

A STUDY ON THE AWARENESS OF SCHOOL TEACHERS ABOUT POLICY DOCUMENTS RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Rising awareness of mental health in India has led to the formation of policy initiatives aimed at promoting mental well-being. These policies include instructions for teachers to prevent mental distress and promote mental health. Teachers' perception, awareness, and preparedness to tackle mental health issues among students are crucial. Teachers can play a key role in improving mental health by identifying early symptoms of distress and promoting sound mental health among students. The study aimed to determine the current level of implementation of the RTE Act and the Mental Health Care Bill, assess the level of mental health awareness among teachers, and evaluate school counseling competencies related to mental health issues. The study is quantitative in nature, with data collected from twenty randomly selected schools through a questionnaire. The results showed a gap between policy creation and its successful implementation. Awareness, reach, and quality of services are uneven, particularly in the field of school education. The study reveals that the reality falls short of expectations, and there are numerous ethical initiatives in policies and practices that require strong campaigns to support grassroots actions aimed at improving the condition of school children suffering from mental health issues in India. The authors recommend identifying core areas within education and health policies, emphasizing the need for counselors in schools.

Keywords: awareness, Mental Health Care Bill, policy documents, RTE, school teachers

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act emphasized making elementary education a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. According to the 2011 Census, children under fifteen years constitute 25.5 million in India (Chahal & Kumar, 2017). Access to quality education is closely linked to the quality of life. Education is a key driver of progress and individual development (Min, Lee & Lee, 2013). Mental health issues are common among children, affecting interpersonal, social, and family relationships. These issues can be addressed through education, primarily by strengthening the basic education system. Teachers' awareness and preparedness to manage mental health issues in students are vital. By

recognizing early symptoms of mental distress, teachers can promote sound mental health among students. This study focuses on teachers' strategies to understand and support student mental health.

Media, often called the fourth pillar of democracy, should be fair and unbiased. However, research indicates media bias regarding mental health issues. Media often portrays mental illness as associated with crime and violence, blaming mentally ill individuals rather than understanding their condition (Bithell, 2010). Greater mental health literacy can encourage open discussion of these issues (DeRango, 2016). Unresolved emotional problems and behaviors can lead to mental distress and physical illness. Common mental health issues include an inability to concentrate, indecision, lack of self-confidence, irritability, anxiety, panic attacks, and mood swings.

The first law related to mental illness in British India was the Lunatic Removal Act of 1851. Over the years, several other laws were enacted to regulate the care of mentally ill individuals in British India. The objectives of this study include determining the current level of implementation of the RTE Act and the Mental Health Care Bill, studying the level of mental health awareness among teachers, and evaluating school counseling competencies for addressing mental health issues.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This descriptive, quantitative study aims to evaluate the awareness and implementation of the RTE Act and the Mental Health Care Bill, as well as school counseling competency.

2.2 Population and Sample

All secondary schools from the Bokaro district of Jharkhand were the population of the study. Twenty secondary schools were randomly selected as the sample for the study.

2.3 Research Tool

The self-developed questionnaire comprised 10 (Ten) items having yes or no answer, was administered as the tool for the study and the data was collected.

2.4 Process of Data Collection

Before collecting data, the permission was taken from the authorities and they were ensured that the responses collected from them would be kept confidential. The questionnaire was distributed to the school head one after another. It took 10 to 20 minutes to fill the information and the questionnaires were taken back after completion.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by descriptive method and simple frequency was done to know the number of responses by school heads.

3.0 RESULTS

After independence, the primary objective of the Indian government was to ensure education for all without discrimination. Voices advocating for the rights of children with mental health issues have become louder globally. In India, increasing awareness of mental health has led to policy initiatives.

Table 1: Responses of the wareness of the Provisions of the RTE Act, 2009 and the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017

S.N	Questions	Answer		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Are you aware of the RTE Act, 2009 and Mental Healthcare Act, 2017?	9	11	20
2	Do you have any copy of the Act?	5	15	20
3	Have the teachers of your school have attended the orientation programme on the Act?	2	18	20
4	Are your teachers interested in getting orientation on the Act?	17	3	20
5	Do you have idea to deal with Mental Health issues?	6	14	20
6	Do you follow the Legal policies framed for Mental health of the students?	3	17	20
7	Do you have counseling facility for students in school?	0	20	20
8	Do you feel the Acts helpful for students?	13	7	20
9	Have you faced any mental health issue among students?	18	2	20
10	Do you feel more improvements are required in these Acts?	10	10	20

Data in table 1 reveals that most of the schools have low level of awareness. Only two teachers have attended orientation programme on RTE act. Most of the schools have no idea how to deal with mental health issues. No school has counseling facility although they always face issues related to mental health. They wanted improvement in these acts.

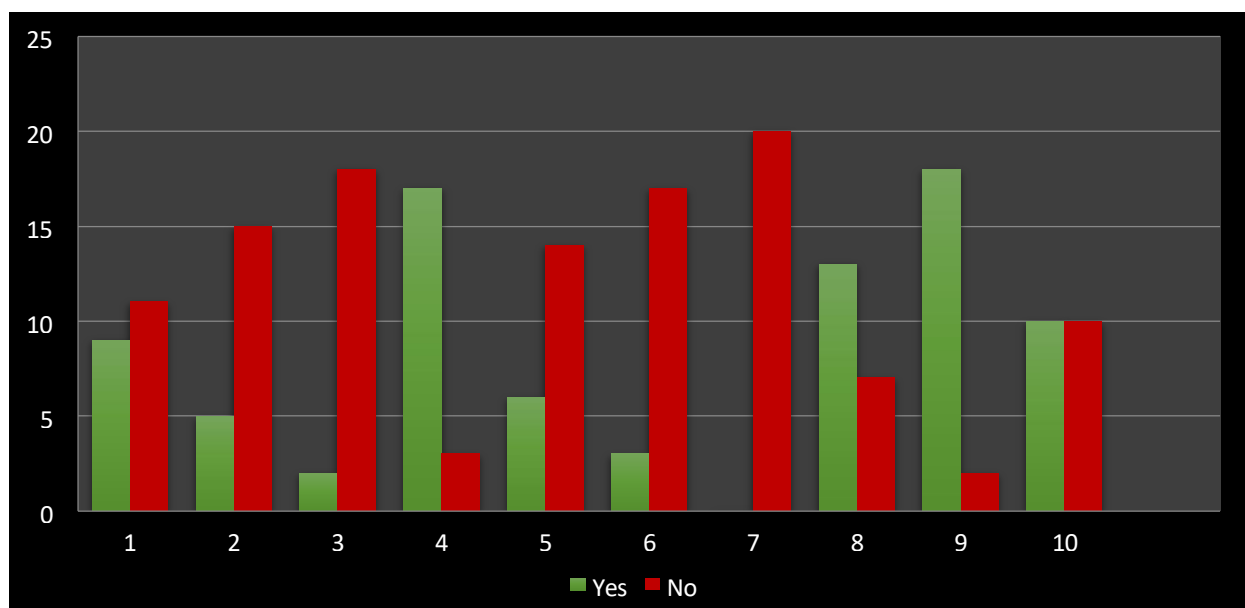


Figure 1: Awareness of the provisions of the RTE Act and the Mental Healthcare Act

4.0 DISCUSSION

The data in Table 1 reveal that schools had limited awareness of mental health issues and the relevant legislation. It is further reveals that there is a low level of awareness about RTE act (Joshi, 2018; Belur, 2018; Thakur, 2014) and Mental Healthcare Act (Srivastava, et al. 2016; Mishra and Galhotra, 2018; among school teachers. The study shows that there remains a little gap between the policy creation and its implementation. Ghumaan (2011) conducted a study and found that very low level of awareness among teachers and further revealed that implanting RTE is a challenge. The awareness, reach and quality of services continues to be sketchy and uneven everywhere, especially in the area of school education. Even not a single school has counseling facility while they face many issues related to mental health (Rakshand, 2018; Bano, 2017). Odeleye (2017) and Kapur (2018) revealed the same result that schools have no facility of guidance and counseling. The study reveals that in spite of having numerous examples of ethical initiative of policies and practices, there requires strong policy campaign to support the immediate steps to improve the condition of school children suffering with mental health issues in India.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Teachers need to be trained through mass awareness programs, such as seminars, workshops, and refresher courses, to understand and implement the RTE Act and the Mental Healthcare Act. Guidance and counseling should be prioritized, given the prevalence of mental health issues among students, such as exam-related depression. Improving teachers' understanding of mental health and their role in addressing it is essential.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher came across the many interesting ideas during the course of research. In this regard the following recommendations have been put forward for further study.

- Mental health awareness should be a key focus for both education and health policy.
- Mental ability tests could help measure student interest and attention, improving mental wellness.
- Schools should prioritize guidance and counseling services.
- Educational objectives should include mental health development for students.
- Government policies should use evidence-based approaches and ICT to address mental health issues in schools.
- Workshops and seminars should be organized at school level to spread awareness among students about mental health issues.
- Reading material should be provided in the mother tongue to enable better understanding of the Right to Education Act.

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