



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH STUDIES ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS PREPARING FOR COMPETITIVE ENTRANCE EXAMS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This critical literature review aims to investigate the mental health of adolescents preparing for competitive entrance exams in India, focusing on depression, anxiety, and stress levels. The purpose is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the emotional well-being of this vulnerable population and inform policymakers, educators, and parents about the need for holistic support systems.

In this critical literature review, the researcher has analyzed and incorporated insights from various studies to present a comprehensive overview of the topic.

KEYWORDS: Mental health, competitive entrance exams, depression, anxiety, academic stress

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of education in India, competitive entrance examinations such as the joint entrance examination (JEE) for admissions to NITs and IITs or the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admissions to medical colleges represent a defining aspect of the academic journey for countless adolescents. These rigorous assessments, gateways to prestigious institutions and promising careers, often manifest as both aspirations and apprehensions in the lives of young individuals. However, the intense competition and unrelenting pressure associated with these examinations are recognized sources of substantial stress, anxiety, and depression.

This study seeks to delve in to the mental health aspect of adolescents undergoing the rigorous preparations for these common entrance exams. Specifically, it aims to investigate the levels of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by these adolescents and draw comparisons between different groups based on factors such as gender, socio-economic background, and preparation duration and geographic region of residence.

Depression is a mood disorder which cause a persistent feeling of sadness, loss of interest which can also leads to a feeling of worthlessness. Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by difficult situations an individual undergoes. Whereas anxiety is intense and persistent fear that interrupts everyday functioning.

It may result fast heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating and feeling tired may occur.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the mental health challenges faced by a vulnerable segment of the population and inform policy makers, educators, and parents about the need for holistic support systems and by understanding the psychological toll of exam preparation, we can work towards fostering a more balanced and healthier academic environment for adolescents in the country.

Background: India's educational system is renowned for its rigorous nature and the extraordinary competition that it fosters, particularly in the field of competitive entrance examinations. These examinations, encompassing an array of disciplines from engineering and medicine to management and arts, are perceived as the threshold to a future loaded with opportunities. While success in these assessments holds the promise of a bright and fulfilling future, the journey toward that success is often characterized by a considerable degree of stress and anxiety.

The challenges and complexities that adolescents encounter during their exam preparations are further aggravated by the sheer magnitude of competition. The psychological impact of this phenomenon cannot be underestimated, and recent years have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of students grappling with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Recognizing



the critical significance of addressing these issues, this research aims to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the mental health challenges faced by adolescents in the specific context of competitive entrance exams in India.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khalid S. Al-Gelban, Hasan S al-Amri, and Ossama A Mostafa conducted a study on Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety and Stress as measured by DASS-42 among secondary school girls in Abha, Saudi Arabia (2009) [1]. Out of more than 500 girls recruited in their study, 3 out of every 4 girls had the symptoms of at least one of the three disorders; One out of every two had at least two disorders, The prevalence of symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress was respectively 41.5%, 66.2% and 52.5%. Majority of students showed symptoms of intensity mild to moderate. The researchers found that there is no significant association between the girls' sociodemographic characteristics and the scores of Depression, anxiety and stress.

Nirmal Verma, Meeta Jain and Preetam Roy (2014) [2] studied Assessment of Magnitude and grades of Depression among adolescents in Raipur City, India. The study highlighted the prevalence of depression among adolescent school students and focused on various social factors that may have an association with depression. Out of about 300 students included in the study, 40% found mildly depressed, and 19% had major depression. Depression was found more in girls (59.5%), compared to boys(56.2%). Statistically significant factors examined for association with depression were working mothers, students staying away from home, poor relationship with family and self or parental dissatisfaction with academic achievements. The researchers came to a conclusion that only happy and confident adolescents are likely to grow into adults who can contribute to the building of a prosperous nation.

A study was conducted by Surabhi Chauhan, Panna Lal and Harsavardhan Nayak (2014) [3] on Prevalence of depression among school children aged 15 years and above in a public school in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. In 360 students 209 were boys and 151 were girls. The overall prevalence of depression was observed to be 38%. About three fourth of the subjects had mild depression, 23% had moderate and only one found to had severe depression. Among the boys 35% were depressed but among girls this rate was found to be nearly 42%. The study also showed that a considerable number of adolescents were experiencing turmoil during this phase leading to poor academic performance and coping methods and suicidal ideations

Man Mohan Singh, Madhu Gupta and Sandeep Grover (2017) [4] conducted a study on Prevalence and factors associated with depression among school going adolescents in Chandigarh, North India. This study showed that 40% of school going adolescents had depressive disorders. Being in a government school, studying in class 10 or 12, residing in rural areas, physical abuse by elders in the family, smoking and drinking by parents, spending less time in studies not participating in co-curricular activities and

having a boy or girl friend are identified as significant associated factors.

Shailendra Kumar Mishra, Mona Srivastava, Narendra K Tiwary and Abhinit Kumar (2018) [5] studied Prevalence of depression and anxiety among children in rural and suburban areas of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. This cross-sectional study was conducted on 200 participants in the age group of 11 – 18 years, of which 55.5% were boys and 44.5% were girls. Researchers could conclude that 15% suffered from anxiety disorder and 14.5% percent suffered from depression. They couldn't find any significant difference between in the prevalence of depression or anxiety in students from rural and suburban areas. Depression was found more in students of classes 9-12, whereas anxiety was more prevalent in students of lower classes. Depression was found to be more prevalent in students from joint families. Depression and anxiety were found more in middle adolescents, girls and in children belonging to lower middle socioeconomic groups. This study provided useful information for early management of psychiatric disorders present in the community and prevent their development into chronic disorders.

The studies conducted by Ashish Shrivastava and Done Rajan (2018) [6] on Assessment of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Students Preparing for Competitive Exams provided a deeper understanding on depression, anxiety, stress. The study was also to identify their social aspects, the various responsible factors and their ill effects on health and daily life. Out of the 400 participants, 19.5% were suffering from mild depression, 20.3% in moderate depression and 8.8% were found to be severely depressed. The anxiety was found to be mild in 21.8%, moderate in 17.8% and severe in 27.3% of the participants. The stress levels were found to be mild in 19%, moderate in 14.8% and severe in 7.5%.

K Jayashree, P Prasanna Mithra, M K C Nair, and Keshava Pai (2018) [7] studied Depression and anxiety disorders in school going adolescents in an urban area of south India. The researchers found that coexisting anxiety and female gender are significantly associated with depression. Increasing age, socioeconomic factors and parental education are other factors influencing depression and anxiety. Out of the 201 participants in the age group 15-18 years 67.2% were from urban areas and the rest were residing in rural areas. 80% were from nuclear family, 12% from extended and 8% from joint families. They found that 40.7% were depressed and the level of depression were found to be higher in girls. 54.7% were found to be anxious with the level of anxiety higher in girls.

A study was conducted by by Neeti Pachole, Aditya Thakur, et al. (2023) [8] to Explore Patterns and Factors of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among students preparing for competitive exams in central India. Out of the 400 students participated, 65.8% were below 18 years of age. 42.7% of the participants were girls. 20.3% were suffering from moderate and 8.8% from severe depression. 17.8% were moderately anxious and 27.3% were severely



anxious. 14.8% had moderate and 12% had severe stress. The study highlighted common factors leading to depression anxiety and stress among students. Stress was found to be significant in females and in students having more than two siblings. Students having non supportive teachers were found to be significantly anxious. Significant depression were found in students having non supportive parents and those who sleep for less than 6 hours and study less than 2 hours on a day.

3. CONCLUSION

This critical literature review illuminates the intricate landscape of the mental health challenges encountered by adolescents preparing for competitive exams in India. By analyzing the findings from various studies, it illuminates the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress in this vulnerable population. The research design, encompassing factors like socio-economic status, preparation duration, and regional disparities, contributes to a nuanced understanding. The study underscores the need for holistic support systems, informing policymakers, educators, and parents about the imperative to foster a balanced and healthier academic environment. This research adds original insights, emphasizing the importance of addressing mental well-being to ensure the overall development of adolescents in the context of rigorous exam preparations.

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