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COUNSELLING EVOLUTION IN INDIA: NEP 2020 AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

This review paper examines the evolution of mental health counselling in Indian schools, tracing its roots from traditional, community-centred guidance to the structured mental health services increasingly recognised today. It synthesises literature on school-based mental health support, emphasising the importance of early intervention and its impact on academic and emotional well-being. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 serves as a key catalyst, promoting a learner-centric model that integrates mental health services within schools. The paper highlights the critical role of teachers in recognising distress and fostering socio-emotional skills in their students. The paper will discuss the crucial role of teachers in identifying mental health concerns and promoting socio-emotional development, highlighting their significance in a culturally diverse educational environment. By addressing these key elements, the paper offers a comprehensive outlook on the future of school counselling in India, arguing that NEP 2020 serves as a roadmap for advancing the counselling profession and promoting resilience and emotional health among adolescents in an increasingly complex society.

KEYWORDS: *Counselling, Mental health, NEP 2020, Ancient Indian Practices, Socio-Emotional Development.*

India has a rich history of mental health approaches that dates back thousands of years. Ancient Indian texts, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, offer valuable insights into understanding the human mind and its well-being. This paper examines the evolution of mental health counselling in Indian schools, from its roots in traditional, community-centred guidance to its current structured form as a recognised discipline. It synthesises literature on school-based mental health support and emphasises the importance of early intervention and its impact on academic and emotional well-being.

The ancient Indian approach to mental health emphasised the concept of "swasthya", which refers to a state of holistic well-being. This perspective, which links mental health with physical well-being and the balance of body, mind, and soul, aligns with the holistic approach of NEP 2020 and modern psychotherapy.

In today's society, mental health has gained increasing recognition and importance. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of understanding and addressing mental health issues. Society has started to recognise the significant impact of mental health on individuals' overall well-being.

One of the key aspects of this paper is the significance of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The introduction of this policy acknowledges the importance of holistic well-being, with a particular focus on the physical and mental health of students. The policy is to link the modern articulation of academic goals while underscoring the importance of integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary perspectives.

By exploring the historical roots of mental health practices in India, we can gain valuable insights into the traditional beliefs and practices related to mental well-being. The ancient Vedas, particularly the Rig Veda and Yajur Veda, consider the mind as a functional element of the soul (ATMAN). In these scriptures, there are prayers through mantras for cultivating noble thoughts and preventing mental pain, including depression. The Vedas emphasise that thoughts influence facial appearance and can be purified through mantras, thereby positively influencing instincts. The text underscores the importance of noble thoughts for overall well-being and highlights the healing power of the mind.

Modern India's call to integrate cultural heritage into psychotherapy reflects a recognition that mental well-being extends beyond mere emotional balance. An ancient philosophy echoes the ideals of holistic living, which encompasses living a fulfilling and creative life. Yoga, the Vedas, the Upanishads, and Buddhism emphasise self-exploration and self-discovery, urging individuals to learn more about themselves. They emphasise the importance of self-reflection and introspection as a means of gaining clarity about one's thoughts and emotions. These texts also offer guidance on various practices, such as meditation, mindfulness, and yoga, that can help individuals achieve greater self-awareness and inner peace. Additionally, the Upanishads discuss multiple levels of consciousness, psychic states, mental faculties, and the powers of the mind, offering early perspectives on psychopathology through the concepts of the Trigunas and Tridoshas.

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The integration of Ayurveda, dating back to the 6th century B.C., further enriches this understanding. Ayurveda categorises human issues, linking mental health intricately to the balance of gunnas. Its holistic paradigm, incorporating nutrition, environment, and psychological well-being, addresses mental health as a component of overall well-being.

In the realm of growing up, Indian philosophy recognises the immense potential within us, encompassing aspects such as mental health, awareness, emotions, motivation, perception, and identity. Understanding these insights can be both a challenge and an opportunity for us. The rich ideas from ancient Indian psychological research offer valuable perspectives that, if explored and applied, can significantly reshape our understanding of psychology and contribute to our overall well-being.

With this view, Counselling, deeply rooted in various cultures, has been a timeless practice. Elders across civilisations have not only set cultural norms but have also played a crucial role in counselling younger generations to adhere to these norms. In the Indian context, imparting counselling in the form of advice and guidance is considered a fundamental and sacred duty, especially by parents and teachers. The age-old saying, “Mata, Pita, Guru, Deivam” (Mother, Father, Teacher, God), designates key agents of counselling and establishes a hierarchy for who should provide counselling at different life stages.

Indian epics vividly portray instances of counselling, where elders willingly assumed the role of counsellors, and the youth sought counselling with eagerness. At the same time, some might dismiss these interactions as mere advice-giving; a closer look reveals the presence of scientific practices and ethical considerations equivalent to those found in modern counselling techniques.

One example from the Bhagavad Gita is where Lord Krishna imparts counselling to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The Gita, serving as an excellent model of psychotherapy through its 18 chapters, delves into various aspects of yoga, psychology, and philosophy. It uniquely integrates psychotherapeutic methods like cognitive restructuring with deep insights into self-awareness, the yoga of action, understanding of renunciation and action, the journey of meditation, knowledge of the absolute and eternal, the yogic perspective, the yoga of devotion, an in-depth knowledge of the three Gunas, and the wisdom of renunciation and liberation. The culmination of these teachings leads to the transformative journey of Arjuna's personality.

In the modern era, where cognitive restructuring is a prominent goal of psychotherapy, the Bhagavad Gita stands as a timeless source that has significantly contributed to accomplishing this objective. Its teachings continue to provide deep insights into psychotherapeutic principles, making it a valuable and enduring guide for those on the path of self-discovery and mental well-being.

Mental Health and Policy Perspectives in India

The evolution of counselling in India reflects a historical journey marked by fluctuations in recognition and interest. The acknowledgement of counselling's significance dates back to 1938, when the Acharya Narendra Dev Committee emphasised its pivotal role in education. During that era, guidance and counselling were regarded as emerging forces crucial to the education system, establishing an initial foundation for their importance.

However, this enthusiasm declined in the subsequent decades, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, as evidenced by a decrease in research literature on the subject. Despite this period of reduced interest, recent times have seen a notable resurgence in demand for counselling services at the national level.

In 2005, the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) played a crucial role in this resurgence by identifying counselling as an essential service in the national framework curriculum. This renewed emphasis on counselling has been particularly pronounced in the school sector, signifying a contemporary recognition of its vital role in shaping the educational landscape. A pivotal moment in recognising the essential role of counselling in the academic landscape occurred during the 2001 National Conference of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). At this conference, a resolution was passed, making it mandatory for all CBSE-affiliated schools to have trained school counsellors. This marked a significant shift, indicating a renewed recognition of the importance of counselling. This emphasis reinforces its pivotal role in shaping the educational framework and effectively addressing the evolving needs of students in contemporary times.

Even under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, counselling has gained recognition as an essential component in the educational landscape. NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on fostering the holistic well-being of students, acknowledging that counselling plays a crucial role in addressing their diverse needs, promoting mental health, and guiding them towards comprehensive personal and academic development. This recognition positions counselling as an integral aspect of the educational framework, ensuring a student-centric approach that goes beyond traditional academic considerations.

Education policies must focus on mental health, since physical health, which is characterised by the absence of diseases, is accompanied by mental and social well-being, which entails successfully fulfilling social duties. An individual in good health contributes positively to themselves, society, and the nation, while an individual who is unhealthy may have difficulty handling responsibilities, which negatively impacts their overall well-being. A psychologically healthy individual experiences joy, builds positive relationships, and contributes positively to the community, whereas mental illnesses can negatively impact happiness and interpersonal relationships.

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As psycho-social stress increases, especially in children, serious concerns are raised. This stress not only influences the mental well-being of individuals but also poses challenges for parents, caregivers, and teachers. The potential impact on their ability to provide support and maintain positive engagement becomes a critical consideration. Integrating mental health practices rooted in cultural heritage and contemporary understanding is essential to addressing these evolving challenges comprehensively. The promotion, protection, and restoration of mental health, as vital concerns, require a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of cultural traditions, guidance systems, and psychological well-being.

For this, we need to consider a comprehensive health model that integrates physical, mental, and social domains, emphasising their dynamic interplay. Mental health, as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), reflects a state of well-being that enables individuals to navigate life's challenges, contribute productively, and maintain positive connections. It involves adaptability, self-management, and a sense of community contribution. It is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, with diverse definitions encompassing its nature. It can be perceived as the absence of disease, the optimal functioning of the organism, or a state of equilibrium within oneself and in relation to the physical and social environment (Sartorius, 2002). The Society for Health Education and Promotion Specialists (SHEPS, 1997) proposes that mental health goes beyond the mere absence of illness, involving positive feelings towards oneself and others, a sense of joy, and love. Influenced by biological, social, psychological, and environmental factors, mental health, similar to mental illness, plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals think, feel, cope, and manage challenges (MHF, 2008).

Emotional and mental well-being are fundamental components of overall human flourishing, often intertwined in various contexts. It plays a vital role in holistic wellness, shaping one's perception of life, interpersonal relationships, and overall health. In the face of life's challenges, it involves cultivating positive emotions, thoughts, and adaptability. The recognition of good mental health is essential for holistic well-being, embracing not only a positive emotional state but also the effective functioning of an individual. According to Huppert (2009), well-being encompasses positive emotions, growth, control, purpose, and meaningful relationships. This state of well-being has been correlated with success across various life domains, including productivity, learning, creativity, prosocial behaviours, and nurturing positive relationships (Diener, 2012; Huppert, 2013; Oishi et al., 2007).

The intricate interplay of emotional, social, spiritual, physical, and intellectual facets contributes to the overarching construct of well-being. In addition to these dimensions, spiritual well-being introduces another layer, encompassing a connection to a higher purpose, a sense of meaning, or feelings of serenity. According to the World Health Organisation, well-being encompasses psychological, physical, emotional, and social aspects, enabling individuals to function optimally in these areas. Well-being is envisioned as a key element of NEP 2020, empowering individuals to achieve their potential, contribute meaningfully to their communities, and foster positive relationships.

Well-being encompasses mental, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Positive feelings, curiosity, community engagement, and a sense of happiness and contentment characterise individuals experiencing a positive life trajectory. The multifaceted understanding of well-being emphasises its significance in promoting personal growth, resilience, and constructive contributions to society, aligning with the holistic vision set forth by NEP 2020.

Importance of Mental Health Counselling Programmes and Interventions in Schools

The need for structured mental health support in schools is not merely theoretical; a growing body of evidence validates it. A 2022 national survey conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) revealed that a significant number of students are struggling with mental health challenges. The findings indicated that a staggering 81% of students surveyed reported experiencing anxiety, with many also citing issues such as mood swings, low self-confidence, and a sense of loneliness. This data underscores the critical importance of proactive interventions and professional support.

In alignment with these findings, the **National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023** reinforces the importance of counselling by designating it as a dedicated cross-cutting theme within the curriculum. It views guidance and counselling as an essential process for supporting the learning and maturation of students, rather than a standalone or separate part of the curriculum. The NCFSE defines guidance as assisting individuals in finding direction and making informed decisions for their personal well-being. At the same time, counselling involves a more skilled and well-trained individual helping to challenge and change patterns of belief and behaviour. By integrating these services, the NCFSE provides a clear mandate for schools to move beyond academics and focus on the overall development of students.

In this context, schools have a crucial role in promoting the mental health and well-being of their students. This goes beyond the mere presence of a counsellor. It involves creating a compassionate and nurturing school culture where mental well-being is valued and normalised. The principles of counselling align seamlessly with the goals of NEP 2020, which advocates for a curriculum that promotes a "wide range of skills, including 21st century skills, character building, life skills, communication, and socio-emotional skills." Schools can implement these principles through a variety of programs, including proactive interventions like workshops and peer support groups to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help, providing skill development through guided sessions, and equipping teachers with the skills to identify early signs of mental distress. This holistic approach ensures that students are not only academically successful but are also equipped with the tools necessary to navigate life's

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challenges, both inside and outside the classroom, thereby fulfilling a core promise of the NEP 2020 to ensure equitable and inclusive education for all.

Mental Health and Well-being of School Students – A Glimpse into the 2022 National Survey

In recent years, mental health has become an important concern for school-going children, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Students faced isolation, learning disruptions, uncertainty, and emotional stress. In response, the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** highlighted the importance of emotional well-being and stated that students cannot learn effectively without it. To support this vision, the **Ministry of Education** launched **Manodarpan**, a special initiative to promote mental health among students, teachers, and families.

To better understand students' mental health, the **Manodarpan Cell at NCERT** conducted a national survey between January and March 2022. The survey received responses from nearly **3.8 lakh students** studying in Classes VI to XII across **28 states and eight union territories**, representing Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, state-run, and private schools. The questionnaire asked about students' emotions, academic stress, peer pressure, relationships, self-image, and coping strategies.

The findings revealed that a large number of students are silently struggling. **81% said they felt anxious**, mainly because of studies, exams, and results. Many experienced **frequent mood swings, loneliness, tiredness, and low self-confidence**, especially in higher grades. **Girls reported more emotional stress** than boys. Around **1 in 3 students admitted to feeling pressured by peers**, and only **1 in 4 said they frequently trust others**. Although **73% were generally satisfied with school life**, satisfaction dropped as students progressed to higher classes. Most students **did not have access to professional counselling**, and instead managed their emotions by talking to friends or parents or using strategies like yoga, journaling, or self-reflection.

This survey clearly shows the urgent need for **trained counsellors in schools, structured life skills education, and regular emotional support systems**. While initiatives like Manodarpan, Sahyog, and Paricharcha are a great start, there is a long way to go. The message is simple yet powerful: **Mental health must be treated as a key part of education—for every child, in every school.**

This national survey sends a powerful message: Mental health is not a luxury—it is a necessity. Every school must make it a priority to support the emotional well-being of its students so that they can learn, grow, and thrive. Initiatives like Manodarpan, Sahyog, and Paricharcha are strong steps in the right direction—but it is the collective effort of schools, families, and communities that will truly make a difference.

Mental Health in School

Students spend a significant portion of their lives in schools, which shape their development in a wide range of areas. Schools and early education settings play a crucial role in promoting mental health among children and young people, contributing to academic and holistic development. **Mental health should be an integral part of the school curriculum, with teachers trained to identify signs of mental health issues and provide appropriate support. Mental health services should also be easily accessible to young people. Early intervention is key to preventing mental health issues from getting worse.**

Relationships with peers, social interactions, academic achievements, emotional control, and behavioural expectations are all affected by mental health. The increased awareness of mental health's influence on academic success has led to the expansion of school-based mental health interventions in high-income countries. School-based mental health initiatives encompass services or programs delivered in a school setting, providing opportunities for promotion, prevention, and support efforts (Boudreau et al., 2009; Patel et al., 2013).

Effective mental health interventions in schools adopt a "whole school approach," considering policies, ethos, environment, partnerships, and staff development, moving beyond classroom-focused activities (Kidger et al., 2009). The World Health Organisation emphasises models for mental health promotion in schools, focusing on safe environments, social and emotional learning, family and community awareness, and building capacity for emotional wellness (Wyn et al., 2000).

In the context of a "whole-school approach," the emphasis is on creating a health-promoting environment for all stakeholders, involving the entire school community, relationships with parents, students, community agencies, school ethos, and policies. The Mind Matters project by Wyn et al. (2000) underscores the significance of this approach, providing a framework for schools to identify strengths and adapt practices for continuous improvement. This highlights actions maximising mental health and well-being, contributing to a holistic development that strengthens social, physical, and economic environments.

Need for counselling in school

The growing prevalence of mental health challenges among adolescents, impacting around 20% globally, with half of these issues emerging during adolescence, has sparked profound concerns. In the Indian context, psychiatric disorders affect 12.5% of children aged 0–16 years, including depression, anxiety disorders, and substance use disorders. Disturbingly, suicide has emerged as a leading cause of death among Indian adolescents, exacerbating the formidable mental health burden. Recent data highlights a troubling surge, revealing that 33% of children aged 0–5 years are diagnosed with hyperkinetic syndrome.

Compounding India's mental health landscape is the absence of a dedicated policy addressing child mental health issues. Existing

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policies emphasise the imperative for comprehensive child mental health programs, with the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) of 1982 constituting a pivotal milestone. While the NMHP aligns with the more recent Mental Health Policy of 2014 and the National Health Policy of 2015, a critical lacuna exists in recognising the pressing need for a distinct national policy specifically targeting school mental health.

School-based interventions emerge as a promising avenue for preventive and promotional mental health initiatives. Comprehensive programs within schools, leveraging teachers as facilitators, possess the potential to build competencies and resilience among children and adolescents adeptly. These programs adopt a life skills competency-building approach and an experiential framework to promote mental health, effectively addressing the mounting challenges faced by youth, including heightened instances of suicide and substance abuse. The exigency for a dedicated policy and seamless integration of programs for school mental health becomes glaringly apparent, underscoring the necessity of preventive measures and the pivotal role schools play in nurturing the mental well-being of the younger generation.

Research studies further fortify the urgency of proactive measures. A study by Kessler et al. (2005) suggests that approximately 20% of the world's adolescents grapple with mental health or behavioural problems, with 50% of these issues emerging during adolescence. In India, a prevalence rate of 12.5% for psychiatric disorders among children aged 0–16 years is reported by Srinata et al. (2005). The National Mental Health Survey indicates a 7.3% prevalence of psychiatric illnesses in adolescents aged 13–17 years in India (GOI, 2016). This data emphasises the critical need for targeted interventions and policy formulations to address the burgeoning mental health crisis among school-going children and adolescents.

The critical role of counselling in schools aligns seamlessly with the visionary framework laid out by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 emphasises a holistic approach to education, recognising the significance of mental well-being alongside academic excellence. The policy underscores the importance of mental health support and counselling services in educational institutions, aiming to create a learner-centric environment that nurtures the overall development of students. By integrating counselling services into the educational fabric, NEP 2020 envisions a system where students receive comprehensive guidance, addressing not only academic concerns but also fostering their emotional and social growth. This alignment with NEP 2020 reinforces the need for counselling in schools as an essential component of the broader educational strategy, ensuring that students are equipped not just academically but also emotionally resilient and prepared for the challenges of life beyond the classroom.

How can mental health counselling help in school?

In the intricate landscape of education, the imperative of integrating mental health services within schools becomes increasingly apparent. Acknowledging that a child's well-being extends beyond academic accomplishments is pivotal, making the incorporation of robust mental health services indispensable. This essay delves into the critical importance of weaving mental health services into the educational fabric, elucidating how these services contribute to the comprehensive development of students.

Holistic Development

Education surpasses the mere transmission of knowledge; it involves nurturing individuals equipped to navigate life's multifaceted challenges. Mental health services play a pivotal role in fostering holistic development by addressing the emotional, social, and psychological dimensions of a student's well-being. In the context of India, where mental health has been a neglected area, the importance of counselling and guidance emerges as crucial. Raguram et al. (1996) emphasise the urgent need for attention from government bodies and policymakers, especially in rural areas where challenges such as the unavailability of experts, low literacy rates, socio-cultural barriers, and traditional beliefs exacerbate mental health issues.

Early Intervention and Prevention

Mental health services in schools facilitate early intervention and prevention strategies, aligning seamlessly with the research-backed importance of timely support. Identifying mental health concerns at an early stage allows for proactive measures, averting the escalation of issues. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where Ahmad and Zadha (2016) emphasise the role of counselling as an essential tool in shaping a child's orientation away from negative ideas. The incorporation of counselling services becomes imperative in addressing academic problems and reducing anxiety (Baum & Fleming, 1993; Khodaei, 1997).

Enhanced Academic Performance

The indisputable interplay between mental health and academic performance finds resonance with the challenges faced by students in India. Mental health services provide a supportive framework to address these challenges, enhancing academic performance. As Bashir et al. (2016) suggest, trained mental health counsellors in schools can bring about transformative change in students' lives, employing different skills and techniques tailored to specific problems.

Crisis Intervention and Emotional Support

Schools, whether in India or elsewhere, are not immune to crises. Mental health services offer a crucial lifeline for students navigating crises, providing immediate support and fostering emotional resilience. In the Indian context, where societal pressures and cultural stigma are prevalent, counselling services within schools become a safe and confidential space for students to communicate and address overwhelming feelings.

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Reduction of stigma

The integration of mental health services into schools significantly contributes to reducing the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health concerns. This cultural shift aids in dismantling barriers to mental health conversations, aligning with the global recognition of the importance of reducing stigma and promoting mental well-being (WHO, 2001).

Alignment with National Education Policies

National education policies, such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, underscore the importance of holistic development and mental well-being, providing a visionary framework. By incorporating mental health services, schools align with the broader educational vision outlined in such policies. NEP 2020 emphasises creating learner-centric environments that prioritise not only academic excellence but also the emotional and social growth of students. The policy envisions a system where students receive comprehensive guidance, addressing not only academic concerns but also fostering their emotional and social growth. This alignment with NEP 2020 reinforces the need for counselling in schools as an essential component of the broader educational strategy, ensuring that students are equipped not just academically but also emotionally resilient and prepared for the challenges of life beyond the classroom.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the importance of mental health counselling programs and interventions.
2. To study the role of the teacher as counsellor in addition to the traditional roles.
3. To study the role and emphasis of NEP on the mental health and emotional well-being of students.

Research Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative, analytical review** of existing literature, drawing on secondary data from a variety of sources to comprehensively explore the theme of mental health and counseling. The research methodology focuses on a descriptive and thematic analysis of key documents, including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, government reports such as the Manodarpan initiatives, academic research papers, articles, and related publications. The analysis involves extracting key insights and identifying overarching themes to shed light on the intricate connections between mental health and counseling within the Indian educational context.

The Status and Emphasis on Mental Health in NEP 2020

The human mind undergoes continuous development, influenced by cultural, social, genetic, and environmental factors. Research, such as that conducted by Prakash (2020), highlights the importance of periodically assessing the psychological well-being of students in developed nations. These assessments contribute to a holistic understanding of a child's emotional needs, ensuring a proactive approach to addressing issues ranging from fundamental concerns like academic performance to more severe challenges such as domestic violence or abuse.

In India, addressing the diverse emotional needs of students becomes imperative. Psychologists and counsellors play a crucial role in identifying and addressing these needs by observing children's interactions with parents, teachers, and themselves. As emotions evolve during a child's development, from basic emotions to more complex ones like confidence, hope, guilt, and pride, teaching them coping mechanisms becomes essential. Early identification of unusual behaviours allows psychologists to guide children in expressing their emotions healthily (Prakash, R., 2020).

Recognising that educators' mental health is as vital as students' well-being, organisations must prioritise the mental health of their staff. The connection between educator well-being and student learning levels underscores the significance of fostering a supportive environment for teachers (Prakash, R., 2020).

Parents play a pivotal role in creating a conducive environment for their children. Instead of setting outright expectations, understanding the boundaries and training children to be self-reliant fosters a healthy mindset. Balancing study hours with breaks, ensuring proper sleep, and encouraging socialisation are crucial aspects. Additionally, paying close attention to even the slightest changes in children's behaviour and spending quality time with them are essential for their emotional well-being (Prakash, R., 2020).

In response to the substantial burden of mental health disorders and the shortage of mental health professionals, the Government of India initiated the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) in 1982 (Hariharan et al., 2020). This program aimed to address the pressing need for mental health services, contributing to the overall well-being of individuals in the country. The intersection of such research findings with the emphasis on mental health in NEP 2020 underscores the holistic approach needed in educational policies to address the multifaceted needs of students.

Contributions of Schools to the Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Students

In the dynamic landscape of education, schools play a pivotal role not only in academic development but also in shaping the emotional well-being of students. This write-up delves into the multifaceted contributions of schools towards fostering mental health and emotional well-being, acknowledging the significant impact on overall student development.

Identifying and Supporting Emotional Difficulties

Schools serve as essential hubs for identifying and supporting students experiencing emotional difficulties. Periodic checks on the psychological well-being of students enable early intervention and appropriate counselling. Recognising the emotional needs of children is crucial, and schools provide a platform to address a

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spectrum of issues, from fundamental concerns like academic performance to more severe problems like domestic violence or abuse (Prakash, R., 2020).

Psychological Well-being and Academic Achievement

The connection between emotional health and academic success is increasingly evident. Positive emotional and social well-being contributes not only to school achievement but also to greater satisfaction with family and peer relationships (Gutman & Feinstein, 2008). Schools, by attending to aspects such as self-esteem and social well-being, enhance the overall academic experience and contribute to the holistic development of students.

Prevention and Promotion through School-Based Interventions

Evidence suggests that school-based interventions have tremendous potential to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors for the mental health and well-being of students. The National Institute of Mental Health Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore, India, has introduced a universal, comprehensive school-based promotional mental health program called the Promotive Mental Health and Well-Being (PMHWB) program. This initiative, designed to reduce risks and enhance psychosocial competencies and resiliency in adolescents, has proven to be feasible and acceptable among teachers (Vranda, M., 2015).

Role in Academic Success and Beyond

Emphasising the critical role of schools in mental health promotion and prevention, it is noted that children with emotional problems are more vulnerable to academic failure, making them susceptible to various challenges such as child labour, substance abuse, and criminal involvement (WHO, 2021). Schools become instrumental not only in academic success but also in preparing students for challenges beyond the educational realm.

In conclusion, schools stand as crucibles for the emotional and mental development of students, offering a unique opportunity to not only address emotional difficulties but also to promote overall emotional well-being proactively. The symbiotic relationship between emotional health and academic achievement underscores the essential role schools play in nurturing competent, resilient, and emotionally healthy individuals.

To study the role of the teacher as a counsellor in addition to the traditional roles

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes that educators are at the forefront of student development and, as such, their role extends beyond academic instruction to include socio-emotional guidance. In this context, teachers wield significant influence in shaping the mental health landscape of students.

To study the role of the teacher as a counsellor in addition to the traditional roles

Teachers wield significant influence in shaping the mental health landscape of students. Their role extends beyond imparting academic knowledge; they can contribute substantially to the well-being of students by identifying early signs of mental health concerns, making referrals, and fostering awareness about mental health issues among adolescents.

Early Detection and Referral

Teachers play a crucial role in the early detection of students at risk for mental health problems. The ability to recognise signs of emotional and behavioural disorders is pivotal. Research indicates that teachers can effectively identify mental health problems in children based on given descriptions and familiar emotional and behavioural cues exhibited by students (Loades, E., and Mastroyannopoulou, K., 2010).

Promoting Socio-Emotional Skills

School-based counselling interventions led by teachers contribute significantly to mental health promotion. Teaching socio-emotional skills such as emotion management, conflict resolution, and problem-solving enhances students' socio-emotional competence and bolsters psychological resilience. Each teacher is entrusted with the responsibility to harmonise the cognitive, affective, behavioural, attitudinal, and social aspects of students (Dumitru, G., 2015).

Sensitisation to Mental Health

Recognising the significance of teachers in the timely identification of students' mental health problems, it is crucial to sensitise teachers on mental health issues. Providing necessary knowledge equips teachers to offer help and make referrals for students with potential problems (Rothi, M., Leavey, G., and Best, R., 2008). Teachers acknowledging their role as mental health promoters can empower the identity of students facing emotional difficulties (Nikolaou, E., and Markogiannakis, G., 2017).

Positive Interpersonal Relationships

The quality of teacher-student relationships and teacher-parent relationships is pivotal in promoting mental health. Positive interpersonal relationships in the school context can prevent behavioural problems and enhance students' psychosocial development. Teachers, through constructive relationships, become linchpins in school-based efforts for mental health promotion (Midford R., Wilkes D., and Young D., 2005).

In conclusion, teachers emerge as champions of student mental health, contributing significantly to the holistic development of students. Empowering teachers with knowledge, sensitising them on mental health, and emphasising their role in fostering positive relationships create an environment where students can thrive academically and emotionally.

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