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EFFECTS OF MENTAL WELL-BEING ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN GUJRAT DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The importance of mental well-being as a pre-learning requirement to success in academic performance over the long-term among adolescent learners in schools is gaining popularity. This research study analyzes the impacts of mental well-being - in its fundamental psychological factors of stress, anxiety and depression - on the academic performance of secondary school students in government high-schools of Gujrat district Pakistan. The study uses a quantitative, descriptive survey design and focuses on students of Grade 9 and Grade 10 studying in Grade 9-10 of public secondary schools in Gujrat. Purposive random sampling was used to pick a sample of 150 students. The questionnaire was developed and validated to gather data via a 25 item questionnaire that was based on a five-point Likert scale profiles, three independent sub-dimensions of mental well-being, and four dependent academic outcome measures of academic grades, classroom concentration, school attendance, and academic motivation. Data was analyzed using SPSS (v.26) and Pearson correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics. The research expects an academic achievement-mental state poor relationship to be statistically significant and anxiety and stresses concerning examination to be the most widely spread psychological issues. The results will be used to advise educational policy makers, school heads, teachers and parents at the Gujrat district, on the essence of ensuring that mental health support mechanisms are incorporated in secondary schools so as to protect the psychological and academic destiny of teenaged students.

Keywords: *Mental Well-being, Academic Achievement, Secondary School Students, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Grades, Concentration, Attendance, Motivation, Gujrat District, Quantitative Research, Likert Scale.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern educational practice, the mental health and psychological well-being of adolescence student have become the core issues of discussion on the global level. With the international educational systems struggling to cope with the increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and stress in the youth of school-going age, it is becoming clear that academic success cannot be objectively interpreted and enhanced without factoring in the mental health of the students (World Health Organization, 2021). The psychological scaffolding on which all learning and academic activity lies is defined as the mental well-being which WHO (2004) contends is the state where a person fulfills his or her own abilities, can withstand the stresses of normal life, can work, and can give back to his/her community.

However, secondary school is a very vulnerable and critical level of development among

adolescents. Grades 9 and 10 students grades (usually age 14 to 16) are in the midst of cognitive, emotional, physical, and social changes typical of adolescence and early identity negotiations with the pressures of growing academic demands, board exams, and identity considerations (Steinberg, 2014). The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) further exacerbate this level in the secondary education system of Pakistan, which has far-reaching consequences in both the further educational paths and career perspectives of students.

Gujrat is a mid-sized city in Punjab Province that is an untapped and fertile educational research since not yet explored. Students attending secondary schools in Gujrat district are predominantly of middle- and lower-middle-income groups, and have socioeconomic pressures, challenges of accessing mental health resources, and high family demands on academic achievements. These situational drivers enhance traditional and academic stress factors and can increase the susceptibility of secondary pupils to psychological stress. Although the need of mental health in the educational environment is acknowledged, there is an urgent lack of empirical studies that directly explore the relationship between mental health and academic performance of public secondary school students in Gujrat.

This research fills this gap by examining how mental well-being dimensions that include stress, anxiety, and depression can impact four academic achievement criteria, such as academic grades, classroom concentration, school attendance, and academic motivation. The theoretical basis of the suggested investigation is based on the Tripartite Model of Anxiety and Depression, formulated by Clark and Watson (1991), the Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (1986) and the Inverted-U relationship between arousal (stress) and performance, presented by the Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908), assuming that absence of arousal and excessive arousal are both detrimental to the mental functions and scholarly performance.

The study seeks to add value to the existing body of evidence that educational administrators, policymakers and school counselors can use in an attempt to create psychologically enabling and academically viable secondary school settings in Pakistan by producing local and empirical data on the same in the Gujrat district public school system.

2. Statement of the Problem.

Although evidence has been increasingly accumulating globally regarding the reduction of academic achievement due to adolescent mental health problems, the scholarly academic literature on higher education in Pakistani education sector (and especially in Gujrat district) is heavily deficient in empirical investigation of this crucial association. Pakistani public schools have virtually no mental health service offerings, and the majority of government secondary schools do not have adequately trained school counselors, psychological support staff, and mental health screening guidelines (Rauf et al., 2018). Without methodical surveys and assistance, students with stress, anxiety or signs of depression could be left undetermined and unhelped during their vulnerable secondary school years.

The outcome of such negligence can be dire. It is known that students who suffer high levels of psychological distress show deteriorating academic performance, high levels of absenteeism, decreased engagement in the classroom, and decreased levels of academic motivation that combined to reduce the academic performance and achievement in the long-term (Pascoe et al., 2020). However, due to the unavailable empirical information on the outbreak and severity of mental health issues in Grade 9 and 10 students in Gujrat, the school heads and district education administrators cannot make evidence-based decisions with respect to the allocation of resources, curriculum design, or student-centered support.

Furthermore, there are other obstacles to awareness and management of mental health issues due to the cultural setting of Pakistan. The stigmatization of psychological distress, low mental health literacy rates among both students and parents, and a culture of prioritizing academic performance over the significance of well-being

pose a framework whereby adolescents and their parents tend to bundle psychological distress and issues that are really underreported, poorly perceived, or completely hidden. The interaction of these aspects on academic achievement in the secondary school environment is empirically unexplored in the Gujrat context.

The current study is thus guided by the following problem statement of core interest: The relationship between the dimensions of mental well-being influences on the academic performance of Grade 9 and 10 students in the Gujrat district schools remains to be systematically unexplored thereby leaving a significant gap in the evidence base by which it is not possible to construct a set of contextually relevant, data-driven educational and psychological-support measures.

3. Importance of the research.

The contribution of this study is multidimensional that covers both theoretical, practical, and policy contributions that reach out to various stakeholder groups.

Hypothetically, the study will contribute to the current literature on adolescent mental health and academic achievements in South Asian school system by the contextualized empirical material in the government-sponsored schools of Gujrat district. It checks the generalizability of theoretical models developed internationally (such as the Tripartite Model of Anxiety and Depression and the Yerkes-Dodson Law) in the Pakistani secondary school environment where they are either valid or refined. The research also addresses a research gap in the existing literature on educational psychology in Pakistan, especially at the secondary level, whereby the extent of empirical research on the mental state is considerably less advanced compared to the university level (Rauf et al., 2018).

In terms of practicality, the research findings will enable teachers and school principals in the Gujrat public secondary schools with empirical evidence of the academic effects of mental health problems of students. This information can change the paradigms of pedagogy - to invite educators to pay attention to the signs of psychological distress in behavior, to implement a trauma-focused approach in schools and to address children with the right levers of support. In the case of school counselors, where it exists, the findings of the study will provide the evidence-based foundation to focus on mental health screening and targeting the intervention in Grade 9 and 10 years.

On the policy level, the study gives the district and provincial education authorities in Punjab, quantitative data to support the need to allocate resources in support of mental health in the public secondary schools. This can involve lobbying of school authority to formally incorporate school counseling roles in their staffing systems, planning student mental health awareness courses, and establishing school-community mental health agency partnership in Gujrat.

The 25 item Likert-scale questionnaire validated in the study also represents a methodological input to the area the standardized, culturally adapted questionnaire that measures the mental well-being and academic perceptions of secondary school students in the Pakistani context and can be later reproduced and altered to a regional study.

4. Research Objectives

The following research objectives guide this research:

1. Same objective: To evaluate the individual status of mental well-being (stress, anxiety, and depression) of Grade 9 and 10 students in the Gujrat district of the public secondary school.
2. To determine the academic performance of learners in secondary schools in regards to grades, concentration, attendance and motivation.
3. To assess the association between secondary school students and their mental well-being and academic performance in Gujrat.
4. To determine which aspect of mental well-being (stress, anxiety, or depression) has the most significant influence on academic achievement of the respondents of the study.
5. To examine gender and grade level disparities in grade level and mental well-being in a sample of students.

5. Research Questions

The research questions include:

6. Mental well-being (stress, anxiety and depression) at Grade 9 and 10 in Gujrat district of the public secondary schools?
7. Academic (grades, concentration, attendance, and motivation) achievement of secondary school students in Gujrat?
8. Optional: 8. Do secondary school students in Gujrat have a statistically significant association between mental well-being and academic achievement?
9. Which aspect of mental well-being, stress, anxiety, or depression, has the most profound effect on academic performance of students?
10. Are observed any substantial differences in mental health and achievements of the sampled students, in terms of gender and grade level?

6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the theoretical framework on which the investigation of the study regarding the relationship between mental well-being and academic achievement was carried out. It specifies the independent (mental well-being and its sub-dimensions), the dependent (academic achievement and its indicators) and the moderated demographic variables, all being placed within the wider framework of Gujrat education system in relation to its secondary schools.

6.1 Mental Well-being- The independent variable in the experiment.

- The independent variable is mental well-being, which can be operationalized as three inter-connected psychological sub-dimensions that stand as some of the most common mental health issues among adolescent learners:
- Stress: The individual experiences some demands in both the academic and personal fields that seem to be beyond their coping ability reflected in the cognitive overload, physical tension, irritability and a lack of academic activity (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).
- Anxiety: An intense worry, fear, and physical stimulation over the expectation of academic assessments, social and future uncertainties. Sixtiary school students are specially prone to anxiety when they are about to take board tests (Clark and Watson, 1991).
- Depression: Persistent low mood, anhedonia, fatigue, concentration deficiency, and less self-efficacy characterize depression and is the worst mental health concern in this frame and academic impairment with the greatest magnitude (Beck, 1979).

6.2 DV: Academic Achievement.

The operationalization of academic achievement is the dependent variable where four different but interrelated indicators are measured with specific questionnaires items:

- Academic Grades: Self-reported performance in recent exams and class tests as the main quantitative measure of academic performance.
- Classroom Concentration: The composition to maintain attention, understand instructions as well as to participate effectively in the classroom sessions.
- School Attendance: the regularity and consistency of school attendance, as an academic and behavioral indicator of psychological well-being and academic interest.
- Academic Motivation: The intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to undertake academic activities, do homework, study, and derive educational objectives.

6.3 Conceptual Framework Diagram

Variable Category	Variable / Dimension	Indicators	Scale
Independent Variable	Stress	Academic workload, exam pressure, peer competition	Likert 1-5
Independent Variable	Anxiety	Test anxiety, social anxiety, future worries	Likert 1-5
Independent Variable	Depression	Low mood, fatigue, lack of interest, hopelessness	Likert 1-5
Dependent Variable	Academic Grades	Self-reported marks/grades in exams	Likert 1-5
Dependent Variable	Concentration	Attention span, comprehension, classroom focus	Likert 1-5
Dependent Variable	Attendance	Regularity, absenteeism patterns, tardiness	Likert 1-5
Dependent Variable	Motivation	Goal-setting, effort, academic self-efficacy	Likert 1-5
Moderating Variable	Demographics	Gender, Grade level (9/10), School type	Categorical

The hypotheses for this framework are that the evidence will go down to lower levels of mental well-being revealed as high levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms would have measurably negative impacts on all the four indicators of academic achievement among Grade 9 and 10 students of public schools in Gujrat district. This relationship is supposed to be moderated by demographic variables (gender and grade level).

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Research Method

This paper uses quantitative research method. Quantitative research is a logical investigation of phenomena which is carried out by gathering numerical data and analyzing them with the help of the applied statistical methods which help to describe and establish relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative approach will be useful in this study as it permits accurate systematic measurement of the dimensions of mental well-being and academic achievement indicators using a standardized tool, provides an opportunity to infer statistical results about the target population on the basis of the sample, and gives an opportunity to objectively test hypothesized relations between psychological and academic variables. The method will guarantee that the findings are replicable, comparable and relevant to other comparable settings in secondary schools in Gujrat and Punjab province.

7.2 Research Design

Employs a descriptive survey design. The descriptive research is a method that describes, in a systematic way, the characteristics, associations, and distributions of variables in a specific population, not performed experimentally (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2012). This study is especially well-suited to the survey design due to its exceptional ability to collect data on a relatively large sample of secondary school students on a structured questionnaire, offer a cross-sectional view of the current state of mental well-being and academic achievement of Grade 9 and 10 students in the public schools in Gujrat, and enables the analysis of the correlational relationships between mental well-being and academic outcomes without

the ethical and logistical issues associated with the cases of experimental design. The survey is cross-sectional, which implies that data will be taken at a particular time, allowing to identify co-occurring patterns and relationships among variables in the sample.

7.3 The population used in the study

This study will target the entire student body that comprise of Grade 9 and Grade 10 students of government (public) secondary schools in the Gujrat district of Punjab Pakistan. It is noted that records taken by district education authority indicate that in Gujrat district, there are more than 200 registered public secondary schools with total enrolment of more than 35,000 students at Grade 9-10. The available population in this study will be Grade 9 and Grade 10 students, who attend secondary schools in the public in a 15-kilometer area around the Gujrat city center, which is a geographical area where the students will be accessible to sample. It is estimated that there are around 8000 -10,000 of this readily available population based in co-ed schools and single-gender schools alike. The accessible population is restricted to students with reported special educational needs, and students who are absent at least 40% of the academic year to maintain data integrity.

7.4 Sample and Sampling Technique.

The population available will be used to select a sample of 150 students. This is a good size of samples to reflect the recommendations by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) of such size at 95% level of confidence and is considered sufficient enough in terms of descriptive correlational research of such nature (Cohen, 1988). They use a purposive random sampling method: on the one hand, since the list of students who qualify as a part of the sample comprises only those who satisfy the eligibility criteria (enrolled in Gujrat public schools as Grade 9 or 10), purposive sampling is used; on the other hand, random sampling in this frame purposively defined increases the sample's representativeness and minimizes the selection bias.

The Gujrat district is purposively selected based on six government secondary schools (geographic access, co-ed or single-gender, institutional willingness to take part). In each school 25 students are picked out by systematic random sampling of the school books of classes, every nth student taken off the list until every quota of the school has been met. The sample is selected so that the sample has a representation of both grade levels and where feasible gender.

School Category	No. of Schools	Students per School	Total Sample
Boys' Public Secondary Schools (Grade 9-10)	3 schools	25 students	75 students
Girls' Public Secondary Schools (Grade 9-10)	3 schools	25 students	75 students
Total	6 schools	25 students	150 students

7.5 Research Instrument

The main data collection tool is a structured self-administered questionnaire specially developed to be used in this study. The questionnaire will be divided into two sections:

Part A Demographic Profile: This section gathers the background information concerning participants such as gender, grade level (Grade 9 or Grade 10), age, school name (coded because they are anonymous), and their self-report on the category of academic performance (Excellent: 80-100%, Good: 60-79%, Average: 40-59%, Below Average: Below 40%).

Part B Mental Well-being and Academic Achievement Scale (25 Items): This section includes the main measurement tool being

structured around the five thematic dimensions of five items respectively. The items will be rated using a five point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. Negative constructs (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression) are items which are coded to indicate that high scores indicate the presence of psychological distress.

Dimension	Items	Sub-construct	Sample Item
Stress	1 – 5	Independent Variable	Academic workload at school makes me feel overwhelmed and tense.
Anxiety	6 – 10	Independent Variable	I feel extremely nervous and fearful before and during examinations.
Depression	11 – 15	Independent Variable	I often feel sad, hopeless, or uninterested in attending school.
Academic Concentration & Grades	16 – 20	Dependent Variable	I find it difficult to focus in class when I am feeling mentally distressed.
Attendance & Motivation	21 – 25	Dependent Variable	When I feel anxious or depressed, I avoid going to school.

7.6 Validation of the Instrument

Multi-stage validation is rigorous in means of determining the content, face and reliability of the research instrument.

Content Validity: A panel of five subject-matter experts composed of two teachers with more than 10 years of experience in Gujrat public schools, educational psychologist based at a university in Punjab, one researcher with expertise in adolescent mental health and one senior official of the Gujrat District Education Authority reviews the initial pool of questionnaire items. Items are rated on four criteria by each expert: relevance to the construct being measured, Grade 9-10 students understand it, suitability to the Pakistani secondary school setting, and the absence of cultural or gender bias. The scale of Content validity index (CVI) is calculated per item and as a scale in general, and any item with item-based CVI under 0.78 is revised or dropped as suggested by Polit and Beck (2006).

Language Accessibility and Face Validity: Since the study will include Grades 9 and 10 students and they are highly likely to be different in English proficiency, the questionnaire will be prepared in both English and Urdu, the Urdu version will be translated and back-translated professionally with a guarantee on the semantic equality. Face validity is determined through placing the questionnaire on 15 Grade 9-10 students who have not taken part in the main study, and who assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and perceived relevance of the item on a structured feedback form.

Pilot Testing and Reliability: Pilot study is performed on 20 students of one of the secondary schools which are not included in the main sample and located in Gujrat. Internal consistency reliability is evaluated in terms of Cronbach alpha both on the complete scale of 25 items and on each sub-dimension. The alpha per dimension must be at least 0.70 and that is within the psychometric standards (Nunnally, 1978). Objects that decrease the total alpha when deleted are checked and revised accordingly and then final administration is performed.

7.7 Data Collection Procedure

The protocol of the step-by-step data collection is applied to achieve the compliance with the ethical principles, the data quality, and the consistency of procedures:

- Before starting work in the field, formal ethical approval is sought from the appropriate

institutional review committee and district education authority.

- The headmasters/headmistresses of the six schools that will be selected are sent official permission letters, which will explain the purpose of the study, the extent of the study, and the confidentiality of the data obtained.
- There is a short briefing to the class teachers of specific grades to understand how the data will be collected and to make the logistics of administration.
- Students (in case of minors) and parents or guardians are provided with informed consent forms in Urdu, via the school administration, with an explanation on voluntary participation, anonymity and the right to withdraw.
- A questionnaire (bilingual: English/Urdu): This will be delivered in person by the researcher during a planned class in each school, and participation in the research is voluntary and not a graded aspect.
- The questionnaire should take the students 20-25 minutes; the researcher is with them only to clear the ambiguities without having control over responses.
- Questionnaires are filled in and collected on the spot. Questionnaires which are left incomplete or destroyed are eliminated and the reserve sample list used to take replacements.
- Each questionnaire will have unique numbered codes prior to the data entry to preserve anonymity of participants during the analysis.

7.8 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 26.0 was used to enter and analyse all the data. Systematic application of the following analytical methods is done:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means (M) and standard deviations (SD) will be calculated on all the demographic variables, the complete sub-dimension of mental well-being, and the indicators of the level of academic achievement, which will present a detailed picture of the psychological state and level of academic achievement of the sample.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (r): Pearson correlation coefficient will be calculated in order to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between composite scores of mental well-being (and individual sub-dimensions) and every indicator of the academic achievement. The level of significance is determined as $p < 0.05$ (two tailed).

Multiple Linear Regression: A multiple regression analysis is carried out to show the relative predictive power of each mental well-being sub-dimension (stress, anxiety, depression), to predict the composite academic achievement score so that the most important among them can be identified.

Independent Samples t-test: A t-test that will be used to answer Research Question 5 is a t-test comparing the means of mental well-being and academic achievement scores in male and female students.

One-Way ANOVA: ANOVA will compare the mean score of Grade 9 and Grade 10 students and boys and girls schools both to determine differences in scores based on grade and based on school type.

Reliability Analysis: Cronbachs alpha is presented as scale of 25 items and individual five sub-dimensions to record internal consistency with the final research data.

Research Question	Statistical Technique	Variables Analyzed
RQ1: Level of mental well-being	Descriptive Statistics (M, SD, %)	Stress, Anxiety, Depression Scores
RQ2: Academic achievement level	Descriptive Statistics (Frequency, %)	Grades, Concentration, Attendance, Motivation
RQ3: Well-being & achievement relationship	Pearson Correlation (r)	Total Well-being Score vs. Achievement Score

Research Question	Statistical Technique	Variables Analyzed
RQ4: Most impactful dimension	Multiple Linear Regression (Beta)	Stress/Anxiety/Depression as predictors
RQ5: Gender & grade differences	t-test / One-Way ANOVA	Well-being & Achievement by Gender/Grade

8. Expected Results

It is expected that the study will yield the following results based on the existing knowledge in the literature of the international and Pakistani educational psychology (Pascoe et al., 2020; Rauf et al., 2018; Suldo et al., 2011; Khalid et al., 2012):

Mental Health Issues Prevalence: Both Grade 9 and Grade 10 students are predicted to score moderately to highly on psychological distress with the average scores between 3.0 and 4.0 on the five-point scale. It is expected that the most common one will be anxiety; especially when students are nearing SSC examinations, and then academic workload anxiety and parental expectation anxiety.

Academic Achievement Profile: Self-reports on academic performance are projected to have a wide distribution, with a significant percentage of students in the average category of academic performance (40-59%), mirroring the reported academic challenges in the real situation in public schools in the district settings of Punjab (Hussain et al., 2019).

Mental Well-being and Grades: It is supposed that there will be a statistically significant negative relation between total mental well-being levels of distress and academic grades ($r = -0.40$ to -0.55, $p < 0.05$), thus, suggesting that students with middle or high level of stress, anxiety, or depressed tend to make lower grades.

Mental Well-Being and Concentration: Mental well-being and classroom concentration are expected to have the strongest negative relationship among the achievement indicators ($r = -0.50$ to -0.65, $p < 0.01$) because cognitive impairment caused by anxiety and depression, directly impairs the capacity to concentrate and process information (Eysenck et al., 2007).

Mental Well-being and Attendance: It is considered as a moderate negative relationship between the score of depression and school attendance with depressive symptoms being a predictive of high level of absenteeism, based on the conclusions made by the research (Kearney, 2008) on adolescent school attendance.

Mental Well-being and Motivation: in the multiple regression analysis, depression will be likely to be the biggest factor in predicting a lack of academic motivation because it has been found to be associated with anhedonia, low self-efficacy, and the withdrawal of goal-directed behaviors (Beck, 1979).

Gender Differences: Female students would report higher anxiety/stress levels than male students, which is also in line with Pakistani secondary school studies by Ahmad et al. (2014) who found females subject to the dual pressure of academic and domestic demands typical of conservative Pakistani family systems.

Reliability: Cronbachs alpha of 0.80 or better is anticipated to be reached with the entire 25 item scale which will affirm sufficient internal consistency to undertake research and practical screening applications.

9. Conclusion

This research is timely and a necessary empirical study of the implications of mental well-being on academic performance of secondary school students in Gujrat district, Pakistan. The study aims to produce strong, locally specific evidence of a relationship that in an empirical sense has not been established at the secondary educational level by using a quantitative descriptive survey design, by establishing a systematic study of the psychological aspects of the stressor, anxiety, and depression as well as academic measures of grades, concentration, attendance, and motivation.

The hypothesized hypotheses: a large negative correlation between psychological distress and academic performance, and the most significant influence of anxiety and depression on

concentration and motivation, make the necessity of institutionalizing mental health as part of the quality of education in Pakistani state secondary schools. The educational infrastructure of the Gujrat district (as well as most other similar district-level school systems in Punjab) contains the resources (in the form of the counseling staff, psychological tests and procedures, and institutional procedures) to identify and refer students with mental health issues to the system. This study offers the evidence base to start discussing these systemic gaps.

The research recognizes some fundamental weaknesses. Being a cross-sectional, self-report survey, it could not provide the causal directionality on mental well-being vis-a-vis academic achievement as the connection could be bidirectional as well where the poor academic performance can be one of the causes of the increasing anxiety and depression in adolescents. The social desirability effect and cultural stigma in regard to mental health disclosure in Pakistan might also inject response bias regardless of the anonymity in the study. Although the sample was representative of the available population of the public schools in Gujrat, it might not be applicable to other contexts such as private schools and the rural schools in the entire district.

Future studies are encouraged to include longitudinal designs that can stem the variations in the mental well-being and academic performance of the students along two year-period boychild studies, use mixed methods designs as a way to understand the qualitative aspects of the psychological experience of students, and test the moderating effect of familial support, teacher-student relationships, and quality of school environments on the relationship between mental well-being and achievement. Comparison of both public and private secondary schools in Gujrat would shed more light on the role of institutional resources and socioeconomic factors in modifying this relationship.

In conclusion, mental health promotion in secondary education is not an auxiliary education issue but a baseline precursor of academic success, student retention, and overall psychological bulwark throughout a lifespan. The research is an essential step in prioritizing adolescent mental health as a topic of educational research and education policy in Gujrat and Pakistani educational system at large.

10. Recommendations

Based on the conceptual framework, presumed findings, and the appropriate literature, the following recommendations are evidence-based and need to be addressed to key stakeholders:

To District Education Authorities (Gujrat)

- Require the presence of at least one trained school counselor in all public secondary schools in the Gujrat district to offer convenient mental health care, academic advice as well as early detection of the students with signs of psychological anguish.
- Establish and involve a district-wide Student Mental Health Policy to develop procedures to carry out mental health screening, referral avenues and crisis response avenues in the secondary schools.
- Introduce mental health literacy into the secondary school curriculum as a compulsory topic or part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

To the School Administrators and Headteachers.

- Form a School Mental Health Committee composed of the headteacher, class teachers and other counseling staff present and their role to watch the well-being of the students, to organize awareness programs and provide referrals to any external mental health service.
- Provide physically safe, non-stigmatizing, school-based care through training of all personnel in basic mental health first aid and development in adolescent psychology so that students can feel comfortable reporting their mental health concerns.
- Inventory and justify examination times, in-house evaluations, and homework responsibilities in order to limit the unwarranted and unproportional academic pressures, specifically during the peak examination preparation times.

For Teachers

- Establish sensitivity to the behavioral and academic signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression in adolescent pupils such as abrupt drops in school achievement, rising absenteeism, introversion, and lack of concentration.
- Embrace supporting and differentiated classroom instruction, which minimizes competitive pressures that lead to anxiety, provides many opportunities to demonstrate learning, and provide a psychologically safe learning environment in which academic errors are seen as learning experiences.
- Have approachable and open communication channels with students, which helps them communicate academic and personal issues and immediately initiate referrals of students who show continued signs of psychological distress to school leadership or counseling support.

To Parents and Community.

- Take part in parent education programs set up in schools where awareness about mental health among adolescents, the academic impact of psychological distress, and the significance of lessening pressure to achieve excessive performance are created.
- Proactively address academic challenges of children by establishing a home environment that is characterized by emotional support, candid communication, realistic expectations in academic achievement, instead of increased performance anxiety.

For Future Researchers

- Carry out longitudinal studies to identify the mental health and academic projections of secondary school students in Grades 9 and 10 - and beyond - to prove the causal and developmental relationship.
- Use mixed-method designs, which add qualitative interviews and focus group discussions to Likert-scale survey, to gain a more detailed understanding of the lived experiences of mentally distressed secondary school students in Gujrat.
- Expand the geographic area of this study to rural secondary schools in Gujrat district and comparative studies with students attending the urban private schools to test the moderating role of socioeconomic and institutional factors on the role of mental well-being and its association with academic achievement.

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