The Impact of School Environment on Students' Mental Health: A Critical Analysis of Contributing Factors and Interventions

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Abstract- ***Learning is a process that requires proper concentration, interest, a healthy environment, a healthy body, and sound mental health. Mental health and the environment play a crucial role in making learning successful. It is a psychological process related to an abstract concept, enabling one to think and acquire knowledge. A child cannot attain complete satisfaction and quality education unless they are well-adjusted to their environment and mentally healthy. This study aimed to examine the role of the school environment in students' mental health and explore supportive strategies for promoting their well-being. The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. A sample of 32 students and four schools was selected using a random sampling technique. Data was collected through observation and questionnaires. The major findings indicate that the institutional environment significantly impacts students' mental health. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended strategies to promote students' mental well-being. Supportive strategies such as meditation, yoga, exercise, awareness programs, counseling, a positive home environment, sports, and recreational facilities are essential for managing students' stress.***

Keywords: Mental Health, Students, Environment, School, Well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial factor in learning. It is a psychological process related to abstract concepts, enabling individuals to think and acquire knowledge. As defined by UNESCO, *"Mental health refers to how a person thinks, feels, and acts when faced with life's situations. The challenge to humanity is to adopt new ways of thinking, new ways of acting, new ways of organizing itself in society in short, new ways of living".*

Students, teachers, and the environment play significant roles in the teaching-learning process. The success of classroom teaching largely depends on students' mental health and teachers' capabilities. Emotional instability and mental distress can lead to failure in achieving academic goals (Hussain & Halder, 2015). Mental health problems are also a leading cause of early school dropout (Braddick & Jane, 2008).

The home environment has a profound impact on an individual's mental health, with its quality determined by the nature of relationships among family members (Sharma et al., 2012). Mental health concerns are not limited to psychological issues; they also include cognitive and emotional challenges such as distressing emotions, anxiety, false beliefs, self-esteem issues, and relapse prevention strategies (Faulkner, 2015). Stress and other mental health concerns among students often arise due to pressures from school, home, and societal expectations.

A survey found that 85% of girl students experienced at least one mental health issue (APA, 1998). Programs addressing mental health need better coordination, and case workers require training and information on available support options. Children with mental health challenges need additional time to complete their work (APA, 1998). Flexible teaching approaches and adaptable schedules can help these students function more effectively. Students struggling with substance abuse can recover and reintegrate into school and society with proper treatment. Regular exercise has been found to improve mental health, physical well-being, and self-confidence. In fact, effective exercise functions like medicine for individuals facing mental health challenges (Kenari, 2014).

Schools are expected to provide a supportive and nurturing environment. Therefore, they must play a significant role in ensuring students' mental well-being.

1.1 Significance of the study

The organizational environment can be a significant factor contributing to disturbances in students' mental health. While they may be physically present in class, they are often mentally absent. A teacher may be speaking, and students may nod as if they are attentively listening and engaged, yet their minds may be elsewhere. This is not necessarily the fault of the students but rather a reflection of their mental health.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 80% of people experience some form of mental health issue. These challenges can affect students' ability to focus, even when they have access to all necessary resources, such as effective teaching methods, a well-structured syllabus, good teachers, and advanced technology. If students are mentally unhealthy, they may struggle to concentrate on their studies, making even the best teaching-learning process ineffective.

Good mental health is closely linked to the environment. A child cannot achieve complete satisfaction and quality education unless they are well-adjusted and mentally healthy. This study aims to explore students' mental health and examine the role of the organizational environment in shaping their well-being.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the role of the organizational environment in the mental health of eighth-grade students.
- To identify supportive strategies for promoting students' mental well-being through observation.

2 METHODS AND MATERIALS

The present study follows a descriptive research design. To achieve the study's objectives, a survey method was adopted, supplemented by observations for data collection.

2.1 Sample of the study

This study follows a qualitative research approach. A sample of 32 eighth-grade students from four schools was selected using a random sampling technique. Data was collected from two government schools and two private schools. The details of the sample are provided below:

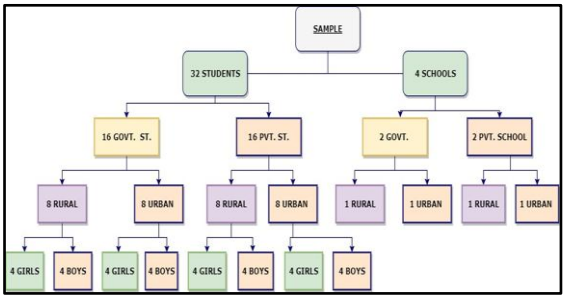

Figure 1: Distribution of sample

2.2 Instruments and apparatus

The data was collected through observations and a questionnaire. The questionnaire, developed by the researchers, consisted of 20 statements and was administered to 32 eighth-grade students to assess their mental health. Observations were conducted to examine the organizational environment, including teacher-student interactions, parent-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher interactions, peer group behavior, discipline, and factors affecting students' mental health. While collecting data, the researchers also interacted with teachers and principals to gather their views and opinions, which helped identify supportive strategies for promoting students' mental well-being.

2.3 Procedures

The fieldwork was conducted in four schools over a period of 20 days (five days in each school). The tool was administered directly by the investigators, who recorded students' responses to the questionnaire. The researchers carefully and critically observed each school environment and analyzed the collected questionnaires. All responses were evaluated and presented in tables. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and frequency analysis was conducted to determine the number of students who provided the same responses.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

The descriptive method was used to analyze the data collected through questionnaires, while frequency analysis was applied to determine the number of student responses. The data obtained from observations was carefully interpreted to ensure accurate insights.

3 RESULTS

The quantitative method was used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Table 1: Item-wise Analysis

Item No.	Response of students		Total
	Yes	No	
Item 1	14	18	32
Item 2	12	20	32
Item 3	17	15	32
Item 4	16	16	32
Item 5	23	9	32
Item 6	19	13	32
Item 7	27	5	32
Item 8	18	14	32
Item 9	21	11	32
Item 10	17	15	32
Item 11	25	7	32
Item 12	22	10	32
Item 13	9	23	32
Item 14	28	4	32
Item 15	24	8	32
Item 16	29	3	32
Item 17	4	28	32
Item 18	16	16	32
Item 19	30	2	32
Item 20	31	1	32

Overall Observation of the Schools

School -1

This school was observed for five consecutive days by the researchers. The organizational environment was found to be unfavorable for the mental health of the students. The relationship between teachers and students was not very friendly, and students exhibited fear toward their teachers. Additionally, teachers were not very supportive of their colleagues.

School -2

During the five days of observation, it was found that the environment of the school was favorable. Teachers were supportive and cooperative with both their students and colleagues.

School -3

It was observed that all teachers and staff were very helpful and humane. The school maintained a favorable environment for the students. There was a good rapport between teachers and parents, and students were caring and cooperative with one another.

School -4

The observers found that the institutional climate was not ideal. There was poor rapport between students and teachers, and teachers were administering punishments to students. Students were not very familiar with their teachers.

4 DISCUSSION

The major findings are as follows: The institutional environment significantly affects the mental health of students, with both social and individual factors influencing mental well-being. The study revealed that the overall level of students' mental health is average. Based on the collective experiences of the students, the majority of them consider their parents as their well-wishers. The mental health of students is satisfactory, and there are significant differences between boys and girls in terms of their mental health. Additionally, students attending private and government schools exhibit significant differences in mental health. Factors such as the organizational environment, teachers' attitudes, and peer behavior significantly influence students' mental health.

Supportive strategies such as meditation, yoga, exercise, awareness programs, counseling, a better home environment, sports, and recreation facilities are vital to managing students' stress. There is a clear need to enhance the level of sound mental health among both students and teachers, enabling them to think critically and generate creative, dynamic, and logical thoughts. Learning is a process of personal functioning and development, and the benefits of good mental health extend beyond students to teachers as well. When students are mentally healthy, they can focus better, understand content more clearly, respond to teachers more easily, and help teachers feel more competent in their work. A supportive environment should be cultivated to promote the mental health of both students and teachers.

5 CONCLUSION

The study highlights the critical role of mental health in the learning process and the substantial impact of the organizational environment on students' well-being. The findings indicate that students' mental health is influenced by multiple factors, including teacher-student interactions, peer relationships, home environment, and school climate. Schools with a positive and nurturing atmosphere contribute to better mental health, while those with rigid structures and lack of support

mechanisms hinder students' psychological well-being. The research further establishes that students in private and government schools exhibit significant differences in mental health, emphasizing the importance of tailored interventions to address specific institutional challenges. Gender-based variations in mental health suggest the need for targeted support systems that cater to the distinct emotional and cognitive needs of students.

Supportive strategies such as meditation, yoga, counseling, awareness programs, sports, and recreational activities emerge as essential tools for enhancing mental well-being. The study underscores the importance of collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and policymakers to create an environment conducive to students' holistic development. Fostering a mentally healthy school environment benefits not only students but also teachers, leading to a more effective and enriching educational experience. Schools must adopt comprehensive mental health policies and integrate well-being programs into their curriculum to ensure that students can thrive academically and personally.

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