

“Parental perception of mental health problems of school-going children of Salyan and Kailali districts of Nepal”

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Introduction:

About 10-20% of children and adolescent have mental health problems and half of mental disorders begin before the age of 14 (WHO, 2017). In addition, 10% of adolescents (13–17 year) attempted suicide at least once in the last 12 months (WHO-SEARO, 2017). Almost 15% children and adolescents have been identified as having one or another emotional and behavioral problems in Nepal (Mahat 2007) with increased externalizing problems in boys and internalizing problems in girls among school going children. Though more children and adolescents experience mental health problems, the parents are much less aware of mental health and potential mental health problems of their children. Parents' perceptions and awareness about psychiatric illness in children and adolescents is an important determinant of early detection and treatment seeking as research showed parent could recognize more behavioral level problems (externalizing) than the emotional (internalizing) problems (Mubarek, A. et al, 2015). There has been limited information about parental perception regarding children's mental health issues in the context of Nepal. This study, therefore aimed to explore how parents perceive child mental health issues in Salyan and Kailali districts of Nepal.

Methods:

Study used qualitative information obtained through 610 participants in 39 focus group discussions (FGD) from school communities of two districts Salyan and Kaillai (hill and Terai). FGD tool was used in the evaluation of school mental health work already and found adequate to gathered data. Participants were selected conveniently considering the representation of the parent of child attending school. Research assistants were trained in using FGD questionnaire and were consistently supervised for the appropriateness of data collection process, date safety and transfer. Information were gathered until reaching the saturation of the information in FGD. Information were analyzed manually and segregated to the themes focusing on awareness in mental health problems of children, contributing factors, role of school and parent in prevention, promotion and treatment and current practice of the parent about to discuss with children about physical changes, their concerns and future plans.

Results:

Major findings from the data are given below to each theme;

- 1. Realization about the importance of giving time to listen to children's voices and feelings:** Parents have almost no realization of the importance of giving time to listen children's voices and feelings. It was found that parents do not listen to their children's worries and concerns, mainly because they do not feel that it is important and mostly they did not invest in this. Parents generally reflected providing food, stationary and dress were their responsibilities and were fulfilling mostly.
- 2. Understanding of EBP in children:** Parents could identify observable behavioral changes in their child such as rule breaking, throwing anger, not obeying at homes and school, not complying homework,

school absent, fearfulness, getting anxious, complain of feeling sad and loneliness and learning difficulties. Parent in both districts did not felt mentioned problems as mental health problems in their child.

- 3. Causes of EBP in children:** Lack of care and affectionate environment at home and schools were considered as main causes of emotional, behavioral and learning related problems in their children. Further not having practice of positive disciplinary approaches (psychological techniques of reinforcement) at school and home, lack of equal attention to all children also can lead EBP in some child.
- 4. Current practices of providing support to the children:** Parents were mostly unaware on how they can help their child or take for support other than depending on traditionally available support (i.e. visiting Shamans, priest, taking temple etc) and asking teachers who also was not aware about treatment and behavior modification support.
- 5. Awareness on reproductive health related changes in girls and need of support from parent:** More than 50% of the parents in the FGD from Salyan had not had discussion about physical changes and future plans of their daughters while the same amount of parents in Kailali were aware on such matters, and do discuss about menstrual hygiene and tried to provide support to their adolescent girls regarding physical changes. Parents - mainly fathers are showing less response on this matter than mothers while there is equal role for both parents in raring and caring for adolescent girls.

Discussion

Though parents have awareness on emotional and behavioral problems in children, there is almost no awareness that children do have mental health problems and it needs timely treatment, service availability, promotive approaches and child friendly behavior of parents at home for its prevention and promotion of mental health wellbeing in children.

Conclusion:

Result provided evidences of lack of adequate awareness on child mental health problems in parent, thus there is great need of parental education on all aspects to promote better mental health for children.

References:

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