

Understanding and Addressing the Mental Health Crisis Among School and College Students: A Multidisciplinary Perspective

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Abstract

The mental health of students in educational institutions has become an increasingly urgent concern worldwide. From academic stress and social anxiety to digital overload and post-pandemic trauma, students today face unprecedented psychological pressures. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the current state of mental health among school and college students, identifying major contributing factors, societal implications, and intervention strategies. It combines quantitative data, psychological theory, real-world case studies, and traditional wellness approaches—such as yogic science—to propose a holistic model of intervention and resilience-building for educational institutions.

Keywords: Student mental health, schools, colleges, psychological wellbeing, yogic solutions, Inner Engineering, academic stress, youth resilience

1. Introduction

In recent years, mental health concerns among school and college students have intensified into a global crisis. The pressures of modern education, rapid socio-cultural changes, and digital exposure are pushing students to emotional extremes. According to the World Health Organization (2021), one in seven adolescents experiences mental disorders, with many left undiagnosed or untreated. The traditional education system has emphasized academic outcomes over emotional intelligence and psychological stability. This research aims to address the psychological toll of modern education and introduce culturally rooted, practical frameworks to enhance student well-being.

2. Mental Health: Definitions and Scope

Mental health, as defined by the WHO, is "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to their community." Among students, mental health includes:

- Academic-related anxiety and burnout
- Depression and low self-esteem
- Social isolation and peer pressure
- Suicidal ideation and self-harm
- Screen addiction and cyberbullying
- Family and socioeconomic trauma

Mental well-being is not just the absence of mental illness, but the presence of purpose, emotional strength, and balance.

3. Causes and Risk Factors

3.1 Academic Pressure

The intense competition to achieve top ranks and meet parental or societal expectations leads to chronic stress, sleep deprivation, and mental fatigue.

3.2 Emotional and Social Development

Teenage years are marked by identity confusion and emotional sensitivity. Social rejection, bullying, or lack of validation can lead to withdrawal or self-harm.

3.3 Digital Addiction and Cyberbullying

The overuse of mobile phones and social media contributes to anxiety, attention disorders, sleep disruption, and comparison-based self-loathing.

3.4 Post-Pandemic Psychological Effects

COVID-19 deeply disrupted the rhythm of student life, creating isolation, fear, and uncertainty. Learning gaps, grief over lost family members, and economic stress have led to lasting trauma.

3.5 Domestic and Socioeconomic Factors

Broken families, financial instability, and domestic violence affect concentration, motivation, and the psychological safety of students.

4. Impacts of Mental Health Issues

Mental health challenges in schools and colleges have wide-ranging consequences:

- Declining academic performance
- Absenteeism and dropout rates
- Aggression or emotional withdrawal
- Addiction to substances and risky behaviors
- Higher incidences of suicidal thoughts or actions
- Long-term psychological disorders like PTSD and bipolar disorder

5. Case Studies

Case Study 1: Kota Coaching Crisis, India

In Kota, Rajasthan—India's coaching hub—over 30 students died by suicide in 2023 alone due to extreme academic pressure and parental expectations. Despite repeated warnings from mental health experts, institutions often fail to provide adequate counseling or emotional support.

Case Study 2: Yale University, USA

Yale faced backlash from students over inadequate mental health support. As a response, it introduced flexible medical leave policies, 24/7 counseling services, and peer support groups—leading to reduced anxiety levels and improved student satisfaction.

Case Study 3: Hikikomori in Japan

In Japan, a growing number of students are classified as *hikikomori*—young individuals who withdraw from society due to stress, academic failure, or bullying. The education ministry introduced wellness programs, peer dialogue circles, and mindfulness to counter this trend.

Case Study 4: Isha Vidhya Schools, India

The Isha Foundation's rural schools integrate yoga, meditation, and value education along with regular academics. Internal surveys showed these students had higher self-confidence, better emotional control, and significantly lower absenteeism due to mental distress.

6. Sadhguru's Inner Engineering: Yogic Solutions for Youth Well-being

6.1 About Inner Engineering

Sadhguru's Inner Engineering program, developed by Isha Foundation, is a structured yogic science-based approach to mental and emotional well-being. It includes practices like *Shambhavi Mahamudra Kriya*, mindfulness modules, and breath awareness techniques.

6.2 Benefits for Students

- **Reduces stress and anxiety:** Decreases cortisol (stress hormone) levels
- **Enhances focus and memory:** Increases mental clarity and academic efficiency
- **Improves emotional resilience:** Helps manage fear, anger, and peer pressure
- **Better physical health:** Improves sleep, digestion, and immunity
- **Promotes responsibility and leadership:** Encourages social and self-awareness

6.3 Empirical Evidence

A study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2020) found that Inner Engineering participants reported significantly lower levels of stress and depression after four weeks of practice. IIT-Madras and Vellore Institute of Technology reported positive outcomes after offering these practices to students.

6.4 Integration in Educational Institutions

Schools and colleges across India are now incorporating these practices in their wellness modules. With minimal cost and scalable impact, yogic techniques offer a powerful mental health toolkit that aligns with India's cultural heritage.

7. Existing Policies and Institutional Gaps

Despite several policy announcements, implementation remains weak:

- India's CBSE mandated school counselors, but 70% of schools have none.
- Colleges have underfunded and understaffed counseling centers.
- Mental health budgets are less than 2% of total health expenditure in many countries.
- The stigma around mental illness prevents students from seeking help.

8. Effective Intervention Strategies

8.1 Curriculum Reform

Integrate mental health education, yoga, emotional intelligence, and life skills into the formal syllabus.

8.2 Peer Support Networks

Train senior students as mental health ambassadors to provide a listening space for peers.

8.3 Regular Psychological Screening

Conduct annual assessments for anxiety, depression, and stress with follow-up support.

8.4 Faculty and Parent Training

Educators and parents must recognize early signs of distress and communicate effectively.

8.5 Digital and Teletherapy Tools

Deploy apps and helplines offering confidential and affordable support.

8.6 Daily Yogic Practices

Introduce 10–15 minutes of yoga, breathwork, and mindfulness in school/college routines to enhance resilience and concentration.

9. Recommendations

1. **Institutionalize Mental Health Infrastructure:** Every school and college must have access to trained counselors, mental health educators, and support frameworks.
2. **Partner with Traditional Wellness Institutions:** Collaborate with organizations like Isha Foundation to integrate yoga and meditation into wellness programs.
3. **Policy and Budget Enhancement:** Allocate 5% of educational funds for mental health services, screenings, and staff training.
4. **Community and Parent Awareness Campaigns:** Create national campaigns that de-stigmatize mental health and promote early help-seeking behavior.
5. **Longitudinal Data Collection and Research:** Track mental health trends and outcomes in student populations to design evidence-based interventions.

10. Conclusion

Mental health is not a luxury but a necessity in 21st-century education. If schools and colleges continue to treat emotional wellbeing as secondary, we risk building a generation of high-performing but internally fractured individuals. By combining psychological science with India's ancient yogic knowledge—as offered through initiatives like Inner Engineering—we can create balanced, resilient, and joyful learners. Educational institutions must now become centers of both knowledge and inner growth. Only then will true education flourish.

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