

A Study On Primary Teachers' Awareness Of Mental Health In The Hooghly District

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Abstract

Primary education is fundamental in laying the foundation for a child's academic journey, with teachers playing a significant part in shaping this pivotal time. The present investigation was an attempt to understand the current state or the degree of awareness of mental health possessed by the teachers at the primary level of education in Hooghly District of West Bengal. A cross-sectional survey design was implemented by the researcher among 142 primary school teachers. Teachers' awareness of children mental health was considered as the dependent variable and that was hypothesized to be related to various demographic factors as the independent variables viz., gender, habitation, mental health related any training and teaching-experience (in years). The original version of Perception of primary school teachers on children's Mental Health questionnaire developed by Habtamu Kerebih, Hailay Abrha, Reiner Frank and Mubarek Abera (2016) was used to collect data from primary teachers. Major findings showed that female teachers appeared with better awareness of mental health than male teachers. Concerning habitation, teachers from semi-urban habitation possessed higher level awareness of mental health than their rural and urban counterparts. Again, it was found that teachers who have received any form of training related to mental health demonstrate a higher level of awareness of mental health compared to those who have not received any such training. Finally, the relationship between teaching-experience and mental health awareness yielded that higher teaching-experience leads to lower mental health awareness of primary teachers.

Keywords: Mental health, Mental health awareness, Primary education level, Well-being

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I. Introduction

The recognition and understanding of mental health play a pivotal role in the holistic feeling of well-being. The cultivation of this knowledge serves to mitigate social stigma, foster timely intervention, and foster a nurturing milieu for individuals grappling with mental health difficulties. The significance of mental health awareness is paramount due to various factors. First and foremost, the promotion of early intervention has been found to result in improved outcomes for persons who are confronted with mental health difficulties (World Health Organization, 2019). Additionally, the use of this approach serves to diminish societal stigmatization, hence cultivating a more conducive atmosphere for individuals who are in need of assistance (Corrigan, 2016). Moreover, the act of increasing public knowledge serves to enhance the distribution of resources towards mental health care, so effectively tackling a notable issue in the field of public health (Patel et al., 2018). In general, the comprehension and resolution of mental health concerns play a pivotal role in fostering a society that is characterized by improved well-being and heightened empathy (Smith, 2020). The enhancement of consciousness results in well-informed decision-making, hence generating a beneficial effect on personal welfare and society advancement.

Teachers assume a crucial position in molding the comprehensive welfare of their pupils, and a nuanced comprehension of mental health is vital for a multitude of persuasive justifications. The increased focus on mental health awareness enables teachers to effectively identify subtle indicators of psychological discomfort in their students. The ability to detect concerns at an early stage allows for prompt response, thereby offering support before problems grow (Weare, 2013). Teachers have the ability to cultivate a responsive and compassionate learning environment that caters to the different needs of students by being sensitive to their emotional well-being. The incorporation of mental health literacy within teacher training programs facilitates the establishment of a classroom environment characterized by heightened empathy. Teachers that possess this information are more well positioned to comprehend and address the emotional difficulties that kids may encounter (Kutcher et al., 2016). This practice not only strengthens the bond between teachers and students but also fosters an environment of psychological safety, where students have a sense of being heard and appreciated. Scholarly researches indicate a beneficial association between teachers' knowledge and understanding of mental health and enhanced academic achievements, as well as the overall welfare of students (Greenberg et al., 2017).

The establishment of a conducive learning environment that places emphasis on mental health is crucial in fostering not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of persons who possess emotional resilience. The inclusion of mental health education in teacher training programs equips teachers with the necessary tools and methods to effectively address the various dimensions of student well-being (Patalay et al., 2018). This encompasses the identification of diverse learning modalities, comprehension of the influence of social and emotional variables on scholastic achievement, and the use of efficacious treatments when necessary.

Furthermore, Primary education has a fundamental role in establishing the initial stages of a child's academic trajectory, with instructors assuming a prominent position in shaping this critical phase. Comprehending the mental well-being of children is a crucial factor in guaranteeing a favorable and efficient educational encounter. During the early stages of education, children engage in the acquisition of academic skills while also undergoing social, emotional, and behavioral development. Educators who possess a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies surrounding children's mental well-being are more adept at establishing a nurturing and intellectually stimulating milieu. Early identification of indicators of emotional discomfort, learning difficulties, or behavioral challenges enables immediate intervention and personalized support. Teachers who possess an understanding of children's mental well-being play a significant role in establishing an environment that is both secure and supportive. Educators have the capacity to employ tactics that foster favorable social connections, emotional welfare, and a passion for acquiring knowledge. Consequently, this establishes the foundation for a child's comprehensive growth and subsequent achievement in academia.

Rationale of the study

A mentally healthy learning environment encompasses more than just academic achievement; it fosters emotional well-being, resilience, and a sense of belonging among students. Through the acknowledgement and resolution of students' mental health requirements, teachers assume a crucial role in cultivating a constructive and all-encompassing educational environment that establishes the groundwork for both scholastic success and enduring psychological well-being. Teacher's awareness of mental health can foster various healthy actions that significantly contribute to the creation of a healthy, positive, and nurturing school environment including creating a healthy school environment, promoting inclusivity, teaching social-emotional skills, address changes in students' behavior and so on. The establishment of a conducive and health-promoting school environment is a complex undertaking, with teachers assuming a crucial role in its implementation. According to Pianta et al. (2008), teachers offer emotional assistance to pupils, cultivating an environment that promotes feelings of safety and inclusion. The establishment of an emotional connection serves as a fundamental element in fostering a conducive and beneficial educational environment. Furthermore, teachers have an active role in fostering inclusion through the recognition and appreciation of many perspectives, as well as the establishment of a secure environment that ensures the worth and belongingness of every student (Gay, 2018). The implementation of an inclusive approach is crucial in fostering a culture characterized by respect and acceptance within the educational setting. In conjunction with providing academic education, teachers fulfill a crucial function in imparting social-emotional competencies to students, aiding them in effectively addressing obstacles, regulating their emotions, and cultivating positive interpersonal connections (Durlak et al., 2011). The acquisition of these skills is crucial for fostering personal growth and building a conducive educational atmosphere. The capacity of teachers to identify and respond to alterations in students' conduct plays a significant role in facilitating prompt intervention, hence mitigating the likelihood of difficulties increasing (O'Connor et al., 2016). The implementation of this proactive strategy contributes to the overall enhancement of students' well-being. In addition, it is observed that teachers play a crucial role in cultivating and sustaining positive classroom dynamics through the demonstration of suitable conduct and the establishment of expectations for collaboration and benevolence among students (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). This has a good impact on the entire ambiance of the educational institution. The inclusion of wellness education within the curriculum represents an additional means by which teachers actively contribute to fostering a healthy atmosphere. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering a comprehensive comprehension of well-being by imparting knowledge to pupils on the significance of both physical and mental health (CDC, 2014). The involvement of parents in collaboration is of utmost importance in establishing a comprehensive support system for students. The establishment of open lines of communication between instructors and parents plays a crucial role in fostering a collaborative approach to addressing the educational requirements of the child (Epstein et al., 2009). During periods of crisis or adversity, teachers assume a pivotal position in delivering stability and reassurance to pupils, so contributing to a collective sense of security (Brock et al., 2009). Several related studies on current topic advocated that teachers play a crucial role in fostering a conducive and supportive school environment by virtue of their diverse responsibilities and behaviors. Therefore, the present investigation was an attempt to understand the current state or the degree of awareness of mental health possessed by the teachers at the primary level of education in Hooghly District of West Bengal.

Delimitations

The study is delimited to followings areas:

- i. Only 142 teachers of primary education level were taken.
- ii. Primary school teachers from Hooghly district in West Bengal were surveyed only.
- iii. Only descriptive and parametric tests were utilized to present the actual data and analysis procedure.

Objectives

Regarding the study's purpose, the following objectives have been identified:

1. To understand the degree of awareness of mental health possessed by primary-school teachers at Hooghly district.
4. To examine if there is any correlation exist between teaching-experience and mental health awareness of primary-school teachers.
5. To observe whether the gender, habitation and mental health related training cause any variation on teacher's awareness of mental health.

Hypotheses

In accordance to objectives, the following null hypotheses were formulated and stated as:

H₀1: There is no significant mean difference between male and female primary teachers concerning mental health awareness.

H₀2: There is no significant mean difference between trained (mental health) and non-trained (mental health) primary teachers concerning mental health awareness.

H₀3: There is no significant mean difference between various habitations of primary teachers concerning mental health awareness.

H₀4: There is no significant correlation between teaching-experience and mental health awareness of primary teachers.

Study Design

To achieve the objective of this study, a cross-sectional survey design was employed. The population of the study consisted of primary-school teachers in the Hooghly district of West Bengal. Only 142 samples were randomly selected from primary schools in the Hooghly district. In this study, teachers' awareness of children mental health was considered dependent variable and that was hypothesized to be related to various demographic factors as the independent variables viz., gender, habitation, mental health related any training and teaching-experience (in years). To gather relevant data, the Perception of primary school teachers on children's Mental Health questionnaire developed by Habtamu Kerebih, Hailay Abrha, Reiner Frank and Mubarek Abera in 2016 was used. The original version of the questionnaire was implemented after checking its reliability and validity.

II. Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive statistics regarding Self-esteem of tribal students.

Mental Health Awareness of Teachers				
Variables	Category	N (Frequency)	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	65	27.75	23.795
	Female	77	50.08	38.365
Habitat	Rural	42	38.26	34.791
	Urban	26	24.50	21.739
	Semi-Urban	74	46.16	36.082
Mental health related training	Yes	88	44.23	41.139
	No	54	32.74	16.259

Figure 1: Showing independent variable wise mean difference on Mental Health Awareness of Teachers

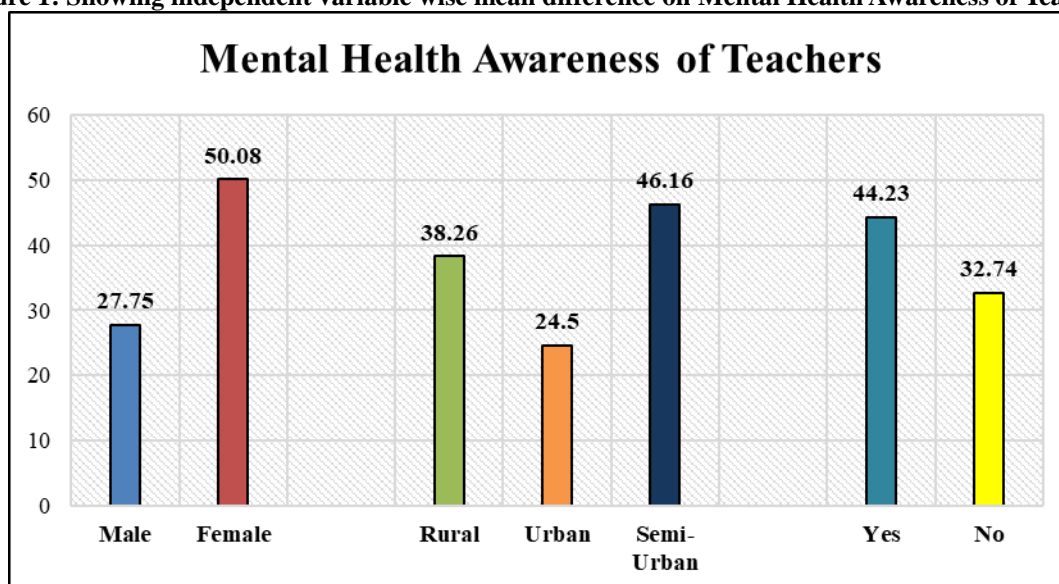


Figure 1 showing independent variable wise mean distribution on mental health awareness of primary teachers at Hooghly district. Gender wise male teachers scored 27.75 and female teachers scored 50.08. Habitation wise teachers from rural locality scored 38.26; teachers from urban locality scored 24.50; teachers from semi-urban locality scored 46.16. Mental health related training wise trained teachers scored 44.23 and non-trained teachers appeared with mean score of 32.74.

Hypotheses testing

Table 2: Inferential statistics based on H₀₁ to H₀₃.

Independent samples T-Test							
Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Remarks (0.05 level)	Hypotheses Testing (95%)
Mental health Awareness	Gender	-4.075	140	0.000	-22.324	Significant	Rejected
	Mental Health Training	-1.958	140	0.052	-11.487	Not Significant	Failed to reject
One-way ANOVA							
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	F	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean square	Remarks (0.05 level)	Hypotheses Testing (95%)
Mental health Awareness	Habitation	4.077	2,139	0.019	4590.255	Significant	Rejected

Testing H₀₁: It can be observed from the table 2 that computed t-value of mental health awareness of primary teachers based on gender is found to be $t_{(142)} = -4.075$; **p-value=0.000**. Found difference in mean is statistically significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

Decision: 'There is no significant mean difference between male and female primary teachers concerning mental health awareness' – *is Rejected*.

Testing H₀₂: It can be observed from the table 2 that computed t-value of mental health awareness of primary teachers based on mental health related training is found to be $t_{(142)} = -1.958$; **p-value=0.052**. Found difference in mean is statistically not significant at 0.05 level ($p > 0.05$).

Decision: 'There is no significant mean difference between trained (mental health) and non-trained (mental health) primary teachers concerning mental health awareness' – *is failed to reject*.

Testing H₀₃: It can be observed from the table 2 that computed F-value value of mental health awareness of primary teachers based on various habitations is found to be $F_{(2,139)} = 4.077$; **p-value=0.019**. Found difference in mean is statistically significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

Decision: 'There is no significant mean difference between various habitations of primary teachers concerning mental health awareness' – *is rejected*.

Table 3: Pearson correlation based on H₀₄.

Pearson Correlation			
		Teaching experience	Mental health awareness
Teaching experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.210*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.012
	N	142	142
Mental health awareness	Pearson Correlation	-0.210*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.012	
	N	142	142

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Testing H₀₄: It has been found in Table 3 that teaching-experience and mental health awareness of primary teachers were negatively correlated with each other $r = -0.210^*$; $p=0.012$ and the correlation was statistically significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, higher teaching-experience leads to lower mental health awareness of primary teachers and vice versa.

Decision: ‘There is no significant correlation between teaching-experience and mental health awareness of primary teachers’ – *is rejected*.

III. Findings

- Female teachers appeared with better awareness of mental health than male teachers and the difference between those groups found to be statistically significant.
- Teachers from semi-urban habitation possessed higher level awareness of mental health than their rural and urban counterparts and the difference between those groups found to be statistically significant.
- Teachers who have received any form of training related to mental health demonstrate a higher level of awareness of mental health compared to those who have not received any such training and the difference between those groups found to be not significant statistically.
- The relationship between teaching-experience and mental health awareness yielded that higher teaching-experience leads to lower mental health awareness of primary teachers and vice versa.

IV. Conclusion

Primary teachers play an essential part in the mental well-being of children through their ability to identify potential concerns at an early stage, establish a nurturing atmosphere, facilitate effective communication, engage in collaborative efforts with parents, adjust instructional approaches, cultivate emotional intelligence, and mitigate the negative effects of societal stigmatization. The consciousness of individuals plays a significant role in fostering a favorable and all-encompassing environment inside the classroom, ensuring a comprehensive approach to the overall welfare of a child. The purpose of this study was to examine the level of mental health awareness among primary school teachers in the Hooghly District of West Bengal. Findings yielded that female teacher appeared with better awareness of mental health than male teachers. Some studies suggest that female teachers have better mental health than male teachers due to factors like patience and adjustment abilities (Pachaiyappan & Raj, 2012; Maheshwari, 2020; Ravikumar & Shanmugam, 2022;), while other studies indicate that female teachers experience higher stress and poorer psychosocial safety climate, leading to lower mental health conditions compared to male teachers (Yan-li, 2006; Sahu et al, 2013; Boström et al, 2019; Ghosh et al, 2020). Another finding suggested that teachers from semi-urban habitation possessed higher level awareness of mental health than their rural and urban counterparts. Several studies have indicated that urban teachers exhibit greater mental health compared to their rural counterparts (Gorsy et al, 2015). Conversely, other research has found that semi-rural teachers showed moderate levels of psychiatric morbidity, with no notable disparities in mental health observed between urban and rural teachers (Paykel et al, 2003). Again, it was found that teachers who have received any form of training related to mental health demonstrate a higher level of awareness of mental health compared to those who have not received any such training. Similar studies indicated that teachers who undergo mental health training tend to exhibit elevated levels of awareness and knowledge pertaining to mental health concerns (Jorm et al, 2010; Powers et al, 2014; Aluh et al, 2018;), exhibit more inclusive attitudes, and display a greater willingness to provide assistance (Cruz et al, 2020). Finally, the relationship between teaching-experience and mental health awareness yielded that higher teaching-experience leads to lower mental health awareness of primary teachers. Some studies suggest that higher teaching-experience is associated with lower mental health awareness (Galloway et al, 1984; Cooper & Kelly, 1993) and higher stress levels among primary teachers, while other

studies show no significant effect or even better mental health with more experience (Kourmousi & Alexopoulos, 2016).

In conclusion, the present research investigation pertaining to the understanding of mental health among primary teachers in the Hooghly District. The results highlight the need of increasing the knowledge and understanding of mental health concerns among teachers of primary school. Teachers play a crucial role as primary stakeholders in the early development of children. By enhancing their understanding, teachers are better equipped to identify early indications of mental health difficulties, establish nurturing environments, and facilitate successful communication. The research highlighted the importance of implementing focused interventions and providing professional development initiatives to augment teachers' expertise and competencies in effectively addressing the mental health requirements of their pupils. This study affirmed the need of equipping elementary teachers with the appropriate resources and expertise to make a positive impact on the mental well-being of pupils in the Hooghly District.

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