

TITLE - Upholding Mental Health and Wellbeing - A School Based Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Students' mental health and wellbeing serve as the cornerstone for imparting holistic development and nurturing in them the qualities and life skills that help them grow, maintain themselves, and develop sustainably. This research paper explores practical strategies that improve students' mental health and well-being within a schools educational framework and gains insight into how students and teachers perceive these strategies.

Methods: This mixed methods research study, was conducted in Salwan Public School, Gurugram. We studied the overall impact of counselling sessions, stress management techniques, peer education programs and educators' Continuous Development Programs (CPDs) for mental health related issues among students. Additionally, perceptions regarding initiatives towards educators' mental health, like weekly meditations and team building exercises, were also assessed. For the quantitative assessment, 150 students from 8th to 12th grade and 35 teachers were distributed pre-defined structured questionnaires. For the qualitative assessment, In Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted on ten students and five teachers.

Results: Findings from the quantitative surveys revealed the responses of both students and teachers regarding the effectiveness of mental health initiatives. According to the survey findings most of the students felt that they feel comfortable discussing their mental health with teachers and counsellors and the school provides a supportive environment for addressing their emotional wellbeing challenges. The students felt that the school communicates information about mental health initiatives through different channels and they have attended many such sessions. Most of the teachers found that the mental health initiatives were effective in promoting the well-being of students and personally participated in the various programmes. The in-depth interviews highlighted the programs which have been majorly successful in promoting mental health. The interviews also helped in identifying the areas where the school initiatives for mental health could be improved and significant stressors affecting emotional wellbeing.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, it is recommended to implement a structured mental health education program that is integrated within the school curriculum. It will be useful to expand and promote peer support programs which foster a sense of belongingness and provide students with a confidante. Conducting regular awareness campaigns on reducing stigma and seeking help, promoting work life balance for teachers and students are other identified areas of focus.

Key Words: Awareness, Mental Health initiatives and Professional Development



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INTRODUCTION

According to the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, the purpose of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building up character and creating holistic and all rounded individuals equipped with the 21st century skills, such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience. Students' mental health and wellbeing serve as the cornerstone for imparting holistic development and nurturing in them the qualities and life skills that help them grow, maintain themselves, and develop sustainably. All facets of health, including physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, are interconnected, and any compromise in one inevitably affects the others. Adolescence is a critical time for forming social and emotional habits that are necessary for mental health. It is crucial to create safe and encouraging conditions at home, school, and in the larger community. (Reference- *Mental Health and Well-being of School Students – A Survey, 2022* – https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/Mental_Health_WSS_A_Survey_new.pdf)

While teachers play a vital role in shaping the future of the next generation, they often experience high levels of stress and burnout due to long working hours, large class sizes, and high expectations from students, parents, and administrators. Therefore, it is essential that mental health is given more importance and attention in the teaching profession as well. Continuous Professional Development Programmes and importance of regular activities such as weekly meditations and celebrating birthdays and festivals for educators' practices have shown promising results in overall mental well-being.

Within the educational landscape, Salwan Public School, Gurugram, stands as a notable institution dedicated to providing a nurturing environment for its diverse student body. Recognizing the profound influence of mental health on students' academic achievements and personal growth, the school has made substantial efforts to implement a range of mental health initiatives and support programs. While the school's commitment to fostering mental well-being is evident, there exists a critical need to assess the perceptions of students and teachers for these initiatives. This research endeavours to delve deep into the strategies employed by the School, understanding how they are perceived by the students and teachers. For teachers particular interest is the Continuous Development Program, as it equips educators with updated knowledge and skills necessary to support students effectively. This study seeks to achieve a multifaceted understanding of mental health initiatives within the School. The findings of this research hold the promise of not only informing Salwan Public School's future strategies but also offering valuable insights to educators and institutions worldwide. By evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives, we aspire to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the pivotal role of mental health in education. Ultimately, it aims to shed light on the critical theme of upholding mental health and well-being in the school context, with Salwan Public School, Gurugram, serving as a compelling case study.



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METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The research study employed a mixed methods research design to explore the theme of upholding mental health and well-being in schools at Salwan Public School, Gurugram. This design helped us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Study Participants

Research participants consisted of 150 students from classes 8th to 12th and 35 teachers for the quantitative survey, coupled with 10 students and 5 teachers for qualitative interviews.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data was collected through an online survey distributed to students and teachers. The survey encompassed various aspects of mental health in school, including awareness of mental health initiatives, details of participation in the different programmes, and perceptions of teacher accessibility.

Qualitative interviews, conducted with 10 students and 5 teachers, aimed to provide in-depth insights into the subject. The interviews explored participant experiences, perspectives, and narratives related to mental health initiatives in the school. These interviews were designed to complement the quantitative survey and offer a deeper understanding.

Data Analysis:

Percentages (%) were calculated for categorical responses in the quantitative survey. Data from qualitative interviews was recorded and transcribed. Codes and themes were generated to extract key themes and narratives.

Ethical Considerations:

The research adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

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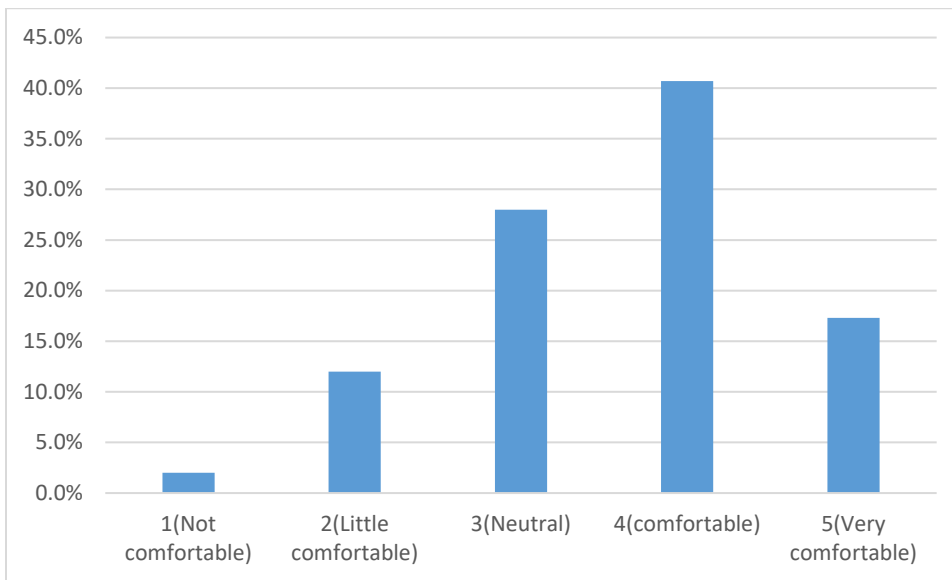
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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data Analysis (Students): Key Findings

1. Comfort discussing mental health with teachers or Counsellors

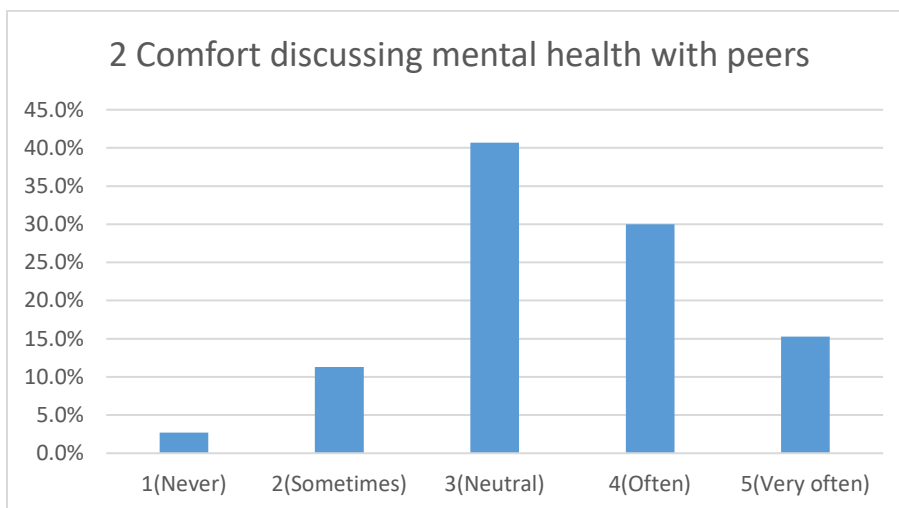
The analysis reveals that when it comes to discussing their mental health with teachers or counsellors, 40.7% of students are at ease. Specifically, 17% express being highly comfortable, while 28% maintain a neutral stance on the matter.



(Figure 1): Students comfort level discussing mental health with teachers or counsellors

2. Comfort discussing mental health with peers

The data illustrates that a considerable portion (40.7%) of students hold a neutral stance regarding their peers feeling comfortable discussing mental health issues among themselves. On the other hand, 30% are often comfortable discussing mental health with their peers, while 15% express being very comfortable doing so.



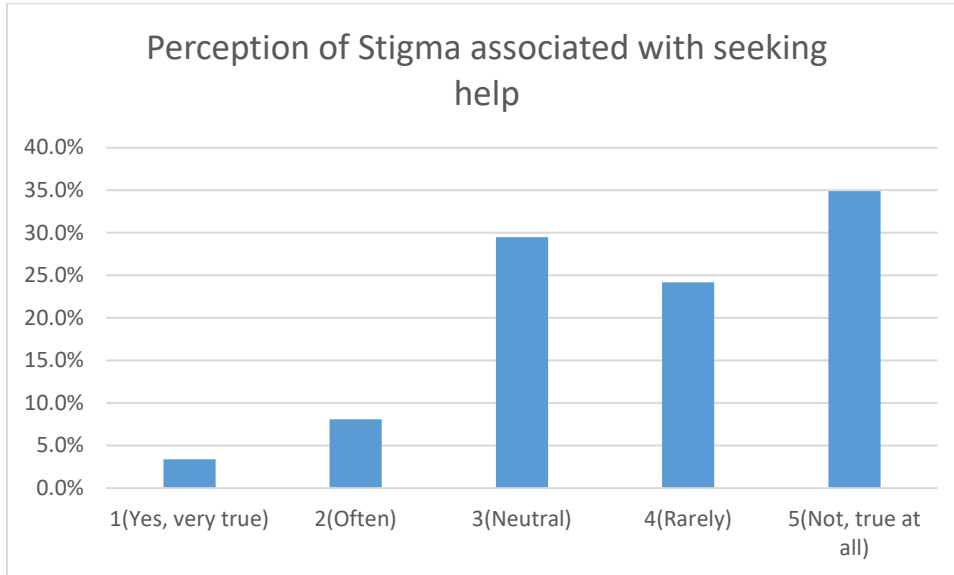
(Figure 2): Students comfort level discussing mental health with peers



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3. Perception of Stigma associated with seeking help

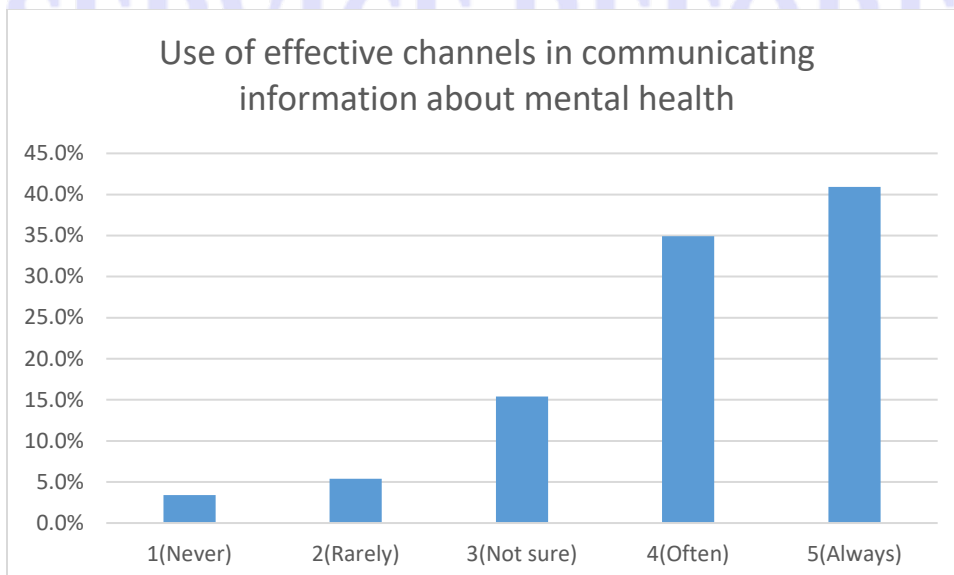
The data highlights that a significant portion (34.9%) of students believe there is no stigma associated with seeking help for mental health issues at school. Additionally, 24.2% perceive that stigma rarely exists, while 29.5% maintain a neutral stance on this matter.



(Figure 3): Students perception of stigma associated with seeking help

4. Use of effective channels in communicating information about mental health

The data reveals that 40.9% of students believe the school effectively communicates mental health initiatives through various platforms such as WhatsApp, school websites, and Facebook. Additionally, 34.9% often perceive effective communication in this regard, while 15.4% maintain a neutral stance on the effectiveness of communication.

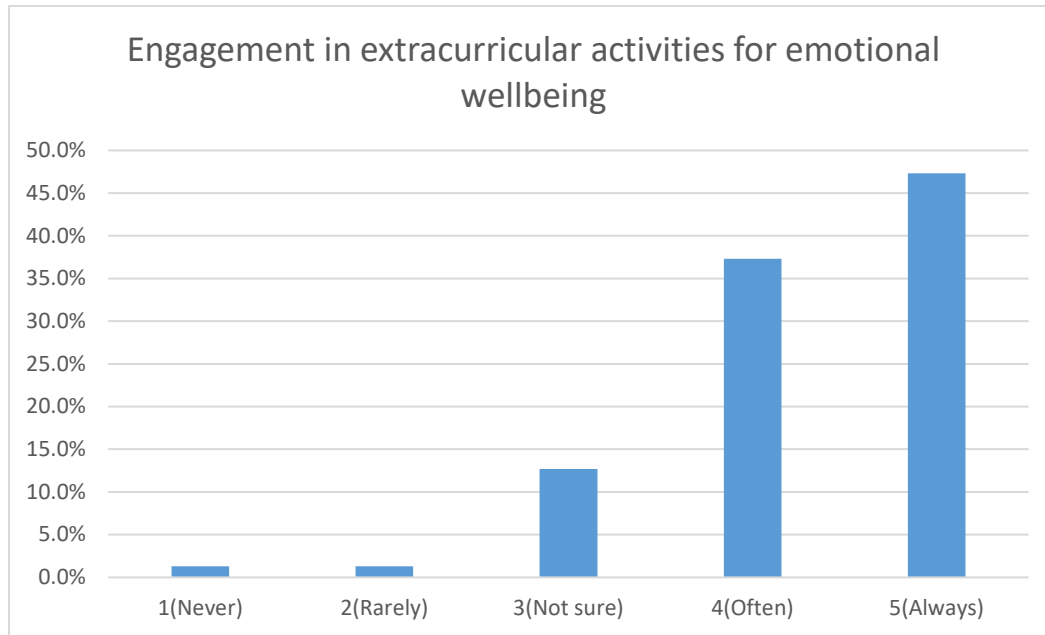


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(Figure 4): Students perception of using effective channels in communicatina about mental health

5. Engagement in extracurricular activities for emotional wellbeing

The data highlights that a significant majority, comprising 47.3% of students, engage in extracurricular activities or hobbies. Additionally, 37.3% often partake in extracurricular activities, while 12.7% maintain a neutral stance on this engagement.



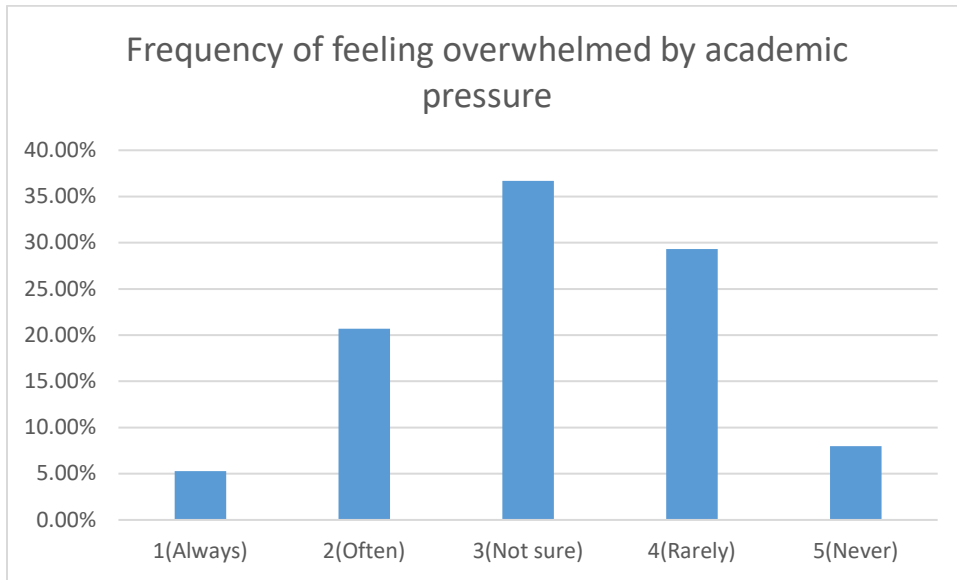
(Figure 5): Students engagement in extracurricular activities for emotional well-being

6. Frequency of feeling overwhelmed by academic pressure

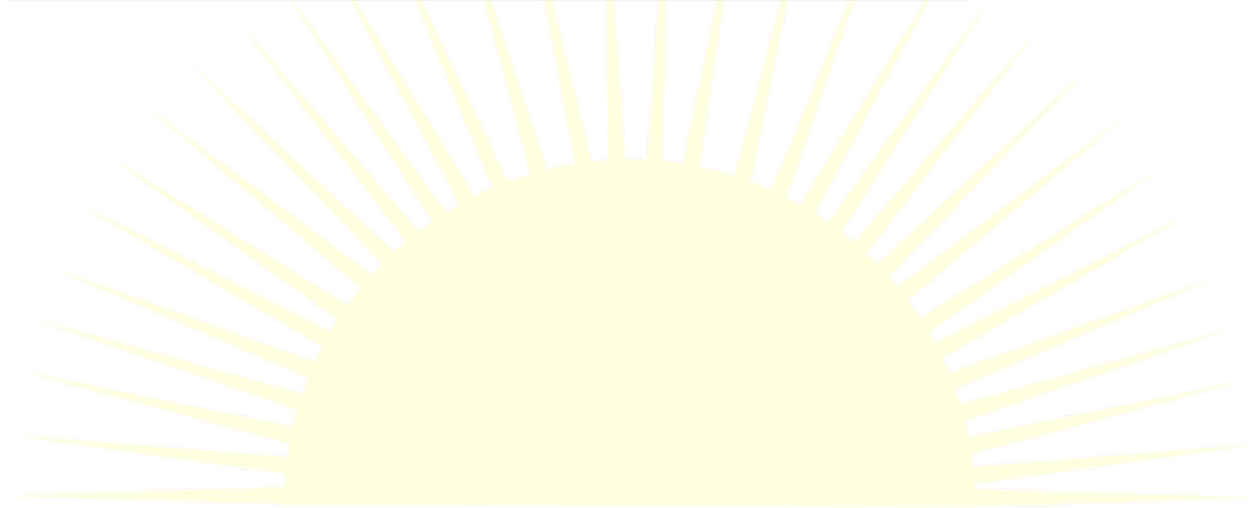
The data highlights that a notable percentage of students (36.7%) are uncertain about their feelings regarding academic pressure. Additionally, 29.3% of students believe they are not overwhelmed by academic pressure, indicating a positive perception.



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(Figure 6): Students perception of feeling overwhelmed by academic



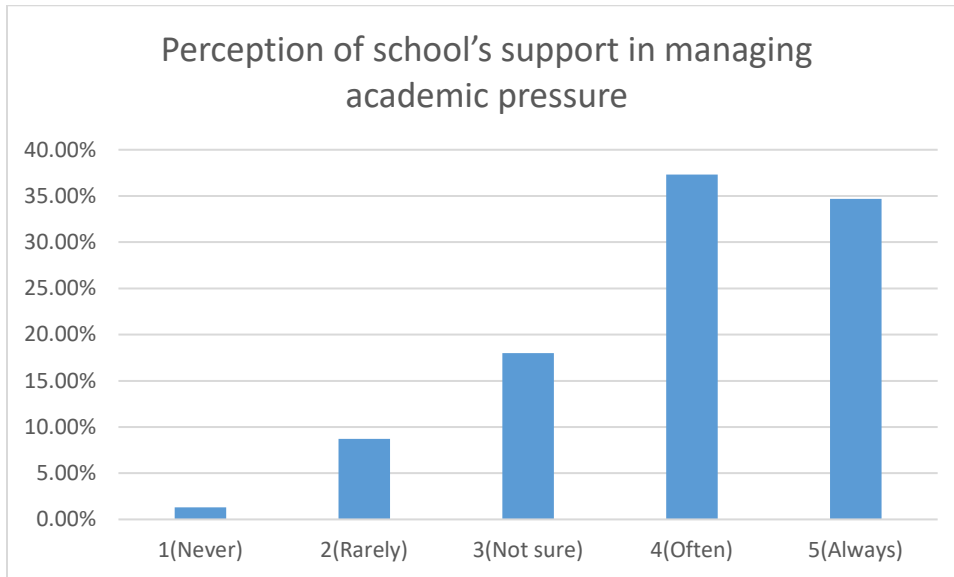
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7. Perception of school's support in managing academic pressure

The data indicates that 37.3% of students generally perceive that the school often supports students in managing the stress related to academic pressure. Moreover, 34.7% believe that the school always offers this support, while 18% hold a neutral stance on the matter.



(Figure 7): Students perception of school's support in managing academic pressure

8. Participation in various initiatives regarding mental health and wellbeing

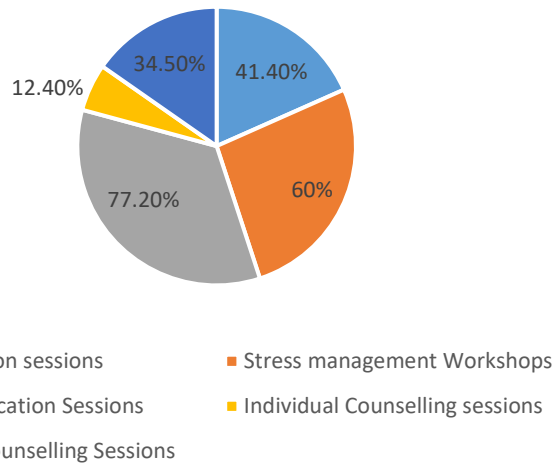
The data reveals a positive trend with a majority of students participating in mental health and well-being initiatives. Particularly, 77.2% engaging in peer education sessions, 60% in stress management workshops, 41.1% in meditation sessions, and 34.5% in group counselling sessions.

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Participation in various initiatives

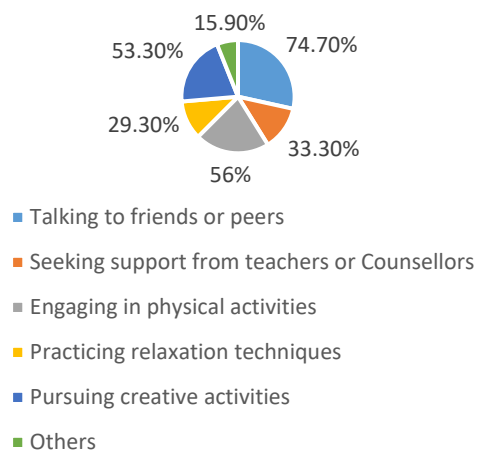


(Figure 8): Students participation in various initiatives

9. Mechanism used to cope with negative emotions

The data underscores that a considerable portion of students employ various coping mechanisms for dealing with negative emotions. Specifically, 74.70% choose to confide in friends, 56% opt for physical activities, 53.30% engage in creative pursuits, 33.3% seek support from teachers and counsellors, and 29.30% practice relaxation techniques to manage their negative emotions.

Mechanism to cope with negative emotions



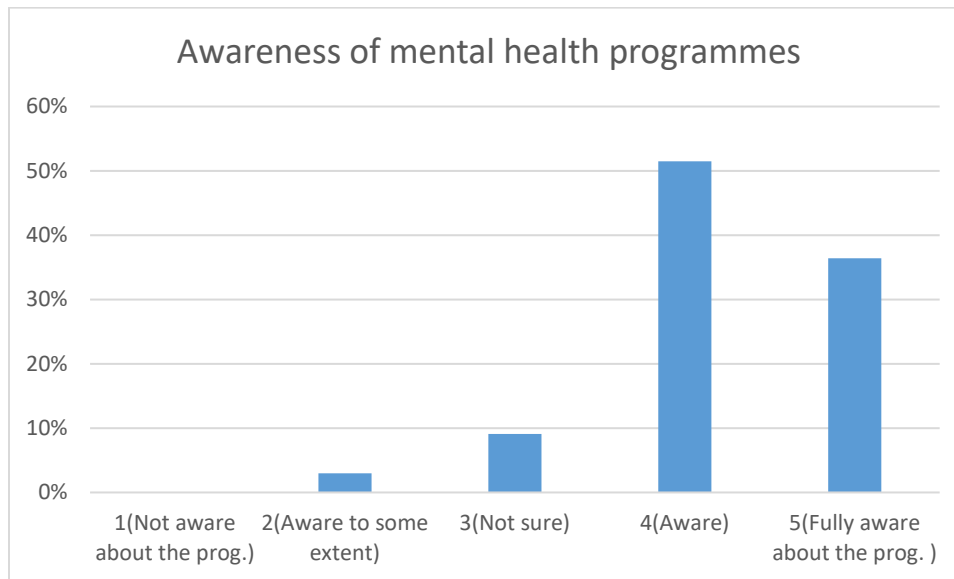
(Figure 9): Students mechanism to cope with negative emotions

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Quantitative Data Analysis (Educators)- Key findings

10. Awareness of mental health programmes

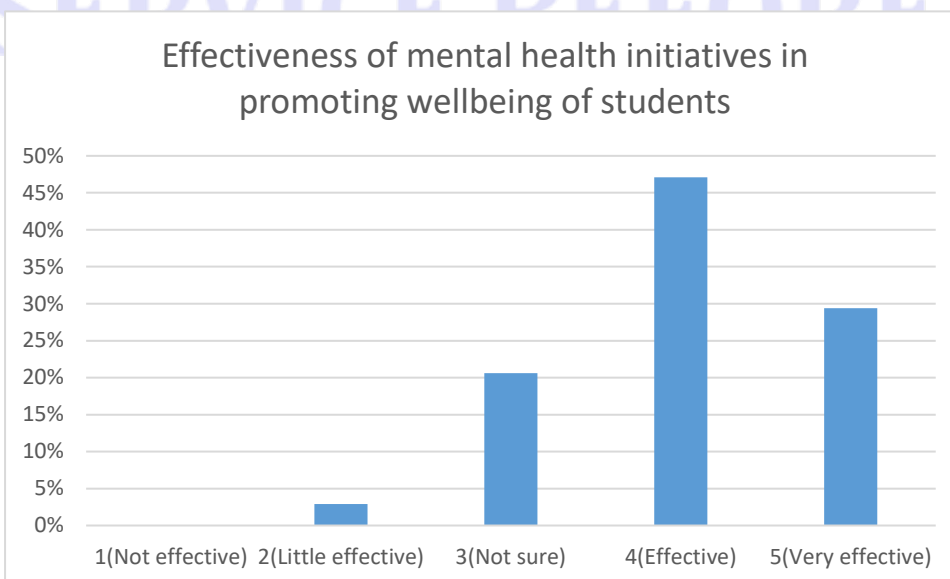
51% of the teachers reported being aware of the various mental health initiatives and programs offered by the school, with 36.4% stating they were fully informed about these initiatives.



(Figure 10): Teachers' awareness level of various mental health

11. Effectiveness of mental health initiatives in promoting wellbeing of students

The data indicates that 47.1% of teachers perceive the current mental health initiatives and programs to be effective in promoting the well-being of students, while 29.4% perceive them to be very effective. Additionally, 20.6% hold a neutral stance regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives.



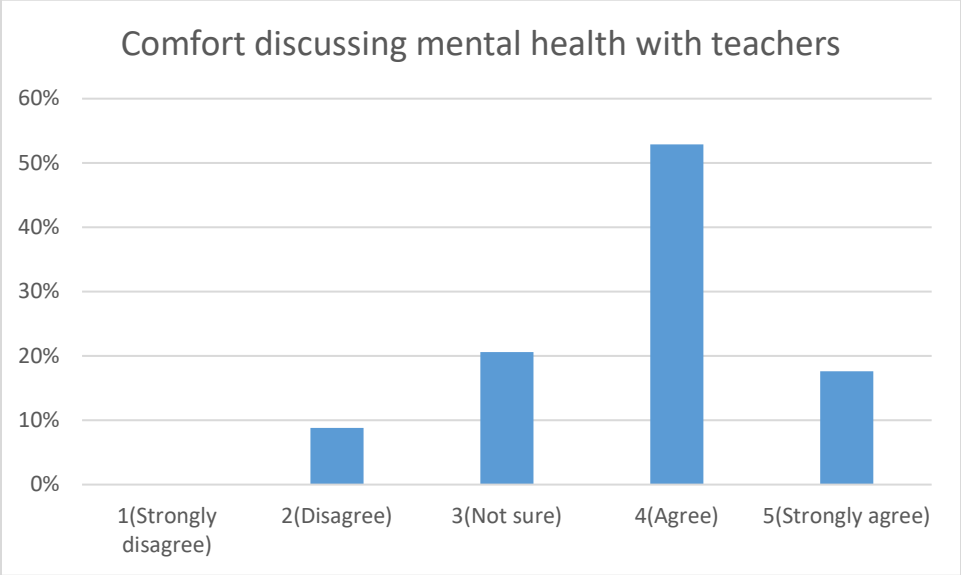
(Figure 11): Teachers' perception of effectiveness of initiatives in wellbeing of students



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12. Comfort discussing mental health with teachers

The data indicates that 52% of teachers perceive that students at Salwan Public School feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns with them or other school staff. Additionally, 17.6% strongly agree with this perception, and 20.6% hold a neutral stance.

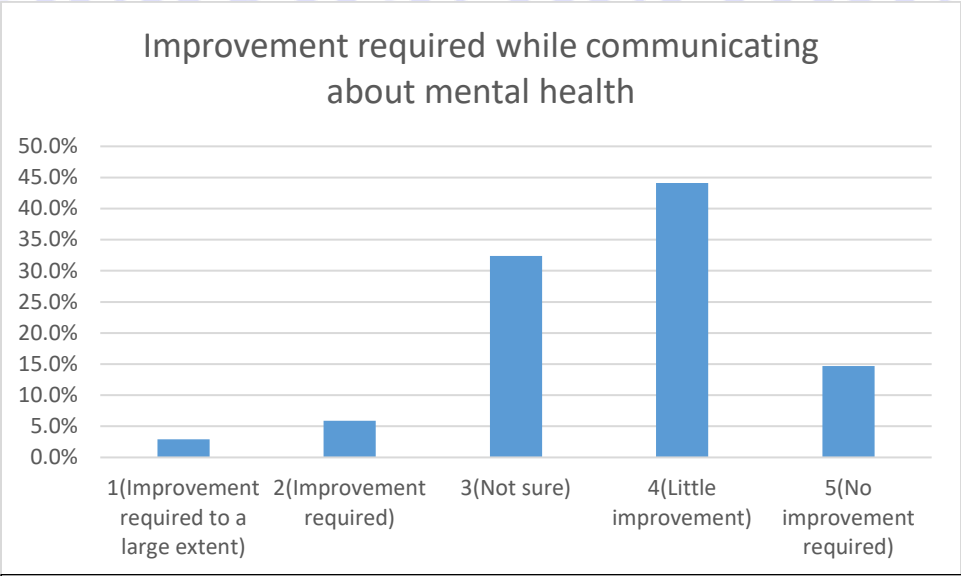


(Figure 12): Teachers’ perception of students’ discussing comfortably with teachers

13. Improvement required while communicating about mental health

The data suggests that 41.1% of teachers feel that very little improvement is required in the way mental health initiatives are communicated to students and teachers within the school. Additionally, 14.7% perceived that no improvement is required, and 32.4% hold a neutral stance on this matter.

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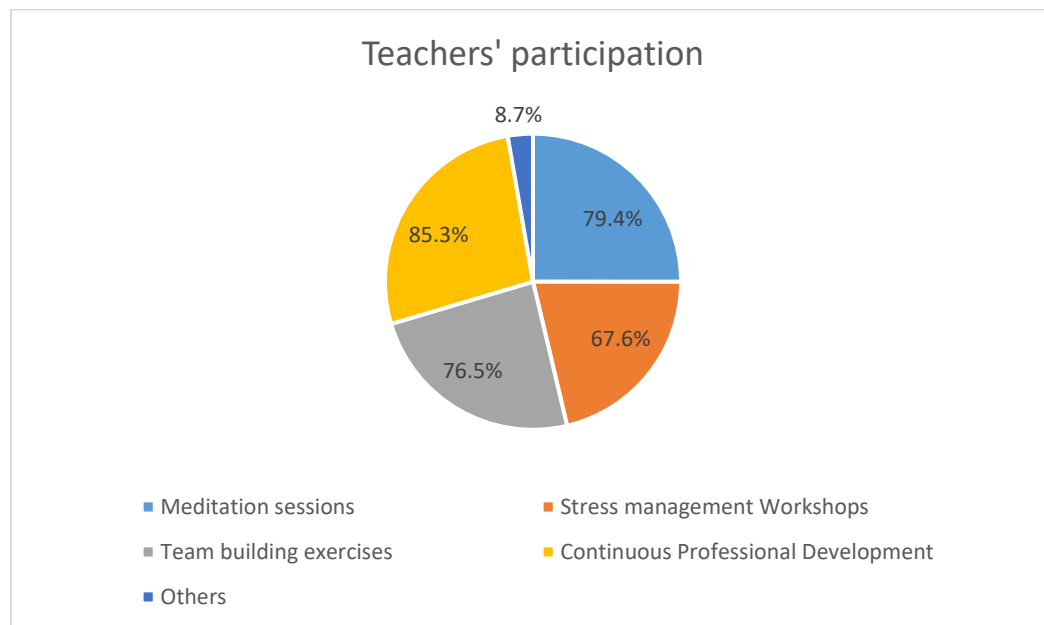


(Figure 13): Teachers’ perception of improvement required in communication about mental health

14. Participation in different mental health initiatives

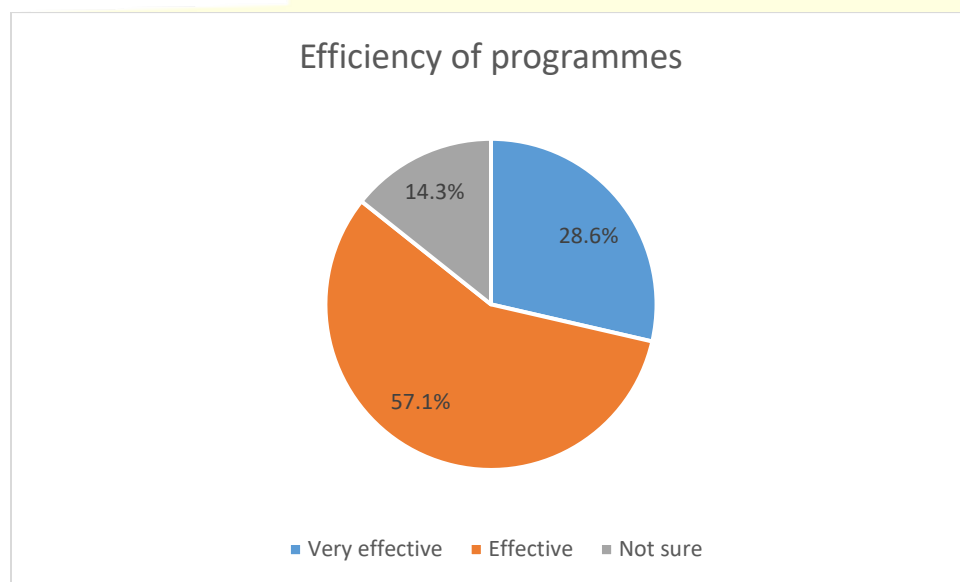
14. Teachers Participation in different initiatives

The data underscores a high level of engagement by educators in various initiatives: 85.3% in continuous professional development sessions, 79.4% in meditation sessions, 76.5% in team building exercises, and 67.6% in stress management workshops.



(Figure 14): Teachers' awareness level of various mental health

15. Efficiency of Continuous Development programmes



(Figure 15): Teachers' perception of efficiency of programmes

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QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS

All In Depth Interviews (IDIs) were audio recorded (with prior consent) and fully transcribed and translated. We first familiarized ourselves with the data through reading and organizing, followed by coding and creating categories. By analysing the categories, we divided the data into broader thematic levels, developing additional matrices and conceptual models to describe key findings.

Improvements or additional initiatives related to mental health

Respondents expressed a desire for more mental health workshops focusing on coping skills and resilience-building. Students also suggested increased bonding between teachers and students and more group counselling /Life skills sessions to be initiated. Teachers highlighted shyness and social stigma as major barriers which inhibit students discussing mental health.

Nearly all teacher, and students from Salwan School stated views that schools should have a role in addressing students' mental health. Many teachers described their responsibility for the overall wellbeing and development of students beyond their academics.

One teacher remarked, "Teachers play an important role in mental health of children, as children are not same. We need to cater to the different needs of students (male teacher)

All research participants suggested teachers need to have a positive relationship and good communication with their students.

Enhancing Communication of Mental Health Resources:

Participants indicated that Tuesday assemblies can be utilised informing about available mental health resources. Others felt that the school uses effective channels to communicate information about mental health initiatives to students.

"One student remarked that the peer educators start making announcements on the PA system week before the events. We get timely information".

"The school should inform by putting information on the display boards" (student)

Addressing Emotional Well-being Challenges:

Respondents mentioned academic pressure, lack of motivation, anger issues and peer pressure as significant stressors affecting emotional wellbeing.

"Students feel shy to speak their problems with teachers. Openness is created by the good teacher. The good teacher will always stimulate students" (Male teacher)

"So many times, we are unable to regulate our emotions, it becomes a stress and affects our mental health" (student)



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Successful Mental Health Initiatives

Peer Education workshops emerged as the most effective initiative, establishing a safe platform for open communication about mental health. Concurrently, teachers highlighted meditation and stress management sessions as highly beneficial initiatives. Given the observed success, expanding and promoting Peer Education programs, as well as enhancing the accessibility of meditation and stress management sessions, stands out as a highly impactful strategy.

"I feel that if a child gets learning from a peer student, without pushing, the child feels no body is forcing him. When students are guided by peers, they understand faster and puts things into practice." (teacher)

"I benefit a lot from the weekly meditations, it relaxes me and I am able concentrate on the things. I look forward for the meditation sessions" (Female teacher).

DISCUSSION

The study emphasises on the effectiveness of mental health initiatives within Salwan Public School. Initiatives like peer education programs, stress management workshops, and continuous professional development for educators have demonstrated positive outcomes. Students and teachers reported improved well-being and better stress management, emphasizing the importance of such initiatives. Understanding the perceptions of students and teachers is crucial. The study reveals a generally positive perception regarding mental health initiatives. This alignment in perception can contribute to a conducive environment where both students and educators are on the same page regarding the significance of mental health support. Addressing barriers like stigma associated with seeking help is pivotal. While a significant portion of students felt there was no stigma, it's essential to address the rest to ensure all students can comfortably access mental health support. The study identifies these barriers, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. Prior studies suggest that a prevalent obstacle to the successful implementation of evidence-based mental health interventions is the presence of "competing priorities within schools," such as academic instruction or testing (Eiraldi et al., 2015). A school-based mental health intervention study in Kenya found, for example, that teachers prioritised exam preparation over other non-academic activities. This prioritisation acted as a barrier to intervention attendance (Meza et al., 2020).

Active engagement in extracurricular activities for emotional well-being signifies a holistic approach. The study reveals a substantial majority, of students, engage in extracurricular activities or hobbies for emotional well-being. This is a positive indication, suggesting that a significant portion of students recognize the importance of such activities in managing their emotions and maintaining mental well-being. Prior studies found out that academic grades were highest in adolescents involved in structured extra-curricular activities. (Pol, S. D., & Prakash, A. (2023), Engagement of structured extra-curricular activities: A preventive measure for technology addiction in adolescents)

Educators play a vital role in promoting mental health. The study shows that continuous development programs and team building activities significantly equip educators to provide effective support. Investing in these programs can have a lasting impact on students' well-being and academic success. Continuing teacher education programmes to promote a broader vision of education and underline the value, benefits and meaningfulness of mental health and wellbeing for young people, underlining both academic, and social and emotional benefits (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Diamond, 2010).



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The study provides valuable suggestions for improvement, such as enhancing communication about mental health initiatives. Implementing these suggestions can bridge any existing gaps and create a more inclusive and accessible support system. Integrating mental health programs into the school curriculum can ensure a consistent and structured approach. It offers a proactive way to instil awareness and understanding of mental health from an early age, promoting a long-term positive impact. Tailoring support mechanisms to address academic stress and fostering a culture of open dialogue about social emotional learning may mitigate emotional challenges. Social and emotional learning promotion provides a foundation for effective learning and academic success (Adelman & Taylor, 2009). It facilitates the acquisition of valuable skills such as regulating emotions, managing emotional distress, coping with classroom demands and frustration, improving problem-solving abilities, developing healthy relationships, and promoting collaborative teamwork. In a meta-analysis encompassing over 200 studies, Durlak et al. (2011) reported that students participating in universal social and emotional learning programs scored significantly higher on standardized achievement tests compared to peers who did not participate in such programs. Comparing the findings with existing research showcases the uniqueness and effectiveness of the initiatives at Salwan Public School. It's essential to understand how these initiatives stand out and what lessons can be shared with the broader academic community.

The study's findings highlight the transformative impact mental health initiatives have within Salwan Public School. By fostering a culture of well-being and support, the school sets an example for others to follow, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more productive educational environment. Continued dedication to mental health initiatives is essential for the holistic growth of students and educators alike.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights the significance of mental health initiatives with the school. The positive impact observed emphasises the need for sustained efforts, fostering a culture of well-being and support in educational institutions. The study advocates for ongoing evaluation, integration of initiatives into the curriculum, and targeted improvements to create an inclusive and nurturing environment, ultimately ensuring the holistic growth and success of students. Based on the findings, it is recommended to implement a structured mental health education program that is integrated within the school curriculum. It will be useful to expand and promote peer support programs which foster a sense of belongingness and provide students with a confidante. Conducting regular awareness campaigns on reducing stigma and seeking help, promoting work life balance for teachers and students are other identified areas of focus.



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