

GENDER & ECONOMIC STATUS MATTER IN MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS ?

By

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is the ability to adjust oneself satisfactorily to the various strains of life. Mental health and Education are closely related to each other. Sound mental is prerequisite for the learner. In this era of severe competition to excel or to be on the top is pressurizing today's adolescents to the utmost. Besides a number of factors like home and school environment, biological and psychological determinants, economic conditions of the family and many more are influencing the mental health status of the students. A mentally healthy person faces the day to day life problems squarely and boldly. Here an effort has been made to study the influence of gender and economic status on the mental health status of high school students. For this Multi Stage random sampling technique was adopted. 600 students were drawn randomly from 10 randomly selected secondary level schools of 2 districts (i.e. Bareilly and Pilibhit) of Rohilkhand region (India). A standardized test was used - Mental Healthy Battery (Arun Kumar Singh and Alpna Sen Gupta). This Battery included six dimensions i.e. emotional stability, overall adjustment, autonomy, security-insecurity, self concept and intelligence. This survey research leads us to a conclusion that male and higher income group students had better mental health than their counterparts

Keywords: Mental Health, Gender, Economic Status.

INTRODUCTION

The old saying "Healthy mind remains in a healthy body", confirms the interrelationship of mental and physical well being. According to World Health Organization's Technical Report Series (1964), the psychological factors are considered to play a major role in disorders like hypertension, peptic ulcer and asthma. Like physical health, mental health is also an important aspect of total personality. Good mental health is indicated in individuals who are happy, hopeful, healthy and have harmonious personality. Mental health is a concept that refers to a human individual's emotional and psychological well being. It incorporates the concepts of personality, characteristics and behaviour all in one. A mentally healthy person shows a harmonious organization of desirable attitude, healthy values and righteous self concept and a scientific perception of the world as a whole.

Mental health is an attitudinal concept towards ourselves and others. It also presents a humanistic approach towards the understanding and assessment of the self,

positive feeling, attitudes towards self and others. In India, an increasing number of children are said to be depressed. According to a study conducted by National Institute of Mental Health (The Pioneer, 2 Dec.2002) 47 of every 1000 teenagers are depressed at any given time. In another study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (Times of India, 13 Nov.2001) at least 15-20 percent children in Chandigarh were found to be suffering from some kind of mental disorder, including depression. An WHO sponsored multi-centered study in four developing countries reported a prevalence of psychiatric disorders 12-29% in children (Giel et. al. 1983). There is a peak rise in suicide among males in our country in late adolescence. The causes are largely 'social', with only 3.4% attributed to mental illnesses. Modern educationists and researchers are working hard on the various educational problems at a rapid pace so that our new generation may welcome their well equipped future. But after so many efforts of educationists, teachers and counselors, the effectiveness of education system is still questioned due to poor mental health level of students, the condition apparently inbuilt inefficiency which results in poor work performance of the

students and ultimately a major loss of the nation. Thus, mental health is a commanding problem of modern life. The mental health needs of the children of today can be judged from increasing number of school dropouts, drug addicts, delinquents, runaways from home and of emotional problems (Moudgil 1985).

Some relevant research findings with regard to the role of gender and socio-economic status (directly or indirectly) on mental health have been summarized here. Bhaskaran and Shukla (1981) found that the majority of adolescents were suffering from anxiety neurosis (female 49.33% and male 38.66%), a greater number of females suffered anxiety neurosis than males. Barinder (1985), Shikari (1986) and Singh and Broota (1995) found that girls are more anxious than the boys. Similarly, Nancy et. al. (2004) and Amando Rose (2007) observed that there were a robust gender differences in the level of depressive symptoms and girls were more affected than boys. But on the other hand, Prathyusha (1987) and Vani (1995) reported that girls are superior to boys in mental health status. However Singh (1980) observed that there was no sex difference in anxiety level. While, Achenbach and Edelbrock (1981) found no significant gender difference in total behaviour problem of competence score.

Some of the researchers have tried to study socio-economic status as a related variable of affecting mental health. Mishra and Singh (1998) found that male and female graduates of low socio-economic status were unable to make proper adjustment with environmental situation due to poor facilities of accommodation, transportation and communication. While according to the study of Tripathi (1986) low SES was found to be associated with less emotional stability. Verma (1993) found that lower socio-economic status of boys and girls appeared to experience greater frustration than those of higher socio-economic status. Similarly Pramanick (1996) found that low class child was likely to suffer from insecurity, anxiety, inferiority and lack of self confidence which resulted in lower self esteem.

Duncan et. al. (1997) reported that it was mainly economic adversity that has negative impact on children's cognitive, behavioural, emotional and physical

development. Phipps and Lethbridge (2006) also found the same result that increase in household income was associated with better well being and development. Vonnie and Mcloyd (2006) found that economic hardship diminishes psychological well being. In another study Emerson Eric (2007) concluded that socio-economic disadvantage may be accepted for a significant proportion of the increased risk for poorer health and mental health of children.

From the forgoing discussion it can be concluded that the findings obtained with regard to the role of gender and economic status on mental health are inconsistent and mostly the studies are related with one aspect or the other affecting mental health of the students. In the backdrop of the review it is observed that with so many areas under a composite head of mental health there is death of knowledge hence to fill in the gap and to have fresh look into the mental health of the adolescents who are under tremendous pressures of competition, parents peers and so many others, the researchers felt the need to take the work in hand. And the mental health status of adolescents in relation to gender and economic status separately has been studied.

Objective of the Study

To study whether mental health of adolescents differ with respect to certain related variables as gender and parental income level.

Hypothesis

- The difference in the mental health of adolescents with respect to their gender is insignificant.
- There exists no statistical difference in the mental health of adolescents when it is evaluated on the basis of their parental income level.

Methodology

Keeping in view the objective of the study, the descriptive survey method was chosen by the investigators for this study.

Sample and sampling technique

To get an adequate and representative sample, multistage random sampling technique was adopted. 10

secondary level schools were chosen randomly from Bareilly and Pilibhit districts of Rohilkhand Region(India). 600 students studying in class X were drawn randomly. Out of which 594 students who had given complete information were considered for the purpose of this study. 372 boys and 222 girls formed the sample. Whereas on the basis of median point of parental income level, the sample was categorized into higher (Above 10 thousand) (N=322) and lower income group (below 10 thousand) (N=272).

Tool

A standardized tool was used in the study.

Mental Healthy Battery (Arun Kumar Singh and Alpna Sen Gupta)

It has 130 items belonging to six dimensions of mental health. These dimensions are Emotional stability, Over-all Adjustment, Autonomy, Security-insecurity, Self-concept and Intelligence. It is highly reliable test as the reliability of the various dimensions of the battery varied across 0.82 to 0.87. Validity ranged from 0.67 to 0.83.

Results and Discussions

When the study was carried out in view of mental health of high school students categorized as boys and girls, significant differences were observed on three dimensions i.e. emotional stability, security- insecurity and intelligence and also on overall mental health of high school students. Gender wise analysis of mental health scores (Table 1) indicates that boys were found to be emotionally stable than their counterparts. The plausible explanation may be that differential treatment with girls and open favoritism towards boys still exists in our society.

Dimensions Of Mental Health	Boys N=372		Girls N=222		t value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Emotional Stability	10.51	1.89	9.47	1.57	7.21**
Overall-Adjustment	28.45	4.81	27.68	5.07	1.82
Autonomy	10.89	1.64	10.63	1.80	1.76
Security-Insecurity	9.47	1.75	10.29	2.32	4.55**
Self-Concept	9.35	2.15	9.30	1.8	0.30
Intelligence	21.23	3.36	20.59	3.47	2.20*
Overall Mental Health	90.09	11.14	88.11	12.34	1.96*

Table 1. Gender Wise Mean Mental Health Scores

The boys are mostly given special family support/attention/extra parental care/love. This different preferential behavior on the part of parents might be helping the boys to be emotionally strong.

The boys were also found to be more intelligent ($t=2.2$, $p<0.05$) than their counterparts. Perhaps, the girls may have to share and co-operate her mother in domestic works, they might be getting lesser time for their studies. Besides, boys are being given more opportunities for their educational growth as parents are more concerned for their career. This may enhance their mental ability.

Further, the boys were found to be overall mentally healthy. The plausible explanation can be that the treatment with boys is better than girls in our society and parents are also very careful for their health/education/development in all areas. Perhaps the preferential parental care and love, their freeness in the society, mostly no do's and don'ts, and many more opportunities keep them mentally healthy. Contrary to it, in Prathyusha (1987) and Vani's study (1995) girls were reported to be better on their mental health than boys.

But, the girls scored higher mean values on the dimension security – insecurity. They had better sense of safety. The reason may be that our society is male dominated and the girls are dependent upon their parents. Any decision for their welfare is taken by their parents. So they might be experiencing more security with their parents.

On the rest areas of Mental Health Battery i.e. overall adjustment, autonomy and self concept no significant differences were observed between girls and boys, hence hypothesis one is accepted on these aspects while it is rejected on emotional stability, security –insecurity, intelligence and overall mental health.

When the students were categorized into higher and lower income groups. The results in Table 2 indicated the existence of significant differences between these two groups on the three aspects of the mental health only. Higher income group students were found to be highly emotionally stable ($t=3.54$, $p=.001$). This finding is consistent with the finding of Tripathi (1986). Today's society is materialistic and perhaps the students having

strong economic background were able to fulfill their materialistic needs and do not feel low among their peers and perhaps this might have boosted their esteem and perhaps strong background may be keeping them emotionally strong. It is economic adversity that has negative impact on children's emotional development (Duncan et. al. 1997).

The higher income group students had also shown better overall adjustment. Perhaps again it is the income level of parents that these children are getting some extra facilities which may enhance their adjustment everywhere. Vonnie and Mcloyd (2006) and Mishra and Singh (1998) had also arrived at similar findings that graduates of low socio-economic status were unable to make proper adjustment.

The higher income group students were also found to be intelligent ($t=3.52, p<0.01$) and overall mentally healthy ($t=3.12, p<0.01$) than their low economic status counterparts. This also confirms that because of high economic status these students were getting more opportunities / facilities / books/ internet facility /tuition with regard to their education. Hence they were having rich information which was enhancing their mental ability and thus making them to face the world boldly keeping them ahead everywhere.

While on autonomy, security-insecurity and self concept dimensions, no significant variations could be traced among the students of these two groups. Hence hypothesis 2 is accepted on these dimensions while rejected on emotional stability, overall adjustment, intelligence and overall mental health.

Dimensions Of Mental Health	Boys N=372		Girls N=222		t value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Emotional Stability	10.52	1.86	9.95	2.03	3.54**
Overall-Adjustment	28.88	4.23	27.47	5.39	3.50**
Autonomy	10.90	1.68	10.77	1.70	0.93
Security-Insecurity	9.70	1.96	9.77	1.92	0.43
Self-Concept	9.49	2.17	9.25	1.95	1.01
Intelligence	21.52	3.25	20.54	3.48	3.52**
Overall Mental Health	91.13	10.25	88.17	12.49	3.12**

Table 2. Income Level Wise Mean Mental Health Scores of High School Students

Findings

From the forgoing account it can be concluded that the boys were found to be more emotionally stable, intelligent as well as overall mentally healthy than the girls. While the girls were better on security as compared to boys. On the rest dimensions i.e. overall adjustment, autonomy and self concept, they were found to be at par with boys .

Higher income group students were found to be superior on emotional stability, overall adjustment, intelligence and overall mental health than their counterparts. On the rest three dimensions – autonomy, security- insecurity and self concept, both income group students were found to be similar.

Some Suggestions

To make our girls and the student population of lower strata mentally healthy, some concrete measures are to be deliberated upon.--

- Strong need is felt to combat against gender discrimination at all levels society/family/school/govt./non govt.levels. For the mental well being of the girls some awareness programmes can be organized to aware the parents ,teachers and heads of the institutions.
- Some special or extra classes can be arranged to bring the children of lower strata at par with their class mates which may boost their mental health status, make them at par with their class fellows on academic fronts.
- Though it is difficult in Indian situations because of big classes but an extra effort on the part of teachers to be caring and friendly with students can motivate the students to solve their educational worries and it may boost their mental well being.
- The entire school programme including examination and co-curricular activities should be organized in such a manner so as to develop a co-operative spirit and discourage unhealthy competition and to give students scope to express their potentialities and gain recognition for the same. Provision of co-curricular activities, especially open-air activities in order to give an outlet to their energies and sublimate their impulses will do the purpose.
- Student-teacher should be familiarized with the

importance and role of mental health in child development and child education and significance of the teacher's role in this regard.

Conclusion

- The boys were more emotionally stable, intelligent and over all mentally healthy.
- Girls better as far as sense of security was concerned.
- Higher the income level higher the level of adjustment ,intelligence and overall mental health.

Thus it can be concluded that gender and economic status influence the mental health status of the adolescents to some extent.

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