

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS – IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT ON EVERYDAY LIFE

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Mental health is an integral part of health and well-being, as it is described by the definition of health in the Constitution of the World Health Organization: “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Determinants of mental health and mental disorders include individual characteristics such as the ability to manage one’s thoughts, emotions, behaviours and interactions with others, as well as social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors [1]. Children-and-adolescents-specific mental disorders are described as “serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day” [2]. Internationally, 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders, half of all mental illnesses beginning by the age of 14. It is a well-known fact that neuropsychiatric conditions are the leading cause of disability in young people in many regions of the world. If untreated, these conditions severely influence children’s development, their educational attainments and their potential to live fulfilling and productive lives [3].

Nevertheless, only about one-third of acutely and chronically mentally ill children and adolescents receive the medical treatment that they require. One of the reasons that this aspect is particularly alarming is that mental illness does not solely affect emotional health; it is known to influence and simultaneously occur with problems in

multiple areas of students’ lives, including their social interactions and academic performance [4]. Some of the reasons why there is a low uptake of healthcare services by mentally ill children and their families are: insufficiently accessible specialist healthcare, the fear of being stigmatized because of having a mental health disorder, parents and children being unsure about whether the conduct or state of mind changes really requires treatment and unawareness regarding mental healthcare services and benefits [5].

As school is where children spend a significant amount of time, one aspect that is integral to psychological wellness advancement is the formation of a suitable school environment which bolsters and listens consciously to students and guardians of all types, societies and cultures, and offers a sound and solid education for all, as children with mental disorders face major challenges with stigma, isolation and discrimination.

School difficulties may be a sign of emerging or unrecognized mental illness. Studies on the relationship between emotional status and educational achievements among middle school students support the fact that emotional regulation significantly contributes to students’ grades, over and above the contribution made by abilities related to cognition [6,7].

Gymnasium students who suffer from mental illness are more at risk for getting failing grades at most subjects and have difficulties in passing the basic required grade levels more often than youth with disabilities as a

whole [8]. Having more than two comorbidities is significantly associated with school dropout before graduating from high school. Students who exhibit externalizing disorders (i.e. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and conduct disorders) are more likely to experience low academic performance and terminate schooling than students who evidence internalizing (i.e. mood and anxiety disorders) ones [9, 10].

Research has demonstrated on multiple occasions that timely identification of youth mental health disorders, auspicious referral, and access to proper healthcare services prompts enhancements in both symptoms' progress and academic performance [11, 12, 13].

Thus, psychiatrists, together with school counsellors, psychologists and social workers should provide teachers the required tools to recognize and contend with mental health difficulties among the children and adolescents whom they teach, to enable the early detection of stress factors in the school environment and initiate the implementation of the necessary aiding techniques. Medicine and pedagogy should work together more closely in order to lower the risk of children and adolescents developing mental health problems and to look after and provide treatment for mentally ill youths from a holistic perspective [14].

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