



## **ROLE OF TEACHERS IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**Ms. Michelle Menezes**, Assistant Professor, Department of BMS, Nirmala Memorial Foundation  
College of Commerce and Science

### **Abstract:**

Mental health issues among college students have been on the rise in recent years, with various studies reporting increased rates of anxiety, depression and stress.

According to UNICEF's survey findings for 21 countries in The State of the World's Children 2021 report, every one in seven youngsters between 15 and 24 years in India reported some form of poor mental health such as feelings of depression or disinterest. Teachers can play a crucial role in promoting mental health among college students by providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment, offering resources for mental health support and identifying students who may be struggling with mental health concerns. This research paper aims to examine the role of teachers in promoting mental health among college students.

**Keywords:** Mental Health Resources, Student Mental Health, Interventions, Anxiety, Academic Pressure, Counselling

### **Introduction:**

Mental health challenges among college students can negatively impact their academic performance, relationships, and overall quality of life. These challenges include academic pressure, social isolation, financial stress and the transition to adulthood.

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) survey revealed that 12-13 per cent of students in India suffer from psychological, emotional and behavioural conditions. One of the most exciting and sometimes stressful transitions is that of entering a college. This highlights the need for interventions that can support the mental health of college students. Teachers can play a critical role in promoting mental health among college students by creating an environment that fosters mental health, identifying students who may need support and providing resources for mental health support.

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies and interventions that teachers use to promote mental health among college students. It also discusses the importance of teacher training and education on mental health topics and the need for collaboration between teachers, mental health professionals, and other support services on campus. The study will also examine the challenges and barriers that teachers face in promoting mental health and identify best practices that could be used to overcome these barriers.

### **Review of Literature:**

- **Teachers and schools as change agents in improving mental health among adolescents**<sup>1</sup> explained that teachers have a strong influence on students' knowledge, attitude, and mindset, and can help improve their mental health status by detecting signs of mental health concerns, making referrals to health professionals, and creating awareness. Studies have explored the role of teachers in identifying psychological problems among students in school settings. The study concluded that sensitising teachers on mental health is important to provide the necessary knowledge to give help and make referrals of students

with potential problems. Teachers noticed changes in students with mental health problems and perceived a decline in their academic performance. Support measures such as teaming up with health experts, refining logistic abilities, and planning curriculum can help teachers offer support to students with mental health difficulties.

- **Teachers' Awareness and Skills in Addressing Students with Anxiety Symptoms**<sup>2</sup> addressed the issue of lack of skills and training of teachers while dealing with mental health issues among students. The paper specifically focused on anxiety problems faced by the students. While teachers are aware of their needs for training in areas like differential teaching strategies, coping skills and the importance of building relationships with the students, they're not well-equipped to do so.

- **The Role of Teacher in Primary School Students' Mental Health Promotion**<sup>3</sup> emphasises on the importance of early detection and intervention of mental health issues among primary school students. Hence, it is necessary to train teachers to create a safe environment for students by forming positive interpersonal relationships so that they can seek help at the right time. The importance of counselling services and other resources are also highlighted in this study.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

- To identify the specific mental health challenges that college students face, including the prevalence of anxiety, depression and stress.
- To examine the current strategies and interventions that teachers use to promote mental health among college students, such as classroom discussions, counselling referrals and awareness campaigns.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies and interventions that teachers use to promote mental health among college students, including their impact on student well-being, academic performance and retention.
- To identify the challenges and barriers that teachers face in promoting mental health among college students, such as stigma, lack of resources and limited training.
- To explore the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards mental health promotion, including their beliefs about their role in supporting student mental health and their level of confidence in doing so.
- To identify best practices for promoting mental health among college students, based on the experiences and insights of teachers who have successfully implemented effective strategies and interventions.
- To provide recommendations for improving teacher training and support to enhance their capacity to promote mental health among college students.

### **Research Question:**

What is the role of teachers in promoting mental health among college students, and what strategies and interventions do they use?

### **Research Methodology:**

A qualitative research analysis was carried out. The researcher gained familiarity regarding the prevalence of mental health issues among college students and various programmes and approaches carried out by institutions to promote mental health. This was done through first-hand observation of college students and by conducting a systematic literature review using the keywords mentioned above. The following selection criteria was used to identify relevant articles for the study:

- Articles published between 2013 and 2023.
- Articles that focus on the role of teachers in promoting mental health among college students.
- Articles that provide strategies and interventions that teachers can use to promote mental health among college students.
- Articles that have been published in reputable journals, newspapers, educational and government websites.

### **Research Findings:**

Teachers have the ability to influence the mindset and attitude of students. They can also stimulate positive changes among students and motivate them to pursue their goals. In order to achieve this it is important to identify psychological issues that students go through. A study carried out by Loades, M. E., & Mastroyannopoulou, K. (2010) concluded that educators possess the ability to identify the existence of common emotional and behavioural disorders in their students. However, addressing these issues was the main challenge.

The research also suggests that as a result of mental health issues in students, there is a decline in their academic performance. Also, the stigma attached to mental health issues prevents them from seeking help. While colleges provide counselling services, students are hesitant to seek them due to fear of judgement and bullying.

Sensitising various stakeholders around the student was the primary aspect. In order to do this, teachers need to create awareness among the parents, college authorities and other students as to what role they could play in assisting the student going through mental health issues.

Teaming up with suitable health experts and planning a curriculum that places emphasis on mental health and having classroom discussions should be mandatory. With the help of these approaches, teachers were able to offer support to students with mental health difficulties in a more efficient way.

The research also concludes that teachers need to assume more responsibility when it comes to students' mental health. Merely referring them to a counsellor is not sufficient.

A study carried out by Figueroa Looyee titled "Teachers' Awareness and Skills in Addressing Students with Anxiety Symptoms" stated that 54% respondents said that anxiety levels of students affect their academic performance to a higher extent. 44.5% responded that anxiety feelings influence their social relations with their peers and teachers to a great extent.

When the respondents were asked the question "To what extent do you believe teachers should receive training in addressing students with anxiety issues?" 50.5% of the respondents rated toward the very much level, and less than 2% of the respondents rated toward the not-at-all level.

A study by Shah and Kumar (2012) observed the importance of a sensitization program for teachers. The programme helped them become aware of mental health issues prevalent among students and benefitted them in ways where teachers were able to detect the symptoms at an early stage and take

the necessary measures to address it.

### **Research Gap:**

The researcher identified the need for more research on the specific strategies and interventions used by teachers to promote mental health among college students. While previous studies have identified various strategies, such as providing emotional support and creating a positive classroom environment, there is a lack of consensus on which strategies are most effective and under what conditions. Further research is needed to identify evidence-based strategies that can be implemented by teachers to promote mental health among college students.

Another research gap is the need to explore the challenges and barriers faced by teachers in promoting mental health among college students. While some studies have identified barriers such as lack of training and resources, more research is needed to understand the specific challenges faced by teachers in different contexts and how these challenges can be addressed.

Finally, there is a need for more research on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards mental health promotion. While some studies have explored teacher attitudes towards mental health, more research is needed to understand how these attitudes influence teacher behaviour and the promotion of mental health among college students.

In summary, the gaps in the existing literature on the role of teachers in promoting mental health of college students include the need for more research on specific strategies and interventions used by teachers, the challenges and barriers faced by teachers, and the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards mental health promotion. Addressing these gaps can inform the development of effective policies and practices for promoting mental health among college students.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The role of teachers in promoting mental health among college students is crucial. Teachers, including professors, academic advisors, and student affairs professionals, play an important role in creating a supportive and safe learning environment that promotes student well-being. Some of the strategies and interventions that teachers use to promote mental health among college students include:

1. Classroom discussions: Teachers can use classroom discussions to raise awareness about mental health challenges and promote open communication about these issues. These discussions can help reduce stigma and promote mental health literacy among college students.
2. Referrals to counselling services: Teachers can refer students to counselling services on campus or in the community, providing them with access to mental health professionals who can offer support and guidance.
3. Peer support groups: Teachers can facilitate the creation of peer support groups that bring together students who have similar experiences with mental health challenges. These groups can provide a sense of community and belonging, as well as opportunities for shared learning and growth.
4. Mindfulness programs: Teachers can offer mindfulness programs that teach students how to manage stress, improve focus, and cultivate greater self-awareness. These programs can be offered as part of a course curriculum or as a standalone program.
5. Crisis response and support: Teachers can be trained in crisis response and support, enabling them to provide immediate assistance to students who are experiencing a mental health crisis. This can involve identifying warning signs, providing resources and referrals, and offering support and

empathy.

Overall, teachers have a critical role to play in promoting mental health among college students. By offering a range of strategies and interventions, teachers can create a culture of support and care that promotes student well-being and academic success.

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