**Mental health problems in students: What makes it worse? What can parents and teachers do?**

**Source:** indiatoday.in

Mental health problems in students have been on the rise since Covid-19. Here's what is making things worse and tips for parents, teachers and students to handle the situation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced schools, colleges and educational institutions to shut down since March. At an age when the primary fulfilling factor is interaction with classmates and enjoying school-life, a school shutdown can wreak havoc in the daily life of students, and cause a number of mental health issues even if they are not easily traceable.

According to a survey carried out by the Indian Psychiatry Society, there was a 20% rise in the number of cases of mental illness at the end of March 2020. Since then, things have become much worse.

“Students are missing out on the crucial balance between studies and play. The emotional effects of being physically distant from their friends, combined with the impact of losing out on playtime could potentially induce stress in students,” says Pravin Prakash, Chief People’s Officer, BYJU’S.

The pandemic-induced normal is causing students to break from their habits and Prakash says that expectation management is very important at this time. Another aspect they should manage is balance creating a balance between work and play can help destress to a great extent.

**Main mental health issues seen in students during Covid 19**

Dr. Sanjeev Kanoria, Founder, Suasth Hospital, listed the following common mental health issues seen in students during Covid-19:

1. Irritability and mood swings.

2. Anxiety and low mood

3. Dependence on video games.

4. Emotional eating (excess eating to cope up with emotions such as frustrations, stress, boredom, and fear)

5. Increased social media use which aggravates negative feelings such as comparison, low self-esteem, body image issues etc.

6. Anger, outbursts, isolating self, and video fatigue.

7. Feeling numb and suffering from low motivation.

8. PTSD if exposed to intra-familial violence.

9. Experiments with high-risk behaviours, such as gambling etc.

There are a few mental health problems in students that are specifically increasing due to Covid-19 and the lockdown. Dr. Divyani Sharma, Co-Founder and Managing Director, The Catalyst Group, and a licensed clinical psychologist, noted the following:

1. Anxiety related to exam preparations and exam results this becomes worse due to the repeated postponement of exams and attending exams online or in ways not attempted before.

2. Depressive thoughts and recurrent suicidal thoughts because of social isolation.

3. Behavioral and emotional disorders due to spending long screen hours.

4. Feeling of distrust due to not being able to physically meet with friends and other peers.

**What causes mental health issues in students to become worse?**

**Stigma:**

As Dr. Kanoria notes, the biggest problem with mental health is the stigma attached to it. Even with the steep rise in mental health issues at this time and the surge in dialogue regarding mental health after the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput by suicide, there remains a common disregard about mental health.

Many-a-time when children or teenagers talk to their parents or teachers about mental health, they are simply not acknowledged as anything serious.

“Misleading notions like ‘be positive’, ‘it's all in your head’, ‘you fight it with your will power’ and superstitious rituals are quite common. Let me be clear that such actions often lead to increased suffering of the patient with a high likelihood of the symptoms getting worse each day,” says Dr. Kanoria.

**Lack of awareness and quick diagnosis:**

Most of the time however students are unable to realise they are facing any such problem and credit their bad mood to simply “feeling low”. It is very important for students, teachers and parents to realise how common mental health issues in children and teenagers are and give them the help they need.

“Early diagnosis and treatment by professionals can make a significant difference. Treatment often involves medication prescribed by a psychiatrist and psychotherapy by a psychologist. These methodologies have shown a more demonstrable and positive impact,” explains Dr. Kanoria.

“Realistic expectations from parents and teachers, open communication, assistance from peers, parents and teachers can ease recovery,” he adds.

**Effect from troubled guardians:**

Dr. Divyani Sharma notes how being quarantined with parents or guardians who are going through mental health issues themselves can also impact the children.

“For children of a certain age, when the direct guardians are quarantined it may lead to deterioration of their own physical and mental health. Children who are vulnerable may think there is no support or start to feel lonely,” she says.

“Some children also become victim to parental frustration that may arise from job loss or other financial issues during such unprecedented times,” she adds.

**Increased screen time:**

Another big cause of rising mental health issues in students due to the Covid-19 pandemic is increased screen time, whether it’s for online classes or for entertainment.

“Multiple studies show that increased social media and screen time can actually contribute to anxiety, low moods, sleep deprivation, low self-esteem, etc.” says Dr Kanoria.