness among children and adolescents is increasing swiftly but the awareness about the identification, symptoms and treatment of different emotional and behavioural disorders among the parents and teachers is of very poor level (Shastri, 2009; Figueroa, 2013). Mental health can be improved and treated only when its different aspects will be known by all. Therefore, it is very essential that teachers' at all educational levels and parents should provide with information about the all aspects of mental health, because many children remain untreated due to lack of identification of mental illness (Huddart, 2006). It can be possible through organizing workshops, training programs, awareness lectures by counselors psychologists and doctors in the schools for both teachers and parents. There should be also focus on the awareness about creating healthy environment in school and home (Shastri, 2009). Parents should provide knowledge about the different parenting styles that promote mental health among their children because there is strong positive relationship between parenting styles and mental health of children (Jahan, & Suri, 2016).

Improvement and augmentation of mental health facilities

In India, the condition of mental health facilities is very disappointing. There is lack of counselors, psychologists,

psychiatrists, hospital with mental health services, and infrastructural facilities (Kumar, 2011). People in rural areas have the availability of just 0.2 psychiatrists, 0.05 psychiatric nurses and 0.03 psychologists per 100,000 population (Mental Health Atlas, 2005) and 2.15 inpatient beds per 100,000 people (Murthy, & Kumar, *et al.*, 2016). The government expenditure on mental health is another issue where it spends just 0.83% of its total health budget on mental health (WHO, 2001) [28]. For tackling with all these problems there is a need of improvement in working mental health centers along with augmentation in multi-disciplinary teams or child psychiatry outpatient service, that will provide particular service to children and adolescents with more severe, complex and persistent disorders. Child and adolescent's counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist and therapist along with social workers or volunteers should be a part of this team (Shastri, 2009). Beside these, the focus of mental health services should be on the five major sectors i.e. early years of children life, school years, community based activity, additional and support needs and children in need of special care (Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health, 2007).

Moreover, there should be shared responsibility of everyone towards the prevention and promotion of child mental health. There should be synergy between the village, block, district and state levels. Parents, teachers, elected representatives of urban and rural local bodies, counselors, aanganwadi workers, NGO's, police administration, social workers and the other responsible members of public should take joint efforts to help the students with poor sanity. (Shastri, 2009). Government should also take initiative to enhance mental health facilities and ensure easy access of every person to these facilities (Kumar, 2011).

Specific care for the children and adolescents with learning disabilities

As it is proved by many studies that children and adolescents with learning disabilities are four times more vulnerable to mental illness (Wilson, 2004; Smiley, 2005; Hajizadehanaria, Hajizadehanaria, & *et al.*, 2013) [32, 37] therefore, it is essential to provide some special teaching learning approaches, methods and facilities to them in the settings of inclusive education. Children with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia can be helped in their particular area of difficulty with the use of different assistive technologies (Kaur, & Padmanabhan, 2017); multisensory approach (Kamala, 2014); game or information and communication technology based learning (Madeira, Silva, & *et al.*, 2015) and social skill training. Along with this, their parents should also provide information about the different parenting approaches, coping skills, game and practical oriented learning strategies that can help these students at their home also (Shastri, 2009).

Provision of guidance and counseling services in educational institutes

Guidance and counselling services plays an important part in education. Although everyone is aware of the significance of guidance and counselling at the school level, however in India, no serious attempts have been taken by school education sector for the establishment of guidance and counseling services (Kodad, & Kazi, 2016; Kumar, 2016).

There are 1,000,000 plus government schools, 509 universities and 31,000 colleges in the country that require guidance and counseling services (Neelanjana, Summiya, & *et al.*, 2010). School counseling services are supportive for enhancing student's academic achievement, social skills and greater feelings of belonging and safety in their schools while reducing mental illness, violence, discipline problems, truancy and drop out (American Counselling Association, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to establish guidance and counseling services in every educational institute. Beside these, teacher-counsellor model advocated by NCERT is good initiative but teachers should provide training for this (Kumar, 2016).

Role of internet technologies and media

India is the second largest online market with over 460 million users. About 90 % of children and adolescents ages 5 to 17, use computers and about 59 % use Internet globally (DeBell, & Chapman, 2003). In one hand, usage of internet and social media is becoming a great source of mental illness due to its inappropriate use but on the other hand it can help in the promotion of mental health. It is revealed by many studies that, social media and internet usage help to build greater public understanding of the importance of psychological wellbeing and also assist in the reduction of social stigma (Barry, 2013). Moreover, it promotes the stress management techniques and coping strategies, positive thinking, problem solving, resilience, self-esteem, relaxation, social and emotional bond and life satisfaction among young people (Hagen, 2009; Barry, 2013). In addition to this, media should be productively used to enhance awareness and sensitivity on child mental health issues.

There are some other suggestions that can also assist the children and adolescents with mental illness. The persons who provide mental health services should follow the ethical issues while practicing, so that the confidentiality of the clients cannot be harmed. This can also help in reducing the problem of social stigma among parents and victims. Beside this, physical health and nutrition of child is very much important to consider. School should emphasize on the physical fitness of students and to ensure this, there should provision of different games, exercise and yoga. All the activities promote mental health to a greater extent (Hagen, & Nayar, 2014; Jones, 2017). Along with this, parent should provide a loving, caring, trusted, values oriented and safe environment at home, so that these children can cope up with their problems and can lead a psychologically sound and satisfactory life.

Conclusion

The condition of mental health among children and adolescents is very painful. But it can be improved to greater extent by paying attention to development and progress of mental health facilities. As it is rightly said that "Prevention is better than Cure". It is essential and possible to prevent the majority of behavior disorders at the school and family level. For this, the active role of Government is very much essential. There should be collaborative efforts of teachers, parents, counselors, community members, NGO's and social workers to assist the children and adolescents with poor mental health. In nutshell, the future of every nation depends upon on its young generation, therefore the healthy physical and mental

wellbeing becomes prerequisite for the development of the nation.

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