



GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The sample of 260 students - 130 Boys and 130 girls of 11th standard, selected randomly from Government Secondary Schools of District Sirsa. The data for the present study was collected with the help of English version of Mental Health Battery by A.K. Singh and Sen Gupta Battery of mental health (2002) which intended to assess the status of mental health of persons in the age range of 13 to 22 years. The obtained data was analyzed by applying 't' test. Results concluded that: 1. Male students were emotionally more stable than female students at 0.01 level of significance. 2. The overall adjustment of female students was better than male students. 3. The girls showed greater sense of independence and self-determination. 4. The boys possessed greater attitudes of knowledge of themselves and evaluation of their achievements than girls. 5. The girls showed greater level of general mental ability than boys.

Keywords: Mental Health, Emotional Stability, Overall Adjustment, Autonomy, Security-Insecurity, Self Concept & Intelligence.

Introduction

The concept of mental health is as old as human beings. In recent years psychologists as well as educationists have started giving proper attention to the study of mental health. In our country relatively few works have been conducted.

Mental Health is a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life. According to Schreiber (1951), mental health means the ability of an individual to pursue reasonable, purposeful goals; use his capacities and talents fruitfully. As part of one's overall health, mental and emotional health or wellbeing is a necessary condition to enable one to manage one's life successfully. It gives him or her capacity to live life in fulfillment of what he or she wants to achieve in accordance with the available resources. This condition also provides an individual the capacity to be resilient to the stresses he meets and to respond to these



challenges without having to compromise his well-being. This also makes him productive and fruitful for himself and his community.

Health is an indispensable quality in human beings. It has been described as soul from which the finest flowers grow. A healthy individual is not only physically healthy, but is also mentally healthy. The modern concept of health extends beyond the proper functioning of the body. It includes a sound, efficient mind and controlled emotions. Mental health which today is recognized as an important aspect of one's total health status is a basic factor that contributes to the maintenance of physical health as well as social effectiveness.

Modern age is the age of competition, which results in tension and mental illness. The present era of educational scene is fast changing. Curriculum and co-curriculum offerings have tremendously expanded thereby gripping the students in adjustment problems. Good mental health is obtained and maintained by helping pupils to overcome serious difficulties. They are to be helped to understand their own potentialities, abilities, aptitudes, interests and the environmental conditions so that they can work harmoniously at an optimum level of functioning.

Mental health is important as it affects everything one does - how one sleeps, what one eats, the risk one will take and the types of things one does to relax and enjoy oneself. After reviewing the literature in this field (Jahoda, 1959; Maslow & Mittleman, 1951; Rogers, 1961; Whitaker, 1970), following six popular indices of mental health were provided:

1. Emotional Stability
2. Overall Adjustment
3. Autonomy
4. Security-Insecurity
5. Self Concept
6. Intelligence

A brief description of each index is given below:

Emotional Stability

Emotional stability is not only one of the effective determinants of the personality patterns, but it also helps to control the growth of adolescent development. The concept of stable emotional behaviour at any level is that which reflects the fruits of the normal



emotional development. An individual who is able to keep his emotions stable and under control even in extreme situations, might still be emotionally stunned or be childish in his behaviour sometimes. According to Smitson (1974) emotional stability is the process in which the personality is continuously striving for greater sense of emotional health, both intra-psychically and intra-personally. It has been emphasized that the emotionally stable individual has the capacity to withstand delay in satisfaction of needs, ability to tolerate a reasonable amount of frustration, belief in long term planning and is capable of delaying or revising his expectations in terms of demands of the situations.

Overall Adjustment

It refers to individuals achieving an overall harmonious balance between demands of various aspects of environment, such as home, health, social, emotional and school on the one hand and cognition on the other.

Autonomy

It refers to a stage of independence and self determination in thinking.

Security-Insecurity

Security-Insecurity are two factors which to a great extent determine the personality of adolescents. Security is a state of mind in which one is willing to accept the consequences of one's behaviours. All the aspects of an individual's behaviour in all areas of his life can be interpreted in terms of security (Blatz, 1967). Modern psychologists have shown that the most important factor for an adolescent's healthy development is love and affection and sense of security which is further dependent on the attitude of parents towards their children (Bossard & Boll, 1954).

The insecurity state of a person is an emotional problem, a state of being in disturbance due to the feeling of tension, strain and conflict together with other consequences of tension, e.g. nervousness. An insecure person perceives the world as a threatening jungle and most human beings as dangerous and selfish, feels rejected and isolated, anxious and hostile, is generally pessimistic and unhappy, shows signs of tension and conflict, tends to turn inward, is troubled by guilt feelings, tends to be neurotic and selfish (Maslow, 1942).

Thus emotional security prepares the ground for mental health and creative activities of the individuals by which they make adjustments to their environment



(Shankar, 1958). On the other hand, the adolescents who have a sense of insecurity in them are quiet, recessive, withdrawn, nervous and prone to anxiety. Such adolescents are generally of normal intelligence, well behaved, amenable and conscious, not giving much trouble to their parents, but they are internally perturbed and are quiet, dreadful of what might happen to them and so are full of anxiety.

Self-concept

Self-concept is an individual's perception of self, including self-esteem, body image, and ideal self. A person's self-concept is often defined by self-description such as "I am a mother, a nurse, and a volunteer." Self-concept is perhaps the basis for all motivated behavior (Franken, 1994).

Three basic components of self-concept are the ideal self, the public self, and the real self. The ideal self is the person the client would like to be, such as a good, moral, and well-respected person. Sometimes, this ideal view of how a client would like to be conflicts with the real self (how the client really thinks about oneself, such as "I try to be good and do what's right, but I'm not well respected"). This conflict can motivate a client to make changes toward becoming the ideal self. However, the view of the ideal self needs to be realistic and obtainable or the client may experience anxiety or be at risk for alterations in self-concept. Public self is what the client thinks others think of him and influences the ideal and real self. Positive self-concept and good mental health results when all three components are compatible.

Intelligence / General Mental Ability

It refers to general mental ability which helps person in thinking rationally, and in behaving purposefully in his environment.

According to National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health, every child and adolescent deserves to experience joy, have high self-esteem, have friends, acquire a sense of efficacy, and believe that he or she can succeed in life.

What constitutes good mental health is especially difficult to define at a time of great change, when a nation enters a war or when it returns again to the life of peace time. The highest degree of mental health might, therefore, be described as that which permits an individual to realize the greatest success which his capabilities will permit, with a maximum of satisfaction to himself and the social order, and a minimum of friction and tension. This implies a stage of such well being that the individual is not conscious of



unsatisfied tensions, does not show socially inadequate or objectionable behaviour and maintains himself intellectually and emotionally in any environment under any circumstances. The need for good mental health is an ideal as it serves as a guide to our objectives of health, normal-mindedness and happiness. Few persons can be found whose psychophysical processes are so perfectly attended and who are so perfectly adjusted to their environment that they can fully measure up to our ideal.

Researches carried out on mental health of adolescents include those of:

- **Tickoo et al. (1997)** who found achievement motivation as positively related to overall mental health of students.
- **Trull et al. (1997)** found that there is also a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and satisfaction with life and social interactions but a negative one with feeling of loneliness.
- **Jagdish et al. (1999)** found that home deprivation was negatively associated with self evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, autonomy, group oriented attitude, environmental mastery and overall mental health of students.
- **Samir et al. (2001)** found a moderating role of mental flexibility by showing that children were protected from negative long term consequences of traumatic events if their perception indicated mental flexibility. However, in the midst of violence mental flexibility was not associated with good psychological adjustment. Mental flexibility was in turn, determined by environmental and cognitive factors: the more intelligent and the less exposed to traumatic events children were, the higher mental flexibility they showed.
- **Sinha et al. (2004)** concluded that there is a positive relation between emotional intelligence and mental health.
- **Miri et al. (2006)** found that there is a relation between all the components of emotional intelligence and laboratory anxiety.
- **Asadi et al. (2007); Haddadi et al. (2007); Farhadi et al. (2008) and Fata et al. (2008)** found a relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health.
- **Beyrami (2008)** found that training of emotional intelligence has had a significant influence on the student's mental health.
- **Zeidner et al. (2009)** found that Emotional intelligence has a positive correlation with mental health but negative relationship with psychological disorders. People who are able to adapt their own emotions and those of others can also protect themselves against solitude. Such people have shown fewer tendencies towards depression, disappointment and suicide.

The studies reviewed so far and on the basis of the fact of present hectic tempo and strife in our society, where the people particularly students are facing stressful situations,



it is necessary that their mental health be preserved by every possible way. Maintaining the mental health of the students is considered one of the primary aims of education because without satisfactory mental health, it is impossible to develop the child's innate abilities.

Besides, children suffering from problems related to their mental health create many other problems in the school. If this situation continues, then the time will come when majority of the children will require professional treatment for coming out of their disturbances. So, it is felt that this is the right time to study the mental health of the students. The results of which will help us in developing better understanding of maintaining and preserving the mental health of adolescents.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been formulated for the present study:

- To study the mental health of adolescents (Boys and Girls) towards six areas of mental health i.e., emotional stability, adjustment, autonomy, security-insecurity, self concept and general intelligence.

Method

The sample for the present study consists of 260 students — 130 Boys and 130 girls of 11th standard, selected randomly from Government Secondary Schools of District Sirsa.

Tool used

The data for the present study was collected with the help of English version of Mental Health Battery by A.K. Singh and Sen Gupta Battery of mental health - 2002 which intends to assess the status of mental health of persons in the age range of 13 to 22 years. It is a battery of six tests and items for each part are separately written.

Statistical Treatment

The data was analyzed by applying 't' test statistics. The details of the statistical analysis are given below:

Table 1: Showing Mean and Standard-Deviation of the Sample on Six Components of Mental Health

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Stability	260	15.3385	8.67745
Overall Adjustment	260	23.8923	7.71425
Autonomy	260	11.4731	1.38220
Security-Insecurity	260	10.2654	2.28026



Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Concept	260	10.9385	3.28623
Intelligence	260	15.9808	3.99271

Table 2: Showing t-Value of Six Components of Mental Health (N=260)

Variable	Male Mean	Male SD	Female Mean	Female SD	N	t	Sig.
Emotional stability	20.47	9.68	10.20	2.03	130	11.83	.01
Overall adjustment	19.36	8.23	28.41	3.22	130	11.66	.01
Autonomy	11.29	1.44	11.65	1.29	130	2.12	.05
Security insecurity	10.13	2.36	10.39	2.19	130	.897	NS
Self concept	12.23	3.74	9.64	2.06	130	6.88	.01
Intelligence	14.91	3.46	17.04	4.20	130	4.45	.01

(Note: NS = Not Significant)

(This page features a 3D bar chart visualizing Table 2 data, comparing Male Mean, Male SD, Female Mean, and Female SD across variables 1 to 6).

Analysis and Discussion

Table 2 gives the comparison of two groups of adolescent students— male and female secondary school students to measure the mental health status on the six dimensions viz. ES, OA, AY, SI, SC, IQ.

Results reveal that male students are emotionally more stable than female students. The mean score of male students is 20.47 and it is 10.20 for female students.



The corresponding t-score is 11.83. The difference is significant at 0.01 level of significance.

In case of overall adjustment the mean score of female students (i.e. 28.41) is higher than mean score of male students (i.e. 19.36). The t-score is 11.66 and the difference is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the overall adjustment of female students is better than male students. They have greater overall balance between the demands of various aspects of environment and cognition as compared to male students.

In case of autonomy area the mean score of female students is 11.65 and for male students it is 11.29. The t-score is 2.12. Male and female students do not differ significantly in autonomy at 0.01 level of significance but they differ significantly at 0.05 level of significance. Thus the girls have greater sense of independence and self determination in thinking.

In security-Insecurity area of mental health male and female students do not differ significantly. In this area the mean score of male and female students is 10.13 and 10.39 respectively and the t-score is 0.897 which shows that the difference is not significant. Thus both groups share similar type of security and insecurity that is, they have similar sense of safety, confidence, freedom from fear, apprehension or anxiety particularly with respect to fulfilling the present or future needs.

In self concept area of mental health mean score of male students (i.e. 12.23) is higher than female students (i.e. 9.64) and the corresponding t-score is 6.88 which shows that the difference is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Thus according to the scores the boys possess greater attitudes of knowledge of themselves and evaluation of their achievements than Girls.

In the area of general intelligence the mean scores of male and female students are 14.91 and 17.04 respectively and the t-score is 4.45 which shows that the difference is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Thus the girls have greater level of general mental ability than boys.

[Diagram Matrix: Emotional Awareness Guidelines]

Acknowledge The Connection Between Past and Present.	Notice The Difference Between Feeling and Behavior.
Feelings are not bound by time... they will stay with you forever until they have your attention. How much of how you feel right now has to do with what's happening right now?	Feelings are non-verbal, living inside the body and are often times hidden from view, behavior is an outward expression—not always a clear mirror for original feelings.



Acknowledge The Connection Between Past and Present.	Notice The Difference Between Feeling and Behavior.
Open The Mental Door To Feelings.	Question Your Behavior.
If you think in terms of: positive, negative, good, bad, right, wrong — you have closed the door to perceiving a feeling and opened the door to evaluating behavior.	Does it clearly reflect a feeling or mask it? Clear reflections bring you closer to getting your needs met.
Remain Curious About What You See.	
Grief can look like "mad;" fear can look like "sad;" identifying the source of an expression requires independent thinking, patient navigation and insight.	(© 2001)

Conclusion

The results of the Table make it clear that out of six dimensions of mental health, the two groups of students i.e. male and female do not differ significantly in their mental health towards SI. It indicates that the Boys and Girls are similar in security and insecurity area of mental health. However, it has been found that boys are emotionally more stable than girls. Girls have greater overall balance between the demands of various aspects of environment and cognition. The result also shows that Girls have greater independence and self determination in thinking. Boys have greater attitudes and knowledge of themselves and evaluation of their achievements than Girls. Also the girls have greater level of general mental ability than boys.

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