

## CHAPTER 11

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# ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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### **Abstract**

*All around the world, mental health conditions continue to get worse. Psychological disease is a major cause of morbidity and disability. People mental and the overall health are desperately needed. Despite the fact there has been a National Mental Health Program since 1982, not much has been done since then to offer services related to mental health. Health promotion has been more important as intervention techniques have become more indispensable as students' behavioural disorders have gotten worse and more ubiquitous in recent years. Schools have a substantial influence on students' lives. They give a comprehensive structure that helps children to learn and nurtures advancement on all levels—social, emotional, psychological, and physical. Teachers constitute an important part of students' emotional well-being. The intention of this essay is to discuss the importance of mental health and the responsibilities that educators and administrators may play in cultivating psychological health.*

*Keywords: Mental Health, Educators, Students, Education, Well Being, Higher Education.*

### **Introduction**

"A condition of complete physical, social, and mental well-being, rather than merely the absence of illness or disability" is how the WHO defines health. There is more to mental health than just mental health. It is a crucial component of general health, which can be characterized in at least three ways: as the absence of illness, as an organism in a state that permits the full performance of all its functions, or as a state of equilibrium both within oneself and between oneself and one's physical and social surroundings. A person's ability to establish and sustain loving relationships with others, carry out the social roles that are typically performed in their culture, manage change, identify, acknowledge, and express positive behaviours and thoughts, and control emotions like

sadness are all implied by their mental health. Achieving mental wellness is a crucial component of general health and cannot be done in a vacuum (Lipson *et al*, 2022). Mental health influences a person's awareness of their internal and external functions, sense of control, and self-worth. Maintaining good mental health is essential at every stage of life. Mental health issues rank among the top causes of illness and disability worldwide. Often, mental health is linked to individuals facing mental illnesses in developing nations like India. Different types of mental health challenges affect both men and women. A person's overall health relies on the balance between physical and mental wellbeing (Fawaz and Lee, 2022).

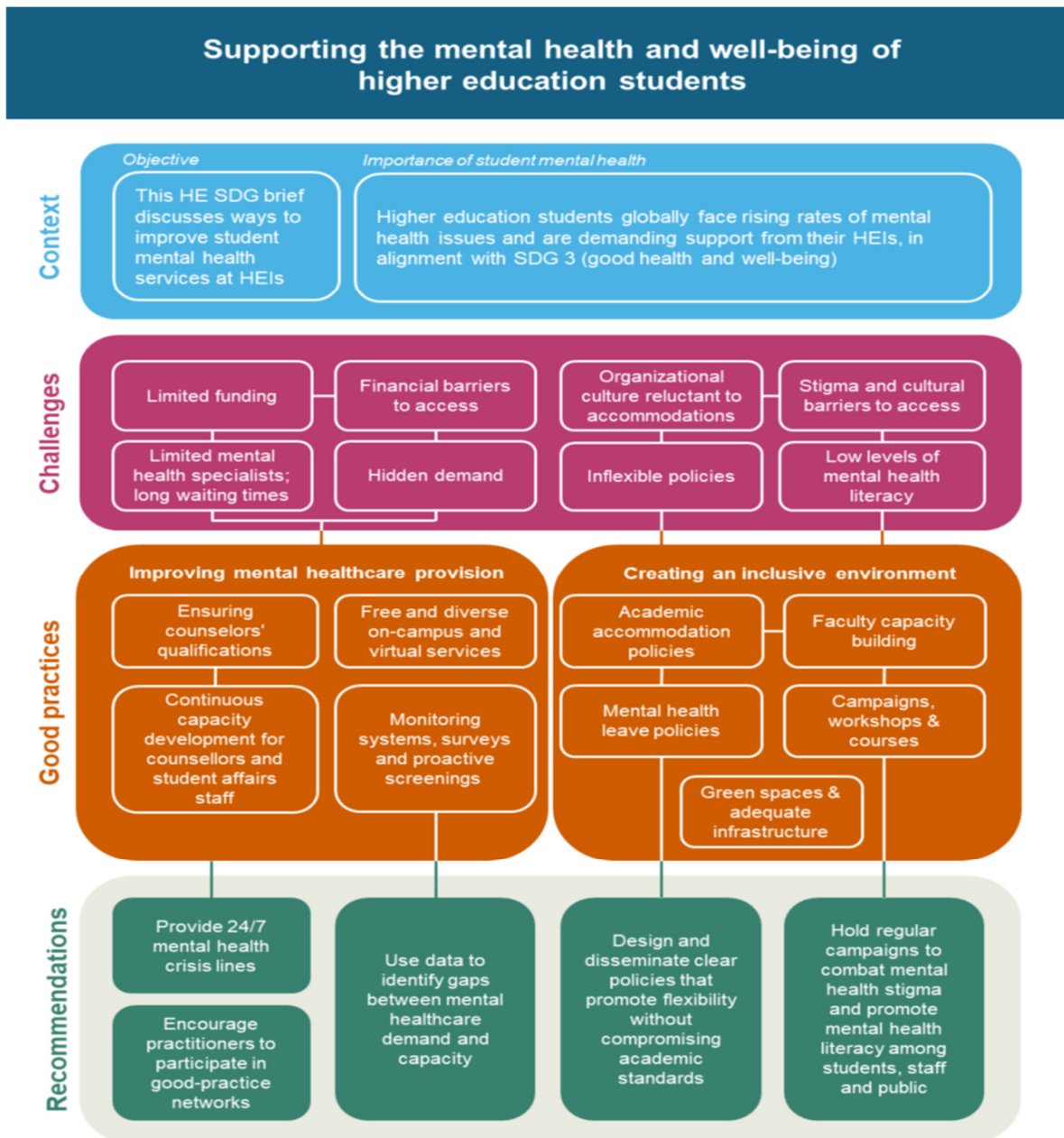
Mental health frequently takes a backseat to more general health topics such as hygiene and sanitation, nutrition, and awareness of infectious diseases. A person in good mental health has a sense of self-worth, control, and comprehension of both internal and external functioning. According to the Society for Health Education and Promotion Specialists (SHEPS, 1997), feeling happy, joyful, and loving is another aspect of mental health. Similar to mental illness, environmental, psychological, social, and biological factors also have an impact on mental health. The social world, which includes family, kinship, employers, peers, co-workers, and friends in the proximal world and society and culture in the distal context, surrounds the individual at the centres of functioning (Bhugra, Till and Sartorius, 2013).

Person in good mental health will have a strong sense of who they are and how they relate to others; they will be able (and willing) to build healthy relationships while still feeling at ease in their own company. Culture has a significant impact on one's sense of self, and personality and culture will determine whether a person is egocentric or socio-centric. Any attempts to alter this self-concept could result in cultural conflict, personal dissatisfaction, and unhappiness (Abdrasheva *et al*, 2022). The ability to develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually; to initiate, develop, and maintain mutually satisfying relationships; to be aware of and empathize with others; and to use psychological distress as a development process and learn from it so that it does not hinder or impair further development are among the capacities that mental health offers. The core senses of mental health are trust, challenge, competency, accomplishment, and humour (Chibb, Fatima and Akhter, 2023).

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To find out the concept and understanding of mental health among students.

- To find out the various obstacles faced with mental health concerns.
- To find out the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEs) and educators in promoting mental health awareness and education.
- To find out the effective suggestions and strategies for reducing mental health problems.



**Image1: Overview of Supporting the mental health and well-being of higher education students.**

Source: Galán-Muros, V.; Roser-Chinchilla, J.; Hsiung, N. (2024). *Supporting the mental health and well-being of higher education students. SDG briefs series. Goal 3. UNESCO IESALC, 2024(1), 1-17.*

## Importance of student's Mental Health

According to the Mental Health Foundation (MHF, 2008), a person's thoughts and feelings about their life and themselves define their mental health, which has an impact on how they handle hardship. One's capacity to function, take advantage of opportunities, and fully engage with family, co-workers, the community, and peers is thought to be impacted by mental health. Physical and mental health are closely related because they both directly and indirectly impact one another. Therefore, it is possible to propose that mental health is a state of equilibrium in which a person is able to take care of both their basic and higher function needs, be at peace with themselves, and function well in social situations (Bhugra, Till and Sartorius, 2013). Baik, Karcombe and brooker (2019) stated that Positive functionality refers to the constructive management of relationships, change, and emotions. Psychiatry faces a challenge in that it must actively participate in incorporating these ideas into public health initiatives and incorporate the preservation and promotion of mental health into its practice, research, and teaching.

According to research findings by (Barbayannis *et al*, 2022) mental health issues among HE students have become a major concern in many different regions. Over one-third (35%) of students reported having mental health disorders, according to the WHO World Mental Health International College Student project, which was implemented in eight countries. Social anxiety, PTSD, eating disorders, and ADHD are among the mental health conditions that affect between 21 and 24.5% of students in South Africa. Over 60% of students in the US were found to have at least one mental health problem, a nearly 50% increase since 2013. Furthermore, more than 80% of students stated that at some point in their lives, mental or emotional challenges had a detrimental effect on their academic performance. In this regard, HE students' need for mental health services has grown dramatically (Galán-Muros *et al*, 2024). Chu *et al* (2023) reported that Higher education students' mental health issues were considerably made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, three out of four HE students in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in India, believed that the pandemic had made their pre-existing mental health issues worse. Students' mental health issues are caused by a variety of factors, such as interpersonal relationship strains, financial hardships, and academic pressures. Students' attendance and academic performance may suffer as a result of these mental health issues. Governments and higher education institutions have an obligation to address these mental health issues in accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 3 on good health and well-being. This includes making sure that no medical condition—physical or mental—becomes a barrier to equal access to or successful completion of higher education (Nasr *et al*, 2024).

Lipson *et al* (2022) evaluated that initiating change requires starting from the ground up due to the strong stigma surrounding mental illnesses. This can be accomplished by fostering greater sensitivity in the developing minds of children and teenagers. By making mental health education a crucial part of our health curriculum, such pedagogy would improve the nation's mental health in the future by educating young minds about mental health and shaping their attitudes and beliefs. We must comprehend the signs and symptoms of mental illness before deciding how to address such behaviours. Globally, it is imperative to identify and support children who are struggling with mental health issues. However, administrators, educators, and policy makers in India are starting to recognize the needs of teenagers with mental health issues.

## **Challenges in dealing with mental health particularly with HE students**

### **1. Student mental health as a reflection of structural issues in Higher Education**

It is becoming more widely accepted that the rising incidence of mental health problems among students is a sign of larger structural problems in higher education systems. This trend is influenced by a number of variables related to pedagogical approaches and educational policies. Exams with high stakes, for instances, have been found to be a major cause of psychological distress. Particularly among students in Indi, these tests, such as the NEET CET, have been linked to improve levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Suicidal thoughts have been connected to the intense pressure to do well on these tests in order to outperform peers and gain admission to highly esteemed colleges (Chu *et al*, 2023).

### **2. Financial barriers to accessing mental healthcare**

According to Moghim *et al* (2023) financial limitations are a major obstacle to receiving mental health services on campus in some nations, including the US, Canada, and India. The amount of money provided by HEIs for student mental health services varies greatly; some provide little to no funding, while others fully or partially cover the expenses.

### **3. Insufficient institutional capacity to provide adequate mental healthcare**

Suicide is the fourth most common cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 29, when many pursue post-secondary education, and 75% of mental health issues are initially diagnosed between the ages of 16 and 24. In spite of this, campus mental health services are often deemed inadequate. Furthermore, students frequently underuse services even when they are offered because of cultural norms, financial constraints, etc. (Osborn *et al*, 2024).

Problems like long queues and a lack of resources as compared to demand worsen the issue. The need for highly qualified professionals (counsellors, psychologists, social workers, etc.) and a broad availability of counselling services has been highlighted by the fact that unfavourable previous experiences with mental healthcare might discourage future help-seeking behaviours (Baik, Larcombe and Brooker, 2019).

## **Assessing Good Practices of HEs and role of educators can contribute to mental health awareness and education**

### **1. Provision of in-campus and virtual mental healthcare services**

By integrating mental health services with larger healthcare systems, stigma is decreased, access is improved, and overall healthcare delivery is strengthened. For example, more and more HEIs around the world are implementing this practice by offering individual and group counselling services with qualified therapists. In certain situations, counselling services are provided both in-person and online. For example, BRAC University in Bangladesh and the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay in India offer free, continuously online counselling. This enables HEIs to adjust to students' various needs and situations (Galán-Muros *et al*, 2024).

### **2. Teachers role in mental health awareness**

The educator's standard responsibility has been to "deliver" knowledge to students about a variety of subjects that can improve their academic skills and prepare them for the workforce. The educators are often the first medical professionals to notice signs that a student or young person needs mental health care. Through their frequent interactions with pupils, educators, have a significant impact on both their academic demands and overall social and emotional development. They can motivate students to succeed in everything they do and encourage them to make improvements (Chibb, Fatima and Akhter, 2023).

Ilango, Kumar and Chellamuthu, (2025) argued that sometimes all it takes for someone to start questioning their skills or competence is one setback. After that, they might experience uncertainty, inferiority, humiliation, and guilt. To avoid being seen as a frightening force but rather as a friend and mentor, the teacher should cultivate a cordial and cooperative relationship with his pupils. Students should feel comfortable discussing any worries they may have with the instructor, who should be kind and encouraging. Overly competitive feelings are harmful to the individual as well as the community, so it is best to avoid them. The best teachers understand how important it is to support their students' mental health.

According to (Nasr *et al*, 2024) all things taken into account, these educators have a special opportunity to spot the early warning signs and symptoms of depression and other mental illnesses because they frequently engage with those students and are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Open, non-judgmental communication with adults may be very beneficial for students. In many cases, a teacher-student relationship that is open and positive can help identify emotional problems and behavioural abnormalities, relieving a great deal of anxiety. The educators who were least liked by their students were those who were ineffective, unfair, irrational, caustic, partial, and unpleasant. From a mental health perspective, the instructor should motivate his pupils to learn by using various forms of rewards rather than sanctions (Osborn *et al*, 2022)

### **3. Raising mental health literacy and destigmatizing mental health**

Raising mental health awareness is essential to lowering stigma and motivating students to get treatment when they need it. Kenya's Mental Health Action Plan 2021-2025 aims to combat stigma at the national level through multispectral initiatives, such as campaigns that target large audiences through media, sports, and cultural events. This strategy also places a strong emphasis on appointing mental health ambassadors and working with groups of believers (Barbayannis *et al*, 2022)

### **4. Capacity building for counsellors and student affairs staff**

More HEIs are putting greater emphasis on expanding the capacity of student support offices in order to address the growing demand for mental health services. This includes making sure that counsellors adhere to strict professional standards and establishing and maintaining suitable student-to-counsellor ratios. Enforcing these standards can be greatly aided by national policies pertaining to counsellors and mental health professionals in general. For instance, mental health professionals in Australia must pass a background check, obtain counselling experience, register with a professional association, and possess a bachelor's or postgraduate degree in a relevant field. By providing future counsellors with specialized training, HEIs can further increase capacity. In order to exchange best practices and advance their knowledge, counsellors can also take part in professional networks or inter-institutional partnerships, forming "communities of practice." (Fawaz and Lee, 2022).

### **5. Capacity building for faculty**

Galán-Muros *et al* (2024) stated that while individualized tutoring and counselling may be offered by student affairs offices in some HEIs, faculty members are frequently the most trusted

or first point of contact for students who are experiencing difficulties. The ability of faculty to recognize and direct students to suitable mental health resources is vital, even though they shouldn't be expected to function as professional counsellors. HEIs can put in place professional development programs centred on mental health awareness and intervention to strengthen this capacity. For example, the University of California, Irvine in the United States has set up workshops to enable faculty and staff to recognize students who are at risk and direct them to the right resources. Bystander education and the dissemination of a manual on handling student mental health issues are examples of this (chu *et al*, 2023).

## **6. Monitoring systems and proactive screenings**

For HEI leadership and legislators to be informed about service needs (including potential hidden demand), resource allocation, and the efficacy of interventions, student mental health monitoring is essential. This can be accomplished by conducting anonymous surveys on a regular basis and by gathering aggregated data from mental health service providers that describes the quantity and kinds of problems students encounter. Surveys are not just for HE students; they can be done nationally or at the higher education level. Better data collection and integration into policymaking can result from general cooperation between HEIs and government health services. For instance, the Mental Health Strategic Plan 2023-2032 of Cambodia emphasizes the value of cooperative and government-facilitated research in creating a more successful mental health strategy (Moghim *et al*, 2023).

In addition to increasing awareness, proactive mental health screenings can make it easier for students to get mental health services. For instance, the University of the Philippines encourages first-year students to attend intake interviews so they can become acquainted with the Office of Counselling and Guidance's mental health resources (Abdrasheva *et al*, 2022).

### **Recommendations** (Chibb, Fatima and Akhter, 2023)

- Using educators to impart mental health knowledge and integrating a single curriculum resource or manual into regular classrooms significantly improved students' experiences and attitudes overall. Because it can be used frequently and doesn't require a specific financial commitment, including such content on mental health in the curriculum is cost-effective.
- Social media platforms play a major role in mental health awareness campaigns. The field of mental health includes both the prevention of mental illnesses and challenges as well as the promotion of general good psychological health.

- The educators must have access to at least some in-service training on how to deal with mental health issues in the classroom.
- When public services are inadequate or unavailable, HEIs should make sure that all students have access to free mental health services. The ratio of students to counsellors should be set up to offer prompt, individualized assistance (Moghim, et al, 2023).
- HEIs should make an investment in teaching faculty members how to spot early indicators of mental health problems and point students in the direction of the right resources. These initiatives could be supported by government incentives. Faculty accommodations for students with mental health issues should be outlined in HE policies and clear protocols, guaranteeing academic standards are maintained while offering flexibility (Osborn *et al*, 2022).
- Higher education institutions should create and put into effect policies that permit students with mental health issues to attend classes with reasonable accommodations. Students should have the option of taking a mental health leave of absence without facing academic consequences for longer absences that are incompatible with upholding academic standards. These guidelines ought to specify how students can return to their studies following their recuperation, taking into account the possibility of a postponed graduation (Ilango, Till and Sartorius, 2025).
- To combat stigma and misconceptions about mental health, governments and higher education institutions should launch frequent awareness-raising campaigns that encourage mental health literacy among the public, employees, and students. Additionally, mental health literacy courses ought to be made available, giving students the skills they need to identify symptoms, develop resilience, and access mental health resources both on and off campus (Abdrasheva *et al*, 2022).
- According to Abdrasheva *et al*, (2022) in order to identify gaps between demand and available resources, enhance service quality, and develop evidence-based policies, it is crucial to periodically collect data on student mental health through surveys or statistics compiled by mental health service providers. Student confidentiality must always be respected in data collection. In line with SDG 3, HEIs and governments can greatly enhance student mental health support through these initiatives. Creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that foster both academic success and mental well-being requires an extensive approach that incorporates free services, a variety of support modalities, faculty involvement, and data-driven policy decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Higher education institutions (HEIs) must offer mental health services because a sizable portion of HE students globally are dealing with mental health issues. In keeping with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 of the UN, which is about good health and well-being, HEIs have an obligation to support students' mental health. It is the duty of governments to enable this support through funding and other policies. Financial obstacles, attitudes regarding mental health, and inadequate institutional capacity to provide mental healthcare all impede students' access to mental health services. This SDG brief identifies global best practices and offers governments and HEIs suggestions for enhancing student mental health. Free mental health services in a variety of modalities must be made available to students, and there must be enough trained personnel who are aware of the various identities and backgrounds of the students. In order to combat stigma and misconceptions about mental health, HEIs and governments must work together to increase mental health literacy among students, staff, and the general public. Faculty members who receive training are better equipped to recognize students who struggle with mental health issues, direct them to pertinent resources, and, in accordance with established guidelines, take academic accommodations into consideration. Governments and HEIs can find gaps, enhance the quality of mental health services, and develop evidence-based policies with the help of systematic data collection and monitoring.

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