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Mental Wellbeing of Secondary School Students During Proximity of Examination

1Dr. Rekha Rani

1Assistant Professor

1Dr.B.R.Ambedkar University,Agra

ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to examine the level of mental well-being among secondary school students during proximity of examinations. The students' mental well being was tested before three months and again before one month of exams. Moreover students were tested on mental well being as per their respective boards of examination. Mental well being of students attended coaching classes and those who preferred self study was also compared. A representative sample of 180 students was selected from 10th and 12th class of secondary schools in Aligarh district. The data were collected by administering Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al 2007). The analysis of the data was carried out by employing 't' test and analysis of variance. The findings of the study revealed that students' level of mental well being was higher one month before the board exams as compared to their mental well being three months before. The study also reported significant difference in the level of mental well being of students belonging to different boards of examination. Students of CBSE board have lower level of mental well being than students belonging to other boards i.e. AMU board & UP board, UP board students' level of mental well being was highest than the mental well being of CBSE and AMU board students. The findings of the present study further revealed that students who preferred self study were found to have better mental well being than their counterparts who attended coaching classes.

Keywords: Mental Well-being, Secondary School Students.

INTRODUCTION

Generally the well being of an individual is that state of existence which is characterized by sound health, happiness, healthy relationship and prosperity in different areas of work. It incorporates both health of mind (mental health) and health of body (physical health). Wellbeing covers two perspectives; firstly, the subjective experience of happiness and life satisfaction (the hedonic perspective) and secondly, positive psychological functioning, good relationships with others and self-realisation (the eudaimonic perspective) (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Stewart-Brown, & Janmohamed, 2008). Mental well being is an integral part of overall general wellbeing of an individual. A mentally well person is one who creates balance between relationships, academics, work and community despite of the hardships he/she faces in life. Thus, mental well being is simply how we think & comprehend, handle & manage our emotions, how we respond to life's ups and downs, how we react, cope up with difficult situations, and take actions to deal them.

In the modern competitive world, the fast changing scenario is creating variety of opportunities as well as challenges for human existence. The young generation is setting new parameters for success across the globe, on one hand they are expanding their horizons to explore in every zone for their outer growth however their integral part of internal growth i.e. mental wellness has been neglected consciously or unconsciously. In developing democracy like India much socio-economic progress depends upon the healthy adjustment of our youth but unfortunately mental health and wellbeing are by far one of the most neglected areas in our country. According to The World Health Organisation, India has the highest number of teenage suicide rates globally. A recent National Mental Health survey reported that approximately 150 million people in our country need care for their mental health condition. The same survey also discovered that between 70 and 92 percent of these cases failed to receive due attention and timely treatment. According to WHO, suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds globally. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in its 2019 data made a shocking revelation that in India, 23.3% students (32,427) at Secondary level and 14% (19,508) at Hr. Secondary level are suicide victims. One student commits suicide every hour in India. Failure in examinations is one of the major reasons led to suicides by students (25% in 2016, 26% in 2018). The problems related to mental wellness have become so significant in current scenario that immediate attention is required to study them in a wider perspective. The findings of various research studies

have highlighted financial hardship, physical illness (lack of quality health care), lack of education/skill, failure in examination, lack of basic resources, heightened anxiety, depression, inability to provide protection for self and for one's family, emotional disturbance and unfulfilled desires in life to be major factors that affect mental well being and leading cause of mental illness and suicide among people in general.

Adolescent students often represent a society's investment in its future. Therefore, issues surrounding mental wellness are increasingly being investigated upon the student population. Recently, there has been a growing awareness about the problem of student's mental health in India. The mental well being of young adolescent boys and girls studying in secondary schools may be the best representation of such a study. There is increasing research evidence that positive mental wellbeing leads, on an individual level, to a more flourishing school, work and home life and this, in turn, brings benefits for the wider community as a whole (Hasumi et al., 2012 ; Johal & Pooja, 2016; Pathak et al., 2011). Improved psychological wellbeing is also associated with physical health benefits (e.g., Danner, Snowden & Friesen, 2001). Research evidence indicates that the single most consistent predictor of adolescent mental health and wellbeing is the quality of relationship the young people have with their parents. (Resnick et al. ,1997).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that action to improve mental wellbeing can have very high economic and social returns (Foresight, 2008). Mental health and well-being during adolescence are strongly influenced by life experiences and relationships. Healthy parent-child relationships, family connectedness, proper communication, family structure, social support, supportive peers are certain key protective which help young people to adjust to new situations and cope with stressful life events (WHO, 2016).

By reviewing the related literature the investigator opined that mental health of adolescents is determined by a number of factors such as physical, social, emotional, cultural, biological, psychological, economic, spiritual and academic. The research also depicts that among various academic factors affecting mental wellness of adolescent students, one of the most prominent factors is pressure to perform well in test or examination, students' mental health had significant negative correlation with their academic stress while a significant positive correlation with academic achievement (Agarwal, 2011; Pai,M.A; Neelakandan and Raju, R., 2018, Revina Ann Mary et al., 2014). Puskar and Bernardo (2007) stated that the mental health problems can affect the school performance and academic achievement. When mental health problems are not

recognized, students may be unable to reach their academic potential. Thus, there is an urgent need to understand the pattern of those factors affecting mental well being of young students. This led the investigator to examine the level of mental well-being among secondary school students during proximity of examinations.

Objective of the study

- To examine the level of mental well-being among secondary school students during proximity (before three months & one month) of examinations.
- To compare students on mental well being as per their respective boards of examination.
- To test mental well being of students attending coaching alike self studying students.

Operational Definition

In the present study Mental well being is considered as that dynamic state of an individual which enables him to think clearly, work productively and creatively, promote self acceptance, build strong and positive relationships with others, develop feelings of optimism, cheerfulness and relaxation and achieve a sense of purpose in society.

Method

Sample & Data Collection

A representative sample of 180 students was selected from 10th and 12th class of secondary schools in Aligarh district. Students were chosen randomly from the schools of different boards (CBSE Board = 64, AMU Board = 76, UP Board = 40) and tested twice on mental well being i.e. before three months and one month before their Board exams. These students were further divided into two groups i.e one group for those who attended coaching (110) and another who preferred self study (70).

Tools

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al 2007) was used to collect the data. This is a self-report scale which focuses entirely on positive aspects of mental health. It is a 5-point Likert scale and consists of 14 items, with responses ranging from 'none of the time' through to 'all of the time'. The reliability of the scale is 0.83.

Data Processing

The data were analyzed by employing statistical measures of central tendency, 't' test and analysis of variance to compare different groups of students on mental well being. The results are presented in the tables:

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Comparison of Students' Mental Well-being before Board Exams

	Mental Well Being (Three months before Board Exams)	Mental Well Being (One month before Board Exams)
No. of Students:	180	180
Mean Score:	48.66	52.78
Standard deviations:	7.46	6.24
Standard errors of means:	.56	.46
Difference between means		4.12
Correlation between mental well being scores (Three months & One month before Board Exams)		.36
Calculated 't' value		7.11 (Significant at .01 level)

The above table depicts the score of students on mental well being indicating that students' mental well being was better one month before Board Exams on the contrary three months before their level of mental well being was low. The mean scores (52.78) on mental well being scale before one month of exam was higher than mean score (48.66) before three months of Board exams. The difference between these two mean scores was found significant at .01 level as indicated by the calculated 't' value (7.11).

The above result may be due to the psychological pressure of exams. When students start preparation for exams they may feel burdened and become anxious regarding course revision, pattern of exams or other related issues while as they move forward in their preparation process their confidence level boosted which stabilize their anxiety. The investigator found no such research study to support the above findings however the studies conducted by Pai, M.A; Neelakandan and Raju, R., 2018, and Revina Ann Mary et al., 2014 clearly reported that academic stress and anxiety lower the level of mental health.

Table 2: Comparison of Students' Mental Well-being with respect to type of Examination Boards

	CBSE Board	AMU Board	UP Board	Total
No. of Students:	64	76	40	180
Mean Score:	45.58	50.33	50.43	48.66
Standard deviations:	6.89	7.90	5.84	7.46
Standard errors of means:	.862	.907	.925	.556

Summary: Analysis of Variance

Source of Variation	df	Sums of Squares	Mean Square	F Value
Between Groups	2	944.167	472.084	9.27 (Significant at.01 level)
Within Groups	177	9018.161	50.950	
Total	179	9962.328		

The results presented in the above tables describe mean scores of students on mental wellbeing with respect to different boards of examination i.e. CBSE, AMU and UP boards. The results further illustrate that students appearing in CBSE board exam have lower level of mental well being than their counterparts in other boards i.e. AMU board & UP board, The UP board students' level of mental well being was highest than the other two board students' mental well being. The table further indicates the significance of difference among these three mean scores and found the 'F' value significant at .01 level depicting that mental wellness of UP Board students is significantly higher than mental well being of AMU and CBSE Board students. These findings may be due to the differences in the curriculum, teaching methods, pattern of exams and evaluation in different examination boards. The investigator found not a single study in review of related literature to corroborate with the present findings.

Table 3: Comparison of Students attending coaching & self studying on Mental Well-being

	Mental Well Being (Attending Coaching)	Mental Well Being (Self Studying)
No. of Students:	110	70
Mean Score:	47.14	51.06
Standard deviations:	7.44	6.89
Standard errors of means:	.71	.82s
Difference between means		3.92
Calculated 't' value		3.54 (Significant at .01 level)

Table 3 shows the comparison of students attending coaching vs. self studying students on mental well being. The results presented in the above table depict that the mean score (51.06) of students carrying out self study was higher than the mean score of those attending coaching (47.14). The significance of difference between the mean scores of students attending coaching classes and studying on their own was found significant at .01 level ($t = 3.54$). These findings indicate that students who preferred self study for exams, they were mentally well and relaxed as compare to those who opted coaching classes. This may be due to competition and pressure of performance created by coaching centers. This finding is supported by Mariya (2019) who published an article in 'The New Indian Express' stating that children undergoing severe stress and anxiety as a result of tuition.

Conclusion & Suggestions

The analysis of findings of the present study depicts that pressure of examination before its commencement or anxiety related to tests or exams is natural which becomes volatile gradually as students prepare themselves for it however coverage of content in exams, nature of exams, pattern of question paper, evaluation & grading system in different boards may affect the level of anxiety among students which in turn influence their mental well being. Moreover, the trend of coaching culture is increasing day by day, more than 85% students attend coaching classes parallel to formal education which obstructs students' extra-curricular activities, play time and limits their friend circle consequently making children anxious and stressful. The results of this study highlight the importance of comprehensive and common curriculum, common pattern of exams and grading system among all the examination boards at secondary school level.

Further, the investigator recommends that the parents should not cultivate demands and expectations to their children rather make them able to identify their interests and capabilities to explore career options. The school teachers should provide a positive class environment and school climate where the sense of belongingness and association can capitalize students' strengths and prepare them to compensate for failures in one area by successes in others. The school counselors should foster mental well being of students in daily life so that they can equip themselves to cope up with mental, emotional or academic pressures and challenges of life.

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