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A Study of the Mental Health of Students Studying at the Secondary Level

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Abstract
Secondary education coincides with adolescence, a stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, social and intellectual changes. At this stage, students face several challenges such as academic pressure, examination stress, competition, parental expectations, peer relationships, family circumstances, social comparison and uncertainty regarding future education and career. These factors may influence students' emotional stability, self-confidence, concentration, social relationships and academic functioning. A mentally healthy student is better able to manage academic and social challenges, whereas poor mental health may be reflected through anxiety, stress, irritability, loneliness, low confidence, poor concentration and adjustment difficulties. The review of related research indicates that mental health problems among school-going adolescents are an important educational and social concern. Previous studies have reported psychological distress among adolescents and have highlighted the influence of social, family, academic and demographic factors on their mental well-being. Research has also emphasized the importance of early identification, school-level screening, counselling and appropriate psychological support. The need for the present study arises because educational institutions and parents often give greater attention to academic achievement while students' emotional and psychological needs may receive comparatively less consideration. Early understanding of mental health can help teachers, parents, counsellors and school administrators provide suitable guidance and create supportive educational environments. The present investigation was conducted among 400 secondary-level students of Lucknow district, selected through simple random sampling. The study examined mental health on the basis of gender and locality. Overall, the study concludes that gender was associated with a significant difference in the mental health of secondary-level students, whereas locality did not produce a significant difference....

Keywords Secondary Level School, Students, Mental Health..

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is an important aspect of an individual's overall development and plays a significant role in shaping behaviour, personality, emotional stability, social relationships and academic functioning. The period of secondary education is particularly important because students at this stage are passing through adolescence, a period marked by rapid physical, emotional, social and intellectual changes. During this period, students begin to develop greater independence, form their own opinions, become more conscious of their abilities and appearance, and experience increasing expectations from parents, teachers and society. These changes can influence their mental well-being in both positive and negative ways. A mentally healthy student is generally able to face academic and social situations with confidence, adjust to changing circumstances and maintain a balanced emotional life. In contrast, poor mental health may be reflected through anxiety, stress, emotional instability, irritability, loneliness, lack of confidence, poor concentration, disturbed behaviour and difficulties in adjustment. The secondary school period is often associated with increased academic demands because students are expected to perform well in examinations and make decisions concerning their future education and career. The pressure to obtain high marks, competition among classmates, expectations of parents, fear of failure and uncertainty about future goals may create psychological pressure among students. At the same time, changes in family relationships, peer influence, social acceptance and the increasing use of digital technology can also affect their mental well-being. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to criticism, comparison and rejection, and negative experiences during this period may influence their self-esteem and emotional adjustment. A supportive family in which parents provide affection, understanding, encouragement and opportunities for communication can help students develop emotional security and confidence. On the other hand, excessive parental expectations, frequent conflict, lack of communication, neglect, comparison with other children and an unsupportive home environment may contribute to stress and emotional difficulties. The school environment also has a substantial influence on students' mental health.

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Teachers, classmates, school rules, academic workload, examination practices and opportunities for participation can either support or negatively affect psychological well-being. A positive school environment where students feel respected, accepted and supported can promote confidence, emotional balance and healthy social development. Similarly, teachers who understand students' individual differences and provide appropriate guidance can help students deal with academic and personal difficulties. Peer relationships become especially significant during adolescence. Acceptance by friends can provide emotional support, companionship and a sense of belonging, whereas bullying, social exclusion, unhealthy competition or peer pressure may produce feelings of insecurity, loneliness and anxiety. In the present technological environment, social media and excessive use of mobile phones and the internet have also become relevant factors in the mental health of adolescents. Although digital technology provides opportunities for learning, communication and entertainment, excessive or inappropriate use may interfere with sleep, concentration, academic activities and face-to-face relationships. Students may also experience pressure arising from social comparison and the desire to gain acceptance in online spaces. Academic achievement and mental health are also closely connected. Students experiencing persistent stress or emotional difficulties may find it difficult to concentrate on their studies, complete academic tasks and perform effectively in examinations. Conversely, repeated academic failure or low achievement may reduce self-confidence and increase feelings of anxiety or inadequacy. Thus, the relationship between mental health and educational development may be understood as a dynamic process in which psychological well-being can influence learning and academic performance, while educational experiences can also influence students' mental health. Individual differences such as gender, family background, socio-economic conditions, locality, type of school and personal experiences may further influence students' mental well-being. Some students may cope effectively with stressful situations, whereas others may require greater emotional support and guidance. For this reason, it is necessary to understand mental health not only at the individual level but also in relation to the social, family and educational environment in which students develop. The importance of mental health at the secondary level is further increased because habits of thinking, emotional responses, coping patterns and interpersonal behaviour developed during adolescence may continue into later life. Early identification of psychological difficulties can therefore help parents, teachers and educational institutions provide timely guidance and appropriate support. Schools can contribute to students' mental well-being by creating a safe and inclusive environment, encouraging open communication, providing counselling and guidance services, reducing unnecessary academic pressure and promoting healthy physical, social and emotional activities. Parents can also support students by listening to their concerns, appreciating their efforts, avoiding excessive comparison and providing a balanced environment at home. Such a study can provide meaningful information about the psychological well-being of secondary-level students and can help identify areas requiring educational and emotional support. The findings may be useful to teachers, parents, school administrators, counsellors and educational planners in developing suitable strategies for promoting positive mental health among adolescents. A healthy educational system should therefore give importance not only to academic achievement but also to the emotional and psychological well-being of students. The balanced development of students requires an environment in which they can learn without excessive fear, express their feelings appropriately, develop healthy relationships and face academic and personal challenges with confidence. Thus, the study of mental health among secondary-level students is an important area of educational research because the mental well-being of students is closely associated with their adjustment, personality development, learning process, social relationships and preparation for future life.

Need and Significance of the Study

Secondary-level students are passing through an important stage of physical, emotional, social and intellectual development. During this period, students experience rapid changes in their personality, relationships, expectations and future aspirations. Along with these changes, academic pressure, examination-related stress, competition, parental expectations, peer relationships, family environment, social media and uncertainty about career choices may influence their mental health. Good mental health is essential for students because it enables them to think positively, manage emotions, develop healthy relationships, concentrate on studies and respond effectively to everyday challenges. On the other hand, poor mental health may be reflected in anxiety, stress, sadness, irritability, lack of concentration, low self-confidence, disturbed sleep, social withdrawal and reduced interest in academic activities. Therefore, studying the mental health of secondary-level students is important for

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understanding their psychological well-being and educational development. The need for the present study arises from the fact that academic achievement is often given greater importance than students' emotional and psychological well-being. Parents, teachers and educational institutions may focus primarily on marks and examinations, while the mental and emotional difficulties faced by students may remain unnoticed. Early identification of mental-health-related difficulties can help in providing appropriate guidance, counselling and emotional support before these problems become more serious. The study is also significant because students belonging to different backgrounds may experience different levels of psychological adjustment due to differences in family environment, gender, locality, socio-economic conditions and educational opportunities. Understanding these differences can help educators develop suitable support strategies for students. The findings of the study may be useful to teachers in identifying students who require additional emotional and psychological support and in creating a positive, supportive and stress-free classroom environment. School counsellors may use the findings to plan counselling programmes, stress-management activities and mental-health awareness programmes according to students' needs. Parents may also become more aware of the importance of communication, emotional support and realistic expectations in promoting their children's mental health. Educational administrators and policymakers may use the findings for strengthening student-support services, counselling facilities and mental-health programmes at the secondary level. The study is further significant from the educational perspective because mentally healthy students are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, maintain better relationships, cope effectively with academic challenges and develop a positive attitude towards learning. Thus, mental health should be considered an essential component of quality education rather than a separate concern.

Review of Related Research Literature

Mangal et al. (2020): Studied common mental health problems among school-going adolescent girls in Gujarat. The study stressed the need for early identification and school-level mental health support.

Tiwari & Jaiswal (2020): Examined the mental health of school-going adolescents in Patna. The findings showed that family and social conditions influence students' mental health.

Devi, Barthakur & Das (2021): Studied 1,839 students from 101 government schools in Assam. Psychological distress was considerable and higher among girls. Mental health was also related to academic performance.

Ansari, Yadav & Pant (2022): Studied mental health among secondary and senior secondary students in Uttarakhand. Home environment, school environment, peer group and online learning were important factors.

Arulvendan et al. (2024): Studied depression and anxiety among secondary school students in Chennai. The study highlighted the need for early detection and psychological support.

Sulur Anbalagan et al. (2025): Examined the impact of COVID-19 on high school students in Nellore. The findings showed effects on students' emotional and social well-being.

Statement of the Problem

A Study of the Mental Health of Students Studying at theSecondary Level.

Definition of Variables

Mental Health: In the present study, mental health refers to the psychological and emotional well-being of secondary-level students, reflected in their ability to understand and manage their emotions, cope effectively with everyday academic and social pressures, maintain healthy relationships, and adjust appropriately to different situations. It includes a balanced state of emotional, psychological and social functioning that enables students to think positively, deal with problems effectively, maintain self-confidence and perform their educational responsibilities satisfactorily.

Secondary: Level Students: In the present study, secondary-level students refer to students studying at the secondary stage of school education.

Objectives of the Research Study

1. A Study of the Mental Health of Secondary-Level Students on the Basis of Gender.
2. A Study of the Mental Health of Secondary-Level Students on the Basis of Region.

Hypotheses of the Research Study

There is no significant difference in the Mental Health of secondary-level students on the basis of gender.
There is no significant difference in the Mental Health of secondary-level students on the basis of locality.

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Tools for Data Collection

Mental Health Test: Questionnaire developed by Dr. Sushma Talesara and Dr. Akhtar Bano.

Sampling

In the present research study, the population consists of secondary-level students of Lucknow district in Uttar Pradesh. Since it is not practically feasible to study all the students in the population, a representative sample will be selected from the population for the purpose of the study. In this research, 400 secondary-level students will be included as the sample.

Analysis and Interpretation of Hypotheses

Table No. 01 Mental Health Status of Male and Female Students Studying at the S econdary Level

Group	**N**	**M**	**S.D.**	**df and level of significance**	**C.R.**	(Hypothesi s)
Male Student	200	150.38	18.45	df = **398** (.05)*	2-27	Rejection (Significan t)
Female Student	200	154.61	17.82			

Analysis of Data: It is evident from the above Table 01 that the mean score of the mental health of secondary-level male students (200) is 150.38, with a standard deviation of 18.45, whereas the mean score of the mental health of female students (200) is 154.61, with a standard deviation of 17.82. The obtained t-value is 2.27. This value is greater than the tabulated value at the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the mental health of male and female students.

Discussion of Results: Female students were found to have better mental health than male students. This may be attributed to factors such as emotional expression, social support, a positive attitude towards school discipline, and family support. On the other hand, academic competition, concerns about the future, social expectations, and behavioural pressures may have a relatively greater impact on male students, which may adversely affect their mental health. Therefore, schools should provide effective mental health promotion programmes by considering the gender-specific needs of students. Counselling services, life-skills education, stress-management programmes, and psychosocial support should be effectively provided to ensure the healthy mental development and well-being of all students.

Table No. 02 Mental Health Status of Urban and Rural Students Studying at the S econdary Level

Group	**N**	**M**	**S.D.**	**df and level of significance**	**C.R.**	(Hypothesis)
Urban Student	200	153.42	18.03	df = **398** (.05)*	1-09	Accepted (No Significant)
Rural Student	200	151.56	18.94			

Analysis of Data: It is evident from the above Table 02 that the mean score of the mental health of urban students (200) studying at the secondary level is 153.42, with a standard deviation of 18.03, whereas the mean score of the mental health of rural students (200) is 151.56, with a standard deviation of 18.94. The obtained t-value is 1.09, which is lower than the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference found in the mental health of urban and rural students is not statistically significant.

Discussion of Results: On the basis of the above findings, it may be stated that, at present, students in both urban and rural areas have relatively similar access to education, communication media, family support, school environment, and health-related facilities, which may be one of the reasons for the absence of a significant difference in their mental health. In addition, examination pressure, competition for future opportunities, social expectations, and psychological challenges associated with adolescence are experienced by students in both urban and rural areas to a similar extent.

Main Findings

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A significant difference was found in the Mental Health of secondary-level students on the basis of gender.
No significant difference was found in the Mental Health of secondary-level students on the basis of region...

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