

65% counsellors believe students not aware of mental illnesses: Fortis Study

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New Delhi: To emphasize the need for incorporating a mental health curriculum in schools, Fortis Healthcare's Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, under the aegis of Dr Samir Parikh, conducted a survey among 200 school counsellors, special educators and occupational therapists across 130 schools in Delhi/NCR and Mumbai. The survey consisted of 17 questions to gain an insight into the attitudes and opinions of the community of mental health professionals working in schools.

The Key Findings of the survey included:

- **65% counsellors (and allied professionals) believed that students were not aware of the common mental illnesses**

- **Search engines and social media were reported as a preferred source of information for students about mental health**

- **91% of the participants believed that mental health is not given adequate importance in schools**

- **96% of the participants admitted that they recognized the need to incorporate a mental health curriculum within schools**

- **29% counsellors (and allied professionals) believe that when in distress, students prefer to keep their concerns to themselves rather than talking about them**

- **88 % of participants believed that students do not know how to respond when their friends talk about psychological or emotional concerns**

The implications of these findings have led to the conceptualization of a mental health curriculum by the Fortis School Mental Health Program. This curriculum is based on the following tenets:

- **Improving an understanding of mental health**

- **De-stigmatizing mental health**

- **Creating awareness about mental illnesses**

- **Encouraging help seeking behavior**

- **Building the emotional resilience of the students**

Introducing such a mental health curriculum within the schools is not an additional educational curriculum but is a platform to create a sensitized, educated as well as empowered generation encouraging positive mental health. In the coming academic year, our team of experts shall be open to training teachers across the schools in the country to be able to incorporate such a mental health curriculum within the classrooms, with the aim of creating a sensitized, educated and empowered generation along with promoting positive mental health for the future generations to come.

Dr Samir Parikh, Director, Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences said, “Children and adolescents are at the crucial developmental stage when sensitized learning is of utmost importance. However, talking about mental health related information, or providing reliable and adequate sources of information to the students within the school setting seems to be majorly neglected. This is especially more pertinent when compared with information being imparted about physical health, and not about mental health. Given such a wide gap, the school counsellors are indeed able to recognize that dire need to incorporate a mental health curriculum within the schools.”

Dr Parikh adds, “There is an undeniable need to focus on the role of mental health for the youth of the country. The objective of this survey is to gain insight into the attitudes and opinions of the community of mental health professionals working in schools. The recognition of the importance of mental health is not sufficient unless we are able to encourage openness and willingness to talk about the concerns and reach out for help. Moreover, such help needs to be made available and accessible, and considering the wide gap which exists at present, the burden cannot be simply shared by the experts. Therefore, it is essential for all of us to be empowered and equipped with the basic sensitivity and awareness to be able to respond when someone reaches out to us for help.

The inclusion of life skills training is indeed an essential component of paving the way for a positive mental health. Especially within the school settings, training the students to be equipped with basic life skills would enable them to deal with the challenges of the contemporary world in a more adaptive and informed manner, and thereby would ensure an enhanced psychological well-being and positive mental health for one and all.”