

CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOL

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Abstract

Mental health promotion mainly means creating environments that promote and sustain positive mental health for everyone. Activities and interventions are designed to enhance protective factors and minimize risk factors. Researchers and practitioners agree that children with emotional and behavioural problems experience serious difficulties at school and that research intended to improve our understanding and ability enhance out comes is critically important. Schools are increasingly seen as places for promoting good mental health through social emotional education, an enterprise that straddles the border between psychology and teaching. The aim of advocacy is to generate public demand for mental health, place mental issues high up on the political and community agenda and effectively all stakeholders to act

in support of mental health. Advocacy may be directed to a variety of stakeholders, including politician's religious leaders, professionals and community. Many schools are already integrating mental health promotion and planning into their current curriculum and activities. Environment that promote mental health are safe, inclusive and empowering. Schools can integrate mental health into their current activities. Promoting positive mental health may provide young people with the necessary life skills and resources to accomplish their potential and to deal with adversity.

Keywords: *Mental health, Environment, School education.*

Introduction

Schools are increasingly seen as places for promoting good mental health through social-emotional education, an enterprise that straddles the border between psychology and teaching. Professionals from these two fields bring complementary expertise to bear on the development and implementation of effective social emotional programmes, but there are nevertheless some barriers to ensuring that practice will be firmly based on the available evidence about what works. This article considers these issues and suggests some ways forward.

The notion of promoting good mental health through schools has aroused international interest in recent years, spurred by research in many countries that has identified concerning numbers of young people with mental health problems (e.g. British Medical Association, 2006). The potential role of schools has been further highlighted by accumulating evidence that the early years lay the foundations for later mental health, well-being and resilience (e.g. Mustard, 2008).

Social-emotional education is in keeping with the World Health Organization's notion of the health promoting school', and encompasses a broad range of issues, such as promoting positive relationships, preventing bullying, developing a healthy body-image and managing strong emotions. Individual programmes may be wide-ranging or more narrowly focused.

An effective programme for promoting mental health includes sequenced step-by-step training; active forms of learning; focus on skills development; explicit learning goals. Furthermore, sequenced training especially for life skills "will not be as effective unless active forms of learning

are used” with “sufficient time focused on reaching explicit learning goals” according to the theory of the Social Skill Training, the most effective intervention to acquire skills in psychiatry. Also in educational science, skills need to be fragmented into smaller steps in order to be mastered. For this purpose lesson plans written in a handbook are very useful with suggestions of practices that are necessary for skills acquisition.

Promoting the mental health of the child was the focus of the present study. The researcher first aspired to understand the term mental health. It situates the research study in the Paradigm of mental health promotion. It also focuses on promotion program practices in schools and the scenario on the Indian front.

Mental Health

The Public Health Agency of Canada defines mental health as “the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.

Mental Health Promotion

Mental Health Promotion is about creating environments that promote and sustain positive mental health for everyone. Activities and interventions are designed to enhance protective factors and minimize risk factors (individual, family related, environmental and economic in nature). Schools are an ideal setting in which to promote mental health for children and youth, providing an opportunity to reach large groups of children during their formative years of cognitive, emotional and behavioral development. The most effective school based programs for promoting mental health are comprehensive and target multiple health outcomes, involve the whole school, focus on personal skill development, include parents and the wider community and are implemented over a period of time.

Review of Literature

The progress of ‘The National Mental Health Programme’ (NMHP) launched in India in 1982 was not satisfactory (Agarwal 2004). This Programme trained the existing primary centre and the community centre staff to treatmental disorders within the community. In India, mental health services are part of general health services.

In India, most initiatives are focused on awareness programmes for parents and teachers. Kapur, M et al with NIMHANS has conducted training programmes for teachers on detecting problems and has taught them classroom skills to manage troublesome behaviour.

School Mental Health programmes have positively impacted on numerous school, student and family outcomes (Stephan et al 2007). Mental health services in the school are provided by training teachers or by mental health professionals. Perspectives and 16 skills of various disciplines may be a pre requisite in the field of School Mental Health (Lasky 2012).

Objectives

- To understanding the mental health concept integrate in the school.
- To create and support the learning environment.
- To study the Role of School in Mental Health Promotion

Role of School in Mental Health Promotion

According to WHO (1994), schools are most appropriate to develop an all-inclusive mental health program for children. Some of the reasons put forth are “Almost all children attend school at some point during their lives. Schools are often the strongest social and educational institution available for intervention. Young peoples’ ability and motivation to stay in school, to learn, and to utilize what they learn is affected by their mental well-being. Schools can act as a safety net, protecting children from hazards which affect their learning, development, and psychosocial well-being. In addition to the family, schools are crucial in building or undermining self-esteem and a sense of competence.

School mental health programmes are effective in improving learning, mental well-being, and in treating mental disorders.”Children with behavioral problems pose a challenge to the parents, teachers and mental health professionals (Ghafoori & Tracz 2004).

Strategies for Promoting Mental Health in Different Settings

Promoting mental health in different settings addresses the mental health needs of specific groups of people; for example, school-based population for children and adolescents, workplace for adult population, and community-based for the elderly population and other vulnerable groups. The following paragraphs describe these different settings and provide examples of mental health activities for each population group.

School-Based Population

Childhood and adolescence serve as critical periods in human development. It is during this stage that the sense of self, as well as the identity, is established. School-based programs increase the likelihood of children and families to commit to positive life skills and effective coping mechanisms. Schools do incorporate the following teaching-learning strategies in their curriculum, which can help students to have a positive sense of self.

Physical education classes Promote physical activity and serve as a way to manage stress. This can be seen as a way to expose children in the health benefits of exercise and engaging in physical activities. Provision of opportunities for creative expression in lessons such as the use of art, poetry, drama and music Group work encourages social interaction and develops skills in teamwork. Use of a system of recognition and appreciation of efforts, talents, and accomplishments can facilitate development of self-esteem. However, educators must avoid criticism of those who are not doing well, and instead encourage them to discover their talents so as not to develop a child’s feelings of inferiority. Educational field trips, these excursions teach students that learning does not happen only in schools and not only from books and teachers. Field trips also provide a healthy break from the routines of schoolwork.

Extracurricular Activities

School tournaments provide venues for friendly competition and sportsmanship. Schools encourage their students to participate in these activities to help facilitate the development of well-rounded personalities. Organizations such as dance troupes, choirs and glee clubs not only help students discover but also hone their talents. The school should include the parents in their strategies of promoting psychosocial wellbeing and mental health and wellness.

Creating for Supportive Environment to Promote Mental Health

The aim of advocacy is to generate public demand for mental health, place mental health issues high up on the political and community agenda and electively convince all stakeholders to act in support of mental health. Advocacy may be directed to a variety of stakeholders, including politicians, religious leaders, professionals and community.

Raising Mental Health Literacy

Raising awareness may help improve understanding about the risks to mental health and methods of coping with these risks, and thus promote mental health in the community.

Life Skills Education

Life skills education is a model of health promotion that seeks to teach adolescents to deal electively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1997). Life skills include Self-awareness, Empathy, Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Decision making, Problem Solving, Effective communication, Interpersonal relationship, Coping with stress, Coping with emotion. Studies have shown life skills education is effective in the prevention of substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy and bullying; improved academic performance and school attendance; and the promotion of mental well-being and health behaviours (WHO, 1997).

Mental Health Advocacy and Policy

An example of a community-based approach to combating alcoholism and promoting the mental health of families has been described in rural India where prevention and promotion strategies included education and awareness building, action against drunken men, advocacy to politicians to limit the sale and distribution of alcohol in bars and shops, and mass oaths for abstinence. This led to a marked reduction in the number of alcohol outlets in the area and a 60% reduction in alcohol consumption; and there was more money for food, clothing and welfare and a reduction in domestic violence (Bang & Bang, 1995).

Inter Sectoral Alliances

Intersectoral alliances, such as schools and the community can help promote mental health of children and youth through life skills education, women's groups and trade sector can plan for livelihood projects, senior citizens or elderly groups and social welfare to address social isolation problems and elderly abuse. It is likely that intersectoral alliances and programs will have a powerful impact on promoting mental health.

Conclusion

It is recommended that mental health assume its rightful place in health promotion. The outstanding number of evidence-based mental health programmes concerned with well-being from early childhood to old age, aimed at individuals, groups or at community structural issues demonstrate that well designed interventions contribute significantly to the well-being of populations. Efforts need to be made to strengthen this evidence, particularly in developing countries. A further challenge is for mental health professionals to become more skilled in the process of advocacy in order that such evidence is used to maximum effect in ensuring that mental health promotion is recognized as an integral and central component of health promotion. Because

the health of students is in disengagedly linked to educational achievement, it is critical that schools promote health. Schools can provide the nurture and support needed to facilitate the adoption of health-enhancing behaviours. This helps assure that the educational gains achieved by a student will be maximized by a long and healthy life as an adult. A comprehensive, well-coordinated school health program can promote the optimal physical, emotional, social, and educational development of students.

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