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ABSTRACT

“Children are the world’s most valuable resource and its best hope for the future”. Emotional and behavioural problems are the most prevalent chronic health conditions of childhood and often have serious negative consequences for a child’s academic achievement and social development. Children and adolescents with emotional disturbance exhibit chronic and diverse academic, emotional, behavioural and medical difficulties that pose significant challenges for their education and treatment in schools. Hence it was found relevant to conduct a study to assess the mental health with prime focus on emotional disturbance among school children and to implement school-based intervention programs to bring about an overall improvement in psychological well-being and academic performance.

The main aim of the study was to assess the effect of the Intensive Mental Health Program on psychological well-being and academic performance among school children with emotional disturbance. A quantitative, true experimental basic pretest-posttest design with repeated follow-ups at specific time intervals was adopted to carry out the study. This study was based on General Systems theory by Von Ludwig Bertalanffy (1968). A total of 202 school children studying in eighth, ninth and tenth classes with emotional disturbance were randomly allocated into the experimental and control group by using a cluster sampling technique.

The tools used were baseline proforma, Pediatric Symptom Checklist – Youth Version and Sterling Children’s Well-being Scale. The validity and reliability of the tools were established by using the split-half method and was further computed using Spearman’s Brown Prophecy formula and was found to be reliable. The ‘r’ value for the Pediatric Symptom Checklist was 0.89 and for Sterling Children’s Well-being Scale was 0.86. The
experimental group was provided with the Intensive Mental Health Program, by dividing them into groups which consist of group sessions (weekly) and individual specialized
academic instructions (twice in a month) and it lasted for three months. The post-test assessment was conducted between the intervention in the second month, fourth month and the sixth month using the same tools. Tools were repeatedly administered during the second, fourth and sixth months for the control group also without administration of the Intensive Mental Health Program. After the data collection, the control group subjects were divided into groups and the program was administered to them.

Results revealed a significant change in the median scores of all the three sub-scales of psychological well-being and academic performance of school children with emotional disturbance in the experimental group when compared to the control group. Friedman Test was carried out to compare the total understanding of the scores within both the groups and found to be significant at the 0.001 level. Dunn-Bonferoni Post-hoc test was carried out and there was a significant difference between second, fourth- and sixth-month post-test scores (p<0.001) after Bonferroni adjustments. There was a weak negative correlation existing between psychological well-being and the pre-test score of emotional disturbance (r= -.235, n=202, p=0.001). A significant association was noted with the baseline variables: problems with siblings (χ²=5.229, p<0.05), restriction socialization and play with peers (χ²=3.838, p=0.05), family violence ((χ²=6.045, p<0.05) and truancy ((χ²=6.045, p<0.05). The study concluded that the Intensive Mental Health Program was effective in improving psychological well-being and academic performance among school children with emotional disturbance. Development of school-based interventional strategies to be encouraged since it has an impact on the mental health of school children. The public health significance is that it provides suggestions for school-based mental health activities, thereby bringing a holistic development among the children, who will be the future of the nation.

**Keywords:** Emotional disturbance, Intensive Mental Health Program, Psychological wellbeing, Academic performance.