

Mental health in Indian Adolescents: A Review

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Abstract

This study investigates the mental health of teenagers, focusing on their willingness to discuss mental health issues. A survey was conducted involving 130 students, aiming to understand their attitudes and openness regarding mental health. The findings indicate that while students are generally open to talking about their problems, there is a notable hesitation when it comes to discussing mental health issues specifically. This reluctance suggests a lingering stigma and a need for improved support systems within schools. A review of existing literature corroborates the findings, highlighting similar patterns of hesitation among teens and emphasizing the importance of strong, trust-based relationships between students and school counselors. The reviewed papers suggest that effective communication and support from trusted adults are critical in encouraging teens to openly address their mental health concerns. This study underscores the necessity for proactive measures in schools to create a more supportive environment for students' mental well-being.

Introduction

Mental health refers to a state of mental well-being that allows individuals to handle life's stresses, recognize their abilities, learn effectively, work efficiently, and contribute to their community. It is a fundamental aspect of health and well-being, supporting our capacity to make decisions, form relationships, and shape our world. Mental health is a basic human right and is essential for personal, community, and socio-economic development.

Mental health is crucial in our daily life because it significantly impacts our overall well-being, affecting how we think, feel, and act. It influences our physical health, as poor mental health can lead to issues like heart disease and a weakened immune system. Good mental health enhances productivity by improving concentration, creativity, and energy levels, which are essential for effective work performance. It also plays a vital role in building and maintaining healthy relationships, helping us understand, empathize, and communicate with others. Ultimately, maintaining good mental health contributes to a higher quality of life, enabling us to enjoy meaningful activities and cope with daily stressors.

Literature Review

Laura M. Hart (2016). Many adolescents have limited knowledge about mental health, hold stigmatizing views toward individuals with mental illnesses, and lack the skills needed to provide effective Mental Health First Aid to their peers. Training can help improve these areas, enhancing social support and promoting appropriate help-seeking behaviors among adolescents experiencing emerging mental health issues. The teen Mental Health First Aid (teen MHFA) program, developed by Mental Health First Aid International, is a new initiative that offers a classroom-based training program consisting of three 75-minute sessions for students aged 15-18 years. An uncontrolled pilot study of the teen MHFA course was conducted to assess the feasibility of delivering the program in Australian secondary schools, evaluate

relevant measures of student knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, and gather initial evidence of the program's impact. In this study, 988 students from four schools participated in the teen MHFA program. Out of these, 520 students with an average age of 16 completed the baseline questionnaire, 345 completed the post-test, and 241 completed the three-month follow-up. The results showed statistically significant improvements in mental health literacy, confidence in providing Mental Health First Aid to peers, help-seeking intentions, and student mental health, while stigmatizing attitudes significantly decreased [1].

Sok Hui (2020). Adolescent mental illness often goes unnoticed. Youth and teen Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) are adapted versions of the adult MHFA program designed to help adults and adolescents identify signs of mental health issues and provide appropriate assistance. We conducted a systematic review to compile the existing evidence for youth and teen MHFA and to guide future training and research efforts. On September 12, 2020, we performed a comprehensive search on PubMed, Embase, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Cochrane using keywords related to teen or youth MHFA, adolescents, and mental health. A narrative synthesis followed this search. Out of 695 identified articles, 14 studies met the inclusion criteria. All the studies were from the U.S. and Australia. The studies consistently showed significant improvements in knowledge, recognition of mental health issues, reduction of stigmatizing attitudes, confidence, helping intentions, and helping behavior among both adult and youth participants. The most frequently reported improvements were in knowledge and confidence, while enhancements in helping behavior were the least reported. There is promising evidence of long-term benefits following the training [2].

Laura M. Hart (2018). Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) is a classroom-based training program designed for students aged 15-18 years to promote supportive behaviors towards peers, enhance mental health literacy, and reduce stigma. This research compared the effectiveness of tMHFA to a matched emergency Physical First Aid (PFA) training program through a cluster-randomized crossover trial. Four public schools were paired and each pair was randomized to first receive either tMHFA or PFA for all Year 10 students. The following year, the new Year 10 cohort received the opposite intervention, resulting in eight cohorts. Online surveys were conducted at baseline and one week post-training, assessing the quality of first aid intentions, mental health literacy, problem recognition, and stigmatizing beliefs towards fictional adolescents with depression and suicidality (John) and social anxiety (Jeanie).

A total of 1942 students were randomized (979 received tMHFA, 948 received PFA), with 1605 (84%) analyzed for the John vignette at baseline and 1116 (69% of baseline) providing post-training data. The primary outcomes, 'helpful first aid intentions' towards John/Jeanie, showed significant group-by-time interactions with medium effect sizes favoring tMHFA ($d_s=0.50-0.58$). Compared to PFA, tMHFA students also reported significantly greater improvements in confidence supporting a peer ($d_s=0.22-0.37$) and the number of adults rated as helpful ($d_s=0.45-0.46$), as well as greater reductions in stigmatizing beliefs ($d_s=0.12-0.40$) and 'harmful first aid intentions' towards John/Jeanie ($d_s=0.15-0.41$) [3].

Vicky Essler (2006). It is increasingly recognized that promoting mental health should address not only individual well-being but also the negative impact of stigmatizing attitudes. Enhancing self-esteem may reduce the inclination to discriminate against others, and educational interventions have been shown to foster positive attitudes toward individuals with mental health problems. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a school-based intervention, involving a professional theatre company, in increasing teenagers' knowledge about mental health issues and promoting positive attitudes toward people with mental health problems.

The study was a non-controlled intervention involving secondary school pupils. Their knowledge about and attitudes toward mental health problems were measured before and after the educational intervention

using the "Mindout for Mental Health" quiz. The median quiz scores of pupils increased following the intervention ($p = 0.015$). Post-intervention, there was a rise in the proportion of pupils who correctly answered questions about the incidence and symptoms of mental health problems, and to a lesser extent, the risk of violence from people with mental health problems. However, the proportion of students who correctly answered questions about the discrimination faced by those with mental health problems decreased between baseline and follow-up [4].

Chloe Berryman (2018). In recent years, many parents, advocates, and policymakers have raised concerns about the potential negative impact of social media use. Some studies have linked social media use to negative mental health outcomes, including suicidality, loneliness, and decreased empathy. However, other studies have found no evidence of harm or suggested that social media use might be beneficial for some individuals. This correlational study examined 467 young adults to assess their time spent on social media, the importance of social media in their lives, and their tendency to engage in vaguebooking (posting unclear but alarming-sounding posts to attract attention). The study considered outcomes such as general mental health symptoms, suicidal ideation, loneliness, social anxiety, and decreased empathy.

The results indicated that social media use was not predictive of impaired mental health functioning. However, vaguebooking was predictive of suicidal ideation, suggesting that this particular behavior could be a warning sign for serious issues. Overall, the findings suggest that, apart from vaguebooking, concerns about social media use may be misplaced [5].

Izabela Jurewics (2015). In an era of an ageing population, young adults on medical wards are quite rare, with only 12% reporting a long-term illness or disability. However, mental health issues remain prevalent among the younger population. A recent report highlighted mental health problems and obesity as the most common issues facing young adults. Teams specifically designed to address the needs of younger adults, such as early intervention in psychosis services, have been shown to be more effective and cost-efficient compared to traditional care.

On medical wards, younger patients often evoke strong emotions in staff, who may feel protective and deeply empathetic towards the young patients' suffering. To provide comprehensive care for young adults, general physicians need to recognize common mental illness presentations in this age group, including depression, deliberate self-harm, eating disorders, and substance misuse. In addition to treating illnesses, health promotion is particularly important for young adults [6].

Elizabeth Schilling (2007). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have consistently been linked to psychiatric issues in both children and adults. However, the long-term effects of ACEs on mental health during early adulthood have not been extensively studied. Additionally, many studies are limited by non-representative samples and a lack of investigation into gender and racial differences. The current study examines the self-reported lifetime exposure to a range of ACEs in a community sample of high school seniors and its relation to three mental health outcomes—depressive symptoms, drug abuse, and antisocial behavior—two years later during the transition to adulthood.

This study utilized a two-wave, prospective design with a systematic probability sample of high school seniors ($N = 1093$) from communities with diverse socioeconomic statuses. Participants were interviewed in person in 1998 and then over the telephone two years later. Gender and racial differences in ACE prevalence were analyzed using chi-square tests. Each mental health outcome was regressed on one ACE, controlling for gender, race/ethnicity, and SES, to obtain partially standardized regression coefficients.

Most ACEs were strongly associated with all three mental health outcomes. The cumulative effect of ACEs was significant and of similar magnitude for all three outcomes. Except for sexual abuse/assault, significant gender differences in the effects of individual ACEs on depression and drug use were not observed. However, boys who experienced ACEs were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior in early adulthood than girls with similar ACEs. Where racial/ethnic differences existed, the adverse mental health impact of ACEs on Whites was consistently greater than on Blacks and Hispanics [7].

Methodology

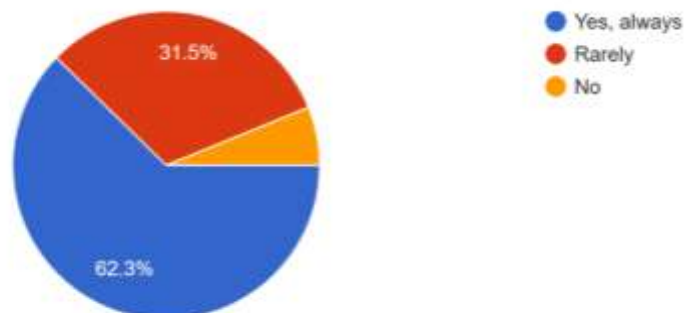
Teenage students of a private school were selected in this study. A questionnaire was formed to assess their mental health, around 130 students participated in this study.

Results

The survey on the mental health of teens reveals some significant insights. An overwhelming majority, 127 out of 130 respondents, believe that mental health is important, indicating strong awareness among teens. However, sleep patterns are concerning, with 77 respondents reporting only 4-6 hours of sleep on average during school days, which is below the recommended amount. Lastly, while a significant number of teens (81 respondents) always have someone to talk to about their problems or achievements, there are still 49 respondents who rarely or never have such support, highlighting a need for better support systems.

Figure 1. Percentage of participants having someone to talk about their problems

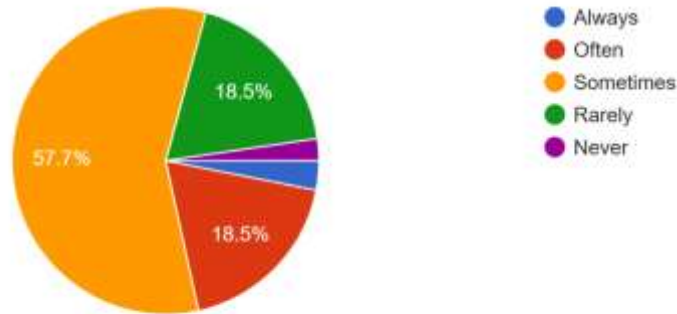
Do you have someone you can talk to about your problems/achievements?
130 responses



From figure 1, we can see that around 60 % of the participants had someone to talk to about their problems. It shows a good sign in some of the private schools where counselors are available for the students. Those counselors listen to students' issues and try their best to help them in dealing with stress. This also shows that, the teenager is able to build deep and fruitful social relationships among their peers.

Figure 2. Percentage of participants feeling lonely at times

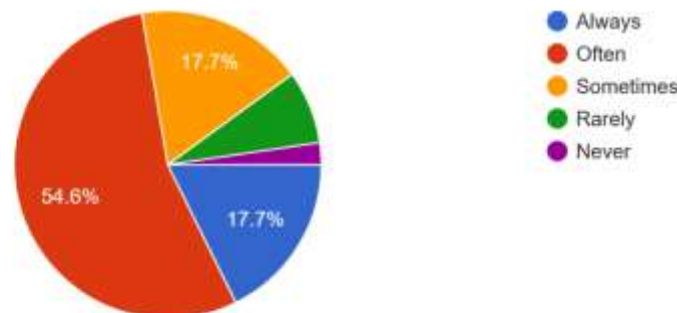
How often do you feel isolated or lonely?
130 responses



According to figure 2 around 60% of the participants feel lonely at times, even though they do have someone to talk to about their problems. This percentage is quite high and shows that lot of young adults feel lonely due to some reasons. This is confirmed with other studies all over the world, the only way to help those teenagers cope with loneliness is to talk to them about their problems and help them find solutions, this is being implemented now in some of the schools in India but there is a long way to go.

Figure 3. Percentage of Participants feeling stressed at school

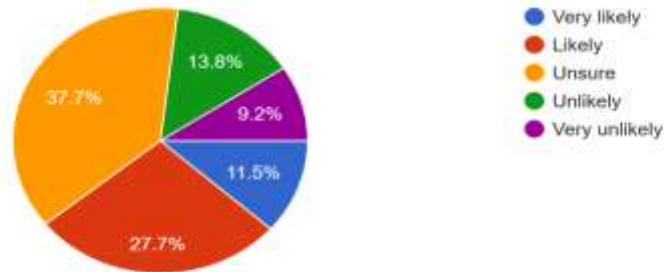
How often do you feel stressed or overwhelmed about your schoolwork?
130 responses



School can often get quite taxing, be it the homework, assignments or the exams. Moreover from figure 3. Around 72% of the respondents feel stressed or overwhelmed about their schoolwork. However, one still needs to contemplate how to incorporate stress-relieving activities in private skills to enable the teenagers to handle that amount of pressure during school.

Figure 4. Percentage of participants waiting to seek help

How likely are you to seek help if you were experiencing mental health issues?
130 responses:



From figure 4 we can see that only 27% of the participants would like to seek help regarding mental health issues, while 37 % were unsure. This shows that young adults may hesitate to talk about mental health issues, this needs to be addressed in schools where counselors should assure the students about their confidentiality.

Conclusion

The survey of 130 students reveals a crucial insight into the state of mental health among teens. Despite their willingness to discuss general problems, there remains a significant hesitation to open up about mental health issues specifically. This reluctance underscores the urgent need for school counselors to forge strong, trust-based relationships with students. By creating a supportive and approachable environment, counselors can help students feel more comfortable and secure in addressing their mental health concerns, ultimately fostering a healthier and more resilient student community.

References

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