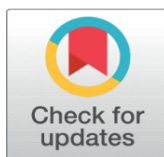


EXPLORING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MENTAL HEALTH OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The current study attempted to investigate gender differences in the mental health of higher secondary students. A descriptive survey method was employed with a sample of 540 students (284 female and 256 male), selected through random sampling from 15 General degree Colleges affiliated to the University of Calcutta. The Mental Health Battery (2012) developed by Singh and Sengupta was used to assess students' mental health. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between male and female students' mental health scores with male students scoring higher than female students. The findings suggest that male students demonstrated better mental health compared to their female counterparts. The study highlights socio-cultural and familial factors that may contribute to these gender-based differences, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to promote the mental well-being of female students. The study provides practical implications for educational institutions, policymakers, teachers and parents emphasizing their collaborative role in fostering resilience, reducing stress, and creating supportive environments and prioritizing mental health education and providing equal opportunities for participation to promote adolescent well-being.

Keywords: Adolescence, Psychological Well Being, Academic Stress, Mental Health, Gender Differences, Higher Secondary Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a crucial transitional stage of human development, typically characterized by rapid biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. During this phase, individuals encounter multiple developmental tasks, such as forming identity, maintaining peer relationships, striving for autonomy, and preparing for academic and career challenges. These transitions often bring heightened vulnerability to stress and psychological imbalance, making adolescence a sensitive period for mental health concerns. Further, in a fast-paced, technologically advanced society adolescents are found to often experience tension, frustration, stress, worry, nervousness, aggression, anxiety as a result of which their mental health and emotional well being is affected, incapacitating their normal life. Due to overindulgence on social networking and overuse of technology the current generation of youth have lost the personal human touch and face to face social contact with their near and dear ones in the millennium society. For students in higher secondary education, who are generally aged between 17 and 19 years, the pressure of academic performance, career uncertainty, and social expectations amplify the risk of emotional strain. This state of mind of the students can be modified by taking care of their mental health. According to Ghani (2013, as cited in Poh Keong et al., 2015), Mental Health is a prosperous

state in which an individual is aware of his own abilities, can handle pressure well, can work productively and is able to contribute to the society. This implies that mental health is fundamental to the well-being of individuals' ability to function more effectively in society. Parameshvara (2010) defined mental health as a state of perfection, including not merely the absence of disease or disorder but also the presence of factors such as life satisfaction, self-acceptance and social contributions. The World Health Organization (2001) conceptualizes mental health as more than the absence of illness, emphasizing it as a state of well-being where individuals can realize their potential, cope effectively with life's stresses, work productively, and contribute positively to society. Elliot (2010) cited that Mental health refers to "positive mood, general well-being, and relatively infrequent symptoms of anxiety and depression" (Stephens, 1988, p. 41). Within the educational context, mental health is pivotal, as it influences not only students' academic performance but also their interpersonal relationships, decision-making abilities, and long-term psychological adjustment. Adolescents with poor mental health often experience difficulties in concentration, lowered motivation, impaired self-esteem, and maladaptive coping patterns, which can negatively impact both their academic achievement and overall life satisfaction. Further, cultural norms and gendered expectations often shape the way students experience and express mental health concerns especially in Indian society where these gender differences can influence their confidence, social participation, and coping mechanisms, ultimately affecting their mental health outcomes. Previous empirical studies provide mixed evidence on gender differences in adolescent mental health. Some researchers (Talawar & Das, 2014; Kohsar Haddadi, 2004) reported that male students exhibit better mental health profiles, while others (Bandhana & Sharma, 2010, 2012) found that female students demonstrate superior emotional stability and resilience. These divergent findings suggest that the relationship between gender and mental health is complex, context-specific, and influenced by socio-cultural factors. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore and understand whether any differences exist between male and female students in their mental health, thereby contributing to educational psychology and informing the development of gender-sensitive mental health interventions and providing suggestions to the stakeholders in the academic context.

2. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS

Mental Health

The World Health Organization (2001) defined mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community". In the present study Mental Health can be operationally defined as a state of mental and emotional well-being of the students which makes them capable of facing the challenges of life and satisfactorily adjust with themselves and the society with maximum effectiveness and positively contribute to the society.

Higher Secondary Students can be operationally defined in the present study as the students whose age ranges from 17-19 years and have passed the public examination at the end of Standard XII viz., the West Bengal Higher Secondary Examination (2014) and also have just taken admission in the First year in Humanities Department in General Degree Colleges affiliated to the University of Calcutta. The students (in the present study) are coming to study in the colleges of Kolkata and its suburbs have their dwelling places-

- in the four districts viz., South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly, and
- places located in and around Kolkata.

Gender can be operationally defined in the present study as the male and female Higher Secondary students

2.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To compare the Mental Health of Higher Secondary students under Gender (Male & Female).

2.2. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

In light of the above objective of the study, the following hypothesis was formulated-

H01: There would be no significant difference in Mental Health between male and female Higher Secondary students

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study used the Descriptive Survey research method keeping in view the objective of the study.

1) Population

All the students with age ranging from 17-19 years who have passed the Standard XII public examination viz., the West Bengal Higher Secondary Examination conducted by the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) and have just taken admission in First year in the General Degree Colleges affiliated to the University of Calcutta and belonging to the Humanities Department constituted the population of the present study.

2) Sampling Technique

The researcher first collected the list of General Degree colleges affiliated to the University of Calcutta from the official website of the University of Calcutta and from the West Bengal Higher Education Report (2012-2013). Then she randomly selected 15 colleges, three each from North, South, Central, East and West Kolkata and its suburbs (50 km around Kolkata) following the pin code list of Kolkata. After obtaining nominal rolls of the students from the First year Humanities Department of each of the colleges the researcher then randomly selected the students from these colleges respectively.

3) Sample

The sample of the study comprised 540 Higher Secondary students out of which 284 were female and 256 were male students.

4. TOOLS OF THE STUDY

The Mental Health Battery (2012) National Psychological Corporation that was developed and standardized by Arun Kumar Singh and Alpana Sengupta, was used for the present study to measure the Mental Health of the Higher Secondary students.

Table Descriptive Statistics of Mental Health of Male and Female Higher Secondary Students

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Mental Health	Female	284	81.23	81	6.759	0.401	-.185	.105	-0.234	.210
	Male	256	83.01	84	7.052	0.441	-.345	.105	-0.204	.210
	Total	540	82.07	82.	6.9495	.2991	-.243	.105	-.264	.210

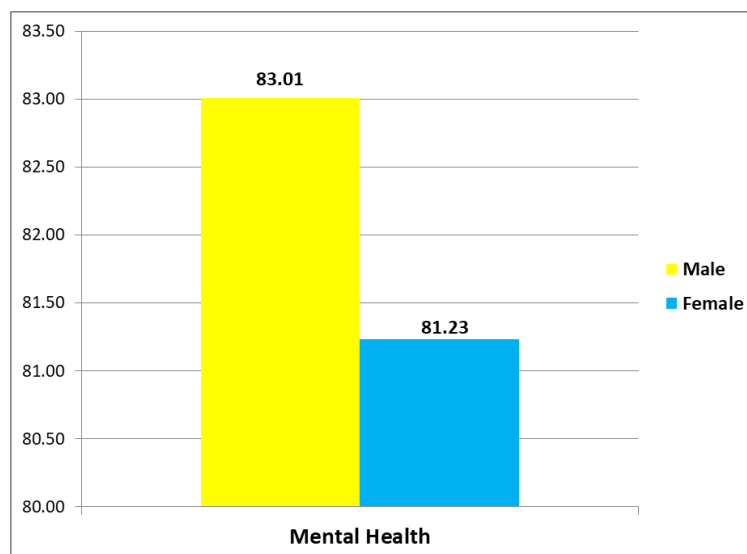


Figure 1 Graphical representation of the Mean scores of Mental Health of Male and Female Higher Secondary Students

Fig. i shows that the mean scores of the Male students are found to be higher than the Female Higher Secondary students in Mental Health (Male= 83.01, Female = 81.23).

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The detailed analysis of the collected data has been provided as per the objective stated earlier. The hypothesis was also tested based on the findings of the study and the interpretations are reported respectively.

Software Used

The analysis of the study was done using the computer software “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences” IBM SPSS Version 21.00.

6. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of the study are presented below.

Objective i: To compare the Mental Health of Higher Secondary students under Gender (Male and Female)

To fulfil this objective the H01 was formulated and tested which was as follows: -

H01: There would be no significant difference in Mental Health between Male and Female Higher Secondary students

Testing of H01:

Groups: Mental Health of Male and Female Higher Secondary students

Table Descriptive and Inferential Statistics of Independent Sample Test of the Mental Health_Gender of Higher Secondary students

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Mental Health	Male	256	83.01	7.05	0.44	2.986*	538	0.003
	Female	284	81.23	6.76	0.40			

* significant at 0.05 level of significance

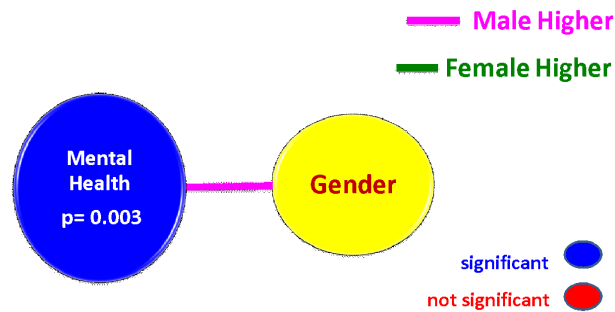
Interpretation

The analysis in Table shows that in comparing the Mental Health between Male and Female Higher Secondary students the calculated t(538) value is 2.986 and ‘p’ value is 0.003 ($p < 0.05$). Hence, t is significant at 0.05 level. So, H01 is rejected and it can be safely said that the Male Higher Secondary students (Mean= 83.01) were significantly different from the Female Higher Secondary students (Mean= 81.23) with respect to their Mental Health.

7. FINDINGS ON MENTAL HEALTH

From the analysis of data on Mental Health, the following finding was observed which is presented in the following diagram and reported subsequently.

ii: Diagrammatic Presentation of the Findings on Mental Health_Gender_Differences

Mental Health_Gender_Differences**Figure 2** Differences between Male and Female Students in Mental Health

- The Male Higher Secondary students (Mean= 83.01) were significantly different from the Female Higher Secondary students (Mean= 81.23) with respect to their Mental Health (Fig. ii).

8. DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated that the Male Higher Secondary students were significantly different from the Female Higher Secondary students with regard to their Mental Health. The finding of the study supports the findings of (Talawar & Das, 2014; Kohsar Haddadi, 2004) who also found a significant difference in the mental health of boys and girls students. The results of the study also showed that the male students were found to have significantly better Mental Health than the Female Higher Secondary students. This finding is in disagreement with the finding of Bandhana and Sharma (2012, 2010) who revealed after analyses that the mental health of girls is more in comparison to boys. The reason as to why the mental health of the female students was found to be less than the male students in the study might be that mostly in Indian families, the female children are kept more over-protected and highly nurtured than the male children. The parents of the girls mostly prefer to keep them confined at homes and restrict them from active social participation as they are more worried for security issues of their girl children especially at the adolescent level. As a consequence, their social exposure and involvement to the outer world becomes limited resulting in their unfulfilling of their needs and desires. Due to this reason they tend to become stressed, apprehensive, insecure, lack confidence, have low self esteem, are less dynamic and their pent up emotions also doesn't find a proper way to get channelized. Their mental well-being also gets affected. The female students gradually develop poor self concept and have problems in adjustments with themselves and with others. On the other hand, the male adolescents in Indian homes are more prone to managing things on their own. They enjoy greater freedom than the girl adolescents. They are more outgoing, independent, cheerful, responsible, initiative, spend more time with their peers, capable of developing constructive values and are more confident and realistic. As a result their overall harmonious balance for meeting the demands of various aspects of the environment also enhances. Hence, these reasons might be considered for the male students having better mental health than the female students.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the mental health of the female higher secondary belonging to the age group of 17-19 years is not at par with the mental health of the male students. While male students reported greater independence, confidence, and social exposure, female students appeared to face more restrictions in mobility and social participation, leading to heightened stress, insecurity, and adjustment difficulties. The impact of the poor mental health of the female students might affect their family and service life in future. The results of the study highlight

the role of socio-cultural and familial factors in shaping adolescents' mental health, with implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and parents for promoting gender-sensitive interventions, encouraging equal opportunities for participation, and fostering supportive environments for adolescent girls which are crucial steps toward enhancing their mental health and overall development. In this regard, mental health education also becomes a vital component of school and college life. Through awareness programs, counseling services, and curricular integration, mental health education equips students with coping strategies, resilience, and socio-emotional skills to handle stress and adjustment difficulties effectively. Addressing this issue of mental health of students requires a collaborative effort from parents, teachers, and students themselves. Parents play a crucial role in fostering an egalitarian home environment by offering equal opportunities, emotional support, and balanced discipline to both sons and daughters, thereby nurturing confidence and resilience. Teachers and educational institutions must integrate mental health awareness, counseling services, and socio-emotional learning into the academic framework, while also being sensitive to gender-specific needs and encouraging platforms for expression and participation. At the same time, students must be empowered to take responsibility for their well-being through self-awareness, healthy peer relationships, and constructive coping strategies. Collectively, these efforts can reduce gender-based disparities, strengthen resilience, and promote the overall psychological well-being of adolescents thus helping them prepare for a better and healthy life and enhanced academic performance.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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