

# The Role of Education in Reducing Stigma of Mental Health Problems in Schools and Increasing Support for Students

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**ABSTRACT** – Stigma towards mental health issues in schools is often an obstacle for students to seek support and manage their emotional well-being. This article discusses the role of education in reducing this stigma and increasing awareness and support for mental health issues among students, teachers, and school staff. The lack of understanding about the importance of mental health makes this situation seem unimportant or excessive. Using a literature review approach, this study examines the importance of education based on accurate and sensitive information, with the aim of creating an inclusive environment for students facing mental health disorders. In addition, training for teachers and school staff on how to recognize the symptoms of mental health problems and provide empathetic and non-discriminatory support is also discussed. An effective counseling program that is easily accessible to students at school is also seen as an important component in building a supportive climate for students with mental health problems. Mental health education integrated into the curriculum can help students better understand and accept their mental conditions, as well as learn ways to manage stress and anxiety. With increased understanding of mental health, stigma can be reduced, and students can feel safer seeking help. This article highlights the importance of collaboration between schools, parents, and the community in creating a welcoming and supportive environment for students' mental well-being.

**Keywords:** Stigma, mental health, education, school, student, support, counseling.

## A. INTRODUCTION

The stigma of mental health problems is increasingly a major concern in global society. Poor mental health, such as depression, anxiety,

or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is often considered shameful or taboo to talk about. As a result, many individuals suffering from mental health disorders are isolated and reluctant to seek help. This stigma not only impacts individuals with mental health disorders, but also affects society at large, including in schools (Wong & Lee, 2017). Education plays a vital role in building awareness and a better understanding of mental health issues, as well as reducing prejudice in society, especially among students.

In schools, the stigma surrounding mental health issues is more pronounced and often has a negative impact on students struggling with these conditions (Aliyah & Masnawati, 2022). Students with mental health disorders often feel embarrassed or afraid to disclose their problems for fear of being considered weak, strange, or even unable to face life's problems. Therefore, schools as educational institutions have a responsibility to create a supportive environment where students feel safe and valued, without fear of being ostracized because of mental health problems (Fitriyah et al., 2024). Through inclusive education and appropriate counseling, schools can play a key role in reducing stigma and raising awareness of the importance of mental health, as well as providing better support for students in need.

One of the main problems faced in education related to mental health is the widespread ignorance and misunderstanding among students, teachers, and school staff regarding mental health disorders. Many students experience symptoms of mental disorders, such as anxiety or depression, but find it difficult to recognize their own condition. Furthermore, this ignorance is compounded by a lack of understanding of how mental health issues can affect their academic performance and

emotional well-being (Yanti et al., 2013). Students struggling with mental health issues may feel pressured to excel academically, but have difficulty with focus, motivation, and energy. In many cases, the inability to understand these issues creates an environment that is insensitive to the needs of students struggling with mental health.

Another problem that often arises is the strong stigma against individuals with mental health disorders. In many schools, mental disorders are often seen as a sign of weakness or lack of personal resilience, which makes students feel isolated and ashamed to seek help. This stigma is exacerbated by negative stereotypes that develop in society about people with mental disorders, who are often seen as “different” or “disabled”, leading to their marginalization in the social environment. As a result, students with mental health problems may prefer to hide their condition or even try to deal with it alone, rather than open up to others or seek professional help (Knipe & Williams, 2018). This traps them in negative feelings and not knowing how to get help. The inability to access appropriate support increases the risk of declining emotional and academic well-being of students.

Support systems in schools are often limited, with a lack of adequate training for teachers and staff to identify and respond to symptoms of mental health disorders. This means that students who need attention often do not get the support they need. Many schools do not have specific policies or programs to address mental health issues, and if they do, the programs often do not receive enough attention or funding to run effectively. Without adequate understanding at the school level, students experiencing mental health problems do not receive support that meets their needs, which ultimately affects the quality of their education and overall well-being (Evans-Lacko & Mojtabai, 2014).

The importance of observing the role of education in reducing the stigma of mental health problems in schools cannot be underestimated, given the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders among young people. According to various studies, mental disorders such as anxiety and depression often appear in adolescence, a period in which many students face severe academic, social, and personal pressures (Rickwood et al., 2007). Without adequate understanding, the negative impact of these mental health issues can develop into bigger

problems, affecting students' academic performance, social relationships, and personal development. Therefore, reducing stigma and raising awareness of mental health is essential to creating a supportive environment for students who need help (Chada, 2023).

The long-term impact of stigma on mental health issues can hinder students' academic achievement and interfere with their overall quality of life. If students feel isolated or afraid to disclose their problems, they tend to be more vulnerable to increased anxiety, depression, and other emotional disturbances. With this in-depth observation of the role of education in reducing stigma, schools can be more effective in providing appropriate support and building an inclusive culture. Considering that school is where students spend most of their time, education is one of the main keys to creating positive changes in the way society views and responds to mental health issues, which in turn can improve the quality of life and academic success of students.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of stigma on mental health issues in the school environment, specifically how stigma affects students' emotional and academic well-being. This study also aims to examine the role of education in reducing stigma related to mental health issues and raising awareness among students, teachers, and school staff. By understanding this, it is hoped that effective strategies can be found to create a more supportive school environment for students facing mental health issues.

## B. METHOD

This study uses a literature review approach that aims to analyze and synthesize information from various relevant sources regarding the role of education in reducing stigma towards mental health issues in schools. This literature review will collect articles, journals, books, and research reports that discuss topics related to mental health, stigma, and the role of education in addressing these issues. With this approach, researchers will identify key theories and previous findings related to the phenomenon of stigma and its impact on students in the school environment.

In this literature study, the researcher will focus on various studies conducted in various educational contexts, both those directly related to educational interventions or programs to reduce mental health stigma, as well as more

conceptual research on stigma and mental health itself. Literature sources will be selected based on topic relevance, information accuracy, and the credibility of the referenced journals or books. Researchers will also look for studies that discuss educational approaches that can be applied in schools to build awareness and create an inclusive environment for students with mental health issues.

The method of analysis in this literature study will involve mapping the key themes found in the collected literature sources. The researcher will compile findings related to stigma towards mental health in schools, its impact on students, and ways in which education can play a role in reducing this stigma. The analysis will be carried out qualitatively, identifying common patterns and differences between various studies, and drawing conclusions from the study.

The results of this literature study are expected to provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of stigma towards mental health in schools, as well as exploring the role of education in creating positive changes in reducing this stigma. Thus, this study aims to contribute to the development of more effective education policies and programs in raising awareness about mental health among students, teachers, and the school community as a whole.

### C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### **The Impact of Stigma on the Emotional and Academic Well-Being of Students in School**

The stigma surrounding mental health issues in schools is an important issue that needs special attention. Often, students with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or attention disorders feel ashamed or afraid to disclose their condition because they worry that their peers and teachers will consider them weak or incapable. In many cases, the stigma worsens students' mental condition and causes them to feel isolated. This stigma can appear in the form of ridicule, rejection, or even exclusion, which ultimately increases feelings of anxiety and stress, and hinders the student's recovery process.

Research shows that mental health stigma not only affects students' psychological condition, but can also negatively impact their emotional well-being. For example, students who feel stigmatized because of their mental condition tend to experience increased anxiety and

depression. This is due to feelings of not being accepted and fear of negative judgment from their social environment (Darmawan, 2015). As a result, students suffering from mental health problems are more likely to experience more serious emotional disturbances, such as prolonged embarrassment and lack of self-confidence, which affect their social interactions with friends and teachers at school (Wong & Lee, 2017).

The stigma of mental health problems also has a significant impact on students' academic well-being. When students feel anxious or depressed because they are afraid of being stigmatized, they are more likely to have difficulty concentrating in class, completing academic tasks, and participating in learning activities (Rains & Kuperberg, 2020). This is due to mental disorders that reduce their cognitive capacity, such as memory impairment, difficulty in processing information, and decreased ability to think clearly. As a result, the academic performance of students experiencing mental health problems can be impaired, which ultimately affects their learning outcomes and increases the risk of academic failure (Knipe & Williams, 2018). The inability to deal with mental health problems appropriately can worsen this condition, creating a negative cycle that is difficult to overcome without adequate intervention and support.

In addition, the stigma of mental health often makes students reluctant to seek help from the school, be it teachers, counselors, or mental health professionals. When students feel afraid or ashamed of the existing stigma, they tend to avoid it. This causes them to deal with it alone and not get the support they need to overcome their problems (Evans-Lacko & Mojtabai, 2014). In fact, the support provided by schools, especially through counseling services and education about mental health, can help students better understand their condition, learn ways to manage stress, and improve healthy coping skills. Without this support, stigmatized students tend to be more withdrawn, which worsens their mental health.

The negative impact of stigma is also seen in students' social relationships. Students with mental health disorders often feel isolated and anxious about how they are accepted by their peers. This feeling of isolation is exacerbated by their peers' lack of understanding of mental health issues. Some students may face ridicule or bullying, which further worsens their

psychological condition. This social rejection makes students feel unworthy of acceptance or appreciation, which further exacerbates feelings of inferiority and difficulties in building healthy social relationships (Hariani et al., 2021).

This stigma phenomenon also impacts students' inability to develop optimally at school. In many schools, there are no effective programs to address mental health-related stigma (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). As a result, students experiencing mental health problems may feel isolated or unwanted, which can affect their motivation to continue attending school or excel academically. Ultimately, the inability to manage or seek help for mental health problems can lead to high absenteeism, decreased interest in school activities, and even dropping out of school in some cases (Rickwood et al., 2007).

To address this problem, it is important for schools to create an inclusive and supportive environment for students facing mental health problems. Education about mental health must start early, with the aim of reducing stigma and increasing understanding of the importance of maintaining mental health. Schools also need to involve counselors or experts to provide support to students in need. With the right approach, schools can help students feel more accepted, reduce fear or shame about mental health issues, and provide space for them to seek the support needed for recovery.

### **The Role of Education in Reducing Stigma and Raising Awareness about Mental Health in Schools**

Education has a very important role in reducing stigma about mental health problems in schools. One of the first steps that can be taken is to provide education to students, teachers, and school staff about what mental health is, as well as identifying common symptoms of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ignorance and false stereotypes about mental health issues are often the main causes of stigma. Comprehensive education about mental health can create a better understanding, reducing fear and negative prejudice against individuals who experience it (Michelson & Marmorstein, 2019).

Reducing the stigma associated with mental health problems through education in schools also involves implementing programs that support open discussion and experience sharing. Outreach programs that actively

involve students can help allay their fears of negative judgment from peers or teachers (Lytle & Hoagwood, 2014). Students who are well educated about mental health are more likely to show empathy and support for their friends who experience mental health problems. In this way, education not only educates about knowledge, but also builds social and moral awareness which is important in creating an inclusive environment at school.

Education that involves all parties at school, including parents, teachers, and administrative staff, is also an important step in reducing stigma. Teachers can be trained to recognize the early signs of mental health disorders in students and provide appropriate support. Training on mental health can reduce the fear that teachers may have in dealing with mental health issues. In addition, with adequate knowledge, teachers can create a better supportive and safe atmosphere in the classroom, where students feel freer to talk about their feelings or problems without fear of being judged (Knipe & Williams, 2018).

Schools can also integrate counseling programs that focus on mental health and provide support services for students in need. With counselors who are trained and ready to listen without stigma, students experiencing mental health issues can feel more accepted and understood (Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). This support includes not only personal counseling sessions but also support groups that allow students to share their experiences anonymously and provide emotional support to each other. Programs like this help students feel more accepted, reduce social isolation, and in turn improve their mental well-being.

The importance of education about mental health is also reflected in changes to the school curriculum that emphasize the importance of psychological well-being. Many schools are now starting to include mental health topics in their curriculum to educate students about ways to manage stress and anxiety, as well as recognize the signs of mental problems in themselves and others. This life skills-based education helps students develop emotional intelligence, which is essential in building healthy social relationships and reducing tension in the classroom. With early education on mental health management, the stigma against mental disorders can be significantly reduced (Wong & Lee, 2017).



Schools must also take an active role in disseminating information about the importance of mental health to the entire school community. For example, holding mental health campaigns through seminars, events, or social media involving students, parents, and the community. This program not only builds awareness but also gives parents the opportunity to better understand mental health issues and how they can support their children at home. This broad campaign can eliminate the stigma that develops outside the school environment and help create a more inclusive and supportive society.

Finally, to effectively reduce stigma, it is important for educators to be role models in the acceptance of mental health. When teachers and school staff openly support and show a non-discriminatory attitude towards students with mental health problems, they create examples that students can emulate. For example, when a teacher talks openly about the importance of taking care of their own mental health or refers students to counseling services, it sets an example that seeking help is nothing to be ashamed of. This approach sends the message that mental health is an integral part of overall well-being, just as important as physical health.

#### D. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, education plays a very important role in reducing stigma against mental health problems in schools. By improving mental health literacy, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, where students feel more accepted and are not afraid to disclose their mental health problems. Educational programs that involve the entire school community—including students, teachers, school staff, and parents—can strengthen understanding of the importance of mental well-being and create a safe atmosphere for discussion. In this way, the stigma that has prevented students from seeking help can be reduced, and those who need support can more easily access it.

Continuous and structured education about mental health can change the perspective on mental health issues, making it a more acceptable issue in the school community. This also helps improve students' coping skills to manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional issues, which ultimately has a positive impact on their academic performance and social well-being. Teachers and staff who are trained to

recognize the signs of mental health disorders in students can also provide early support, which is important to prevent more severe conditions in the future.

The advice that can be given is the importance of continuing to introduce and integrate mental health education into the school curriculum as a whole. Everyone at school, from students to administrative staff, needs to be involved in these efforts to reduce stigma. Counseling programs that are more accessible and more open to all students, without fear of judgment, also need to be strengthened. In addition, it is important for schools to create safe and supportive discussion spaces, whether through support groups or seminars involving parents and the community. With a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, the stigma of mental health issues in schools can be minimized, providing opportunities for all students to thrive, both emotionally and academically.

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