

## IMPACT OF AWARENESS PROGRAM ON KNOWLEDGE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS REGARDING MENTAL DISORDERS AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

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### Abstract

*Mental disorders in children have been increasing worldwide and constitute a public health concern. The aim of this study was to assess the knowledge of primary school teachers about mental disorders in school children and evaluate the impact of an awareness program on their knowledge. A total of 200 teachers from 4 private primary schools in Jaipur City participated in this awareness program in the period between August and September 2021. The knowledge of the teachers about mental illness in school children was assessed by the investigators using interview questionnaire. The assessment included knowledge of teachers about 4 aspects; causes and risk factors of mental illness, types, manifestations, and treatment. After the program, all teachers were assessed again over their knowledge about the 4 aspects using the same questionnaire and the scoring system was similar to that of the baseline assessment. **Results:** The age of the participating teachers ranged between 25 and 59 (36.4±9.9) years, and 39% of them were males and 61% were females. Of the 200 teachers who were interviewed at schools, 99 (49.5%) were found to have good knowledge about mental disorders in school children. After the awareness program, the rates of optimal knowledge about causes, types, manifestations and treatment possibilities for mental illness among school children improved significantly from 15.5%, 62.5%, 62.5% and 21% to a high of 50%, 90%, 76% and 42% respectively ( $p < 0.001$ )*

*The awareness program had a positive impact on improving the knowledge of primary school teachers regarding mental disorders in school children. Further studies should focus on possible roles for primary school teachers in screening for mental illnesses.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge Mental illnesses School children

### INTRODUCTION

Mental health is an important aspect of health worldwide, as around 14 % of the global burden of disease is attributable to neuropsychiatric conditions. It cannot be over-emphasized that there can be no health without mental health. The best way to meet the mental health care needs of any society, globally, would be to integrate mental health into primary care. The burden of childhood mental disorders will stagger by more than 50% by the year 2021. This will put childhood mental disorders as one of the most common causes of morbidity and disability among children, making it a public health concern. Early identification and treating of children with mental illnesses would reduce the burden of these disorders and might offer early chances for treatment in addition to protecting the children from a possibility of worsening academic and social functioning. However, mental illnesses are not easily picked unless the symptoms are extremely distressing and they are

often neglected by the children's relatives as well as their teachers. The associating stigma may prevent the children from referral to psychiatric specialists. All these together might result in late diagnosis, worse prognosis, and serious adverse outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Previous literatures showed that mental illnesses usually start at early life, and most of teens who suffer from mental disorders are school students who spend their daytime under observation of their school teachers. In contrast to parents who are biased observers, teachers are neutral observers and can detect the behavioral changes of their school children when they are well-trained to do so. Meanwhile, teachers can serve in early identification of mental illnesses, referral to specialists, reducing stigma, and enhancing the awareness of their students about mental illnesses.

### **AIM**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the knowledge of primary school teachers regarding the mental illnesses that may affect school children; causes and risk factors, types, symptomatology, and treatment, in addition to implementing awareness program to improve this knowledge.

### **HYPOTHESIS**

We hypothesized that primary school teachers might have suboptimal knowledge about mental illnesses amongst school children and the awareness program we designed might be of a positive effect on their knowledge.

### **SETTING AND TIME FRAME**

A total of 200 teachers from 4 private primary schools in Jaipur City participated in this awareness program. The baseline and final assessment in addition to the sessions of the program have been given at the 4 schools between August and September 2021

### **STUDY DESIGN**

An interventional non-controlled design was adopted. Sampling The sample size was calculated using Epi-Info version 7 Stat Calc, [Center for Disease Control (CDC), WHO], based on the following criteria; improvement rate of 50%, confidence level of 95%, margin of error of 5% and non-response rate of 25%. The 4 primary schools where the programs have been conducted were used randomly by card withdrawal after stratifying the schools to urban and rural schools. The 200 primary school teachers who participated in our program have been selected using total enumeration sampling from the 4 primary upon the following eligibility criteria; primary school teachers; not workers or administrators, and gave a verbal consent to participate.

### **FIELDWORK AND DATA COLLECTION**

Before starting the program, all the participating teachers were asked to fill in a one page questionnaire showing the name and site of their schools, age, sex, parity, religion, family history of mental illness, and if they thought that mental illness is a stigma. Then, the knowledge of the teachers about mental illness in school children was assessed by the investigators using interview questionnaire. The assessment included knowledge of teachers about 4 aspects; causes and risk factors of mental illness, types, manifestations, and treatment. The questionnaire included 16 phrases with a Likert scale from 1 to 5 according to the agreement of the teacher with the statement and every question was given scores from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 in strongly agree, while inverse questions were given scores 5 to strongly disagree and 1 to strongly agree. The total score

of each aspect was 20 and the total score of the whole questionnaire was 80. Scores  $\geq 60\%$  of the total score were considered of optimal knowledge. The causes and risk factors aspect included statements about the familial, nutritional, and social risk factors, while the types aspect explored teachers' knowledge about different types of psychiatric disorders, and whether if the teachers were aware that diseases like depression and anxiety could also affect the children. The symptomatology aspect aimed at evaluating the ability of the teacher to suspect children with mental disorders, while the treatment aspect examined the knowledge of teachers about psychotherapy, behavioral, chemical and nutritional treatments. Before admitting the questionnaire for data collection, a pilot study on 20 teachers was conducted to test the validity and reliability of questionnaire. The Cranach's alpha for reliability was 0.78 while content validity was assessed by a professor of public health and a professor of psychiatry. Since there were no modifications on the questionnaire after the pilot study and the results were merely close to the final findings, they were included in the final sample.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data entry, verification, and validation were carried out using standard computer software. A double entry method was used to ensure that the data were transferred accurately from the case report forms to the database. Data were analyzed using the software, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Inc. Released 2009, PASW Statistics for Windows, version 18.0: SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA), then processed and tabulated. Frequency distribution with its percentage and descriptive statistics with mean and standard deviation were calculated. Chi-square, t-test, correlations were done whenever needed. P values of less than 0.05 were considered significant

### RESULTS

Of the 200 primary school teachers who participated in this program, 84 (42%) were working in schools located in urban areas and 116 (58%) were working in schools located in rural areas. The age of the participating teachers ranged between 25 and 59 ( $36.4 \pm 9.9$ ) years, and 39% of them were males and 61% were females. Most of the participants (92%) were Hindu and 16 (8%) were others. Almost more than half (53%) of the teachers had 2 or less children. A third of the teachers stated having a history of mental illness in the family, and 42.5% believe that mental illness is a stigma (Table 1). Of the 200 teachers who were interviewed at schools, 99 (49.5%) were found to have good knowledge about mental disorders in school children (Figure 1). Baseline assessment of participating teachers' knowledge of mental disorders among school children showed that only 31 (15.5%) had optimal knowledge about the causes and risk factors of mental illnesses in this age, 125 (62.5%) had optimal knowledge about types of mental illnesses that may affect children, and the same percentage for their knowledge about the manifestations of mental illnesses in schoolchildren. Only 42 (21%) showed optimal knowledge about the possibilities of treatment. The results also showed that there were no statistically significant differences between teachers with optimal knowledge and those with suboptimal knowledge regarding the site of the school, age of teachers, their sex, religion, parity, family history, or even their belief that mental illness is a stigma ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 1). After the awareness program, the rates of optimal knowledge about causes, types, manifestations and treatment possibilities for mental illness among school children improved significantly from 15.5%, 62.5%, 62.5% and 21% to a high of 50%, 90%, 76% and 42% respectively ( $p < 0.001$ )

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the findings of the current study show primary school teachers lack knowledge about mental illnesses among children. Also, the awareness program showed a positive impact on improving the knowledge of the teachers. The study highlighted a possibility of using teachers in screening program for mental diseases after getting the required training.

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