

Professional Network

Post Event Summary

The role of the
school environment
on young people's
mental health:
Insights from
research and
practice

Wednesday 20 July, 2022
14:00 IST / 9:30 BST

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Executive Summary

This event was part of a schedule of events organised by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) Professionals Network.

School climate is a complex, multi-dimensional construct which includes the elements of social, emotional, and physical safety; the presence of respectful behaviour; an importance of learning; and collaboration between students, families, and teachers. A positive school climate can impact adolescent health by reducing risky behaviours, such as smoking, alcohol use and aggression, and increase positive behaviours, such as improved mental health outcomes, interpersonal relationships and academic achievement.

Programme and Speakers

Welcome Address

Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones (Associate Professor in Mental Health Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Leeds, UK) – Welcomed the audience and explained that the current session is interested in thinking about the role of the school environment, and shifting the conversation from focusing purely on mental health and well-being as a property of the individual to being a property of the conditions or context in which young people are living. This approach is in line with the global mental health agenda to understand that we all live in different conditions and circumstances, and therefore there is a need to try to understand what elements of these differing circumstances are particularly supportive of positive well-being and what elements are contributing to poor well-being.

This approach becomes particularly important when we think about young people who are in a very critical stage of development (the adolescent years) who's abilities to manage emotions, deal with stress and navigate complex social relationships is all being tested whilst also being developed.

Siobhan then indicated that this event is part of a response to a global agenda to do research differently by working much more closely with the young people who are the intended beneficiaries of that research.

Insights from Global Research

Dr Sphoorthi Prabhu, (National institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, NIMHANS) – Presented the insights from a global research umbrella review that was conducted comprising of articles from 2016 to present.

Sphoorthi highlighted the findings from previous research indicating that the concept of 'school environment' is made up of the following sub-constructs:

- Physical or natural environment/institutional (physical space of the school and its appearance)
- Academic/Quality of teaching or learning (quality of teaching and learning that takes place in the school)
- Community (what are the relationships like between students and students, teachers and teachers and students and teachers and the relationship between the school and the parents. etc).

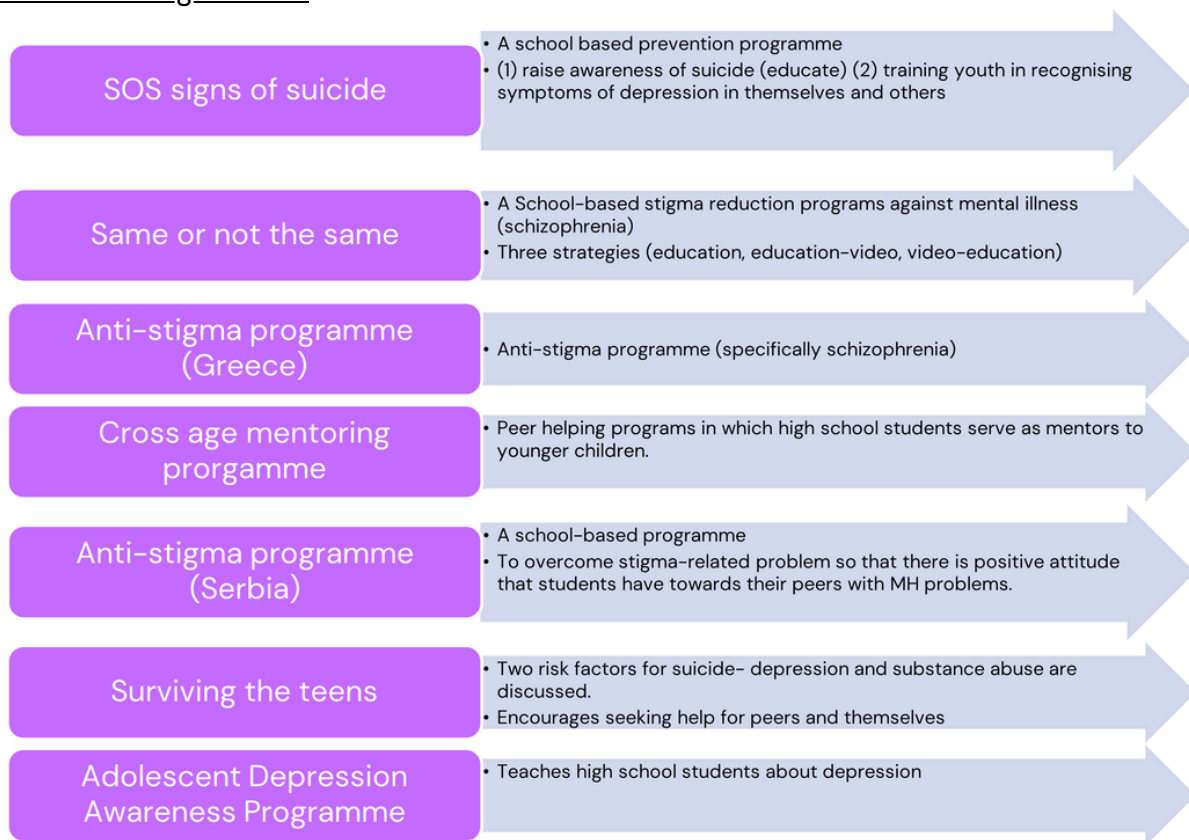
- Psycho-social characteristics/Safety (how emotionally secure and safe do the people of the school feel – this includes the adolescents, teachers, and school staff).

What are the existing programmes to enhance the school environment?

Sphoorthi conducted an umbrella review that resulted in the following:

- Preliminary search = 34 articles, 2 duplicates
- Title and abstract screening = 32 articles, 26 excluded
- Full text screening = 6 articles, 1 excluded
- 5 systematic reviews included = 7 unique effective programmes identified.
- Of these 7 programs 4 were based in the USA, 1 China, 1 Greece and 1 Serbia.

Breakdown of Programmes:



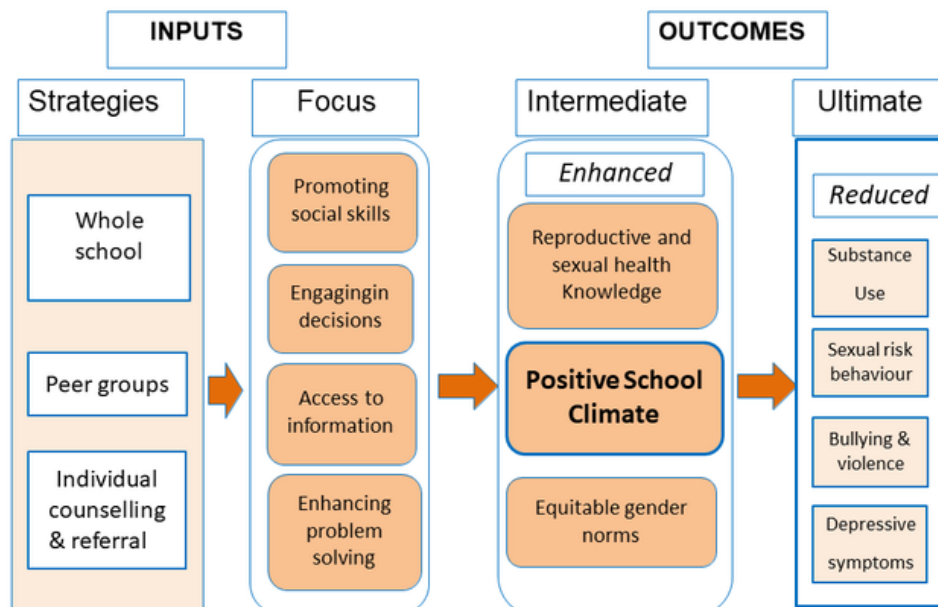
Findings from these programmes SAMA

Programme	Findings
SOS signs of suicide	Significantly lower rates of suicide attempts Greater knowledge and more adaptive attitudes about depression and suicide
Same or not the same	The format of providing education followed by video was found to be effective. Improvement was noted in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stigmatizing attitudes • social distance • knowledge.
Anti-stigma programme (Greece)	Positive changes were recorded in students' beliefs, attitudes and desired social distance; however, only the changes in beliefs and attitudes were maintained after one year.
Cross age mentoring programme	For the mentors it helps in improvement of academic, self-esteem and connectedness. Mentees have demonstrated improvement in attitude toward and connectedness with school and peers; self-efficacy, academic achievement, social skills, behaviour problems etc.
Anti-stigma programme (Serbia)	Social discrimination and the tendency towards social restriction were reduced. Social awareness of mental health-related problems increased among young people six months after program implementation
Surviving the teens	Positive outcomes in program group students' suicide and depression knowledge, attitudes, confidence, and behavioral intentions
ADAP	Improvement in knowledge of depression
Gatehouse project	Improvement in health outcomes (decrease in risk behaviours of smoking and drinking). No significant impact on emotional well-being

Insights from Practice (SEHER)

Prachi Khandeparkar, (Psychologist and Project Lead-Adolescence Health Promotion Programs, Sangath) – Presented the learnings and challenges from the experimental project SEHER (Strengthening Evidence base on School-based interventions for promoting adolescent health) and discussed the significance of providing a school environment that is supportive of every child and is conscious of their nutrition, health, and safety.

SEHER Conceptual Framework



SEHER is an evidence based school health promotion intervention that targets adolescents (aged 13–15 years old). This programme was developed by Sangath a non government organisation.

The SEHER intervention addresses the following concerns for adolescents:

- Reproductive and Sexual Health
- Bullying
- Substance misuse
- Gender Equality and Violence
- Mental Health
- Health and Hygiene
- Study Skills

SEHER takes a multi level approach across the 'whole school' level, the 'group' level and the 'individual' level, using the following activities:

Level	Activities
Whole School	Awareness Generation
	Speak-out box
	Wall magazine
	Intra School Competitions
	School Health Promotion Advisory committee
	Healthy school policies
Group	Peer groups for class IX & X students
	Workshops for students and teachers
Individual	Individual counselling and referral

Key quantitative findings from SEHER indicated:

- The SEHER intervention delivered by lay counsellors (SMs) was superior to both the control and teacher delivered arms on the primary outcome, and most secondary outcomes, in both cohorts.
- The lay counsellor-delivered intervention resulted in large improvements in school climate, bullying, violence and depression and moderate effects on attitudes towards gender equity.
- Consistent for both genders.

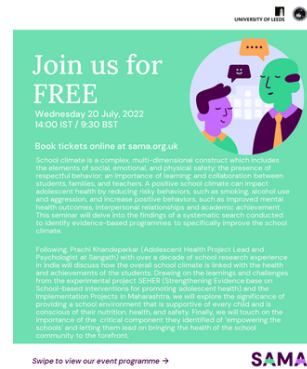
- There was evidence of a dose-response relationship with intervention effects increasing on outcomes like bullying, depressive symptoms, violence and attitudes towards gender equity at the end of the second year of the program, compared with the first(in cohort1).
- The teacher-led intervention, on the other hand, showed no effects on the primary outcome, or most of the secondary outcomes, in either cohort.

Broader Network Discussions / Q&As

Dr Poornima Bhola (Professor Dept. of Clinical Psychology, National institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), India) then chaired the broader network discussions touching on:

- Why there is such a focus on anti-stigma interventions for school environment.
- The development of the concept 'school connectedness' and how young people are no longer considered to have a passive role in this and are instead viewed as important people in the community.
- Implementation tips (specifically focusing on incorporating the hierarchies of a school structure).

Social Media Promotion



A total of 21 external professional network members joined the event.



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