ABSTRACT

Mental Health of children and adolescents is an essential component of their overall health and developmental process and as such its growing importance is getting concern across the world. The present era is a witness of a rapid change in socio-cultural and economic paradigm due to globalization and rapid technological advancement. The increased complexity of our social and economic development has made the life fast, complex and competitive. The children of today are not out of the impacts of this rapid change. This has accelerated pressure on the children for their high achievements to prepare for the future keeping pace with the demand of the globalized society giving rise to Mental Health problem in children and adolescents. This is ultimately affecting their academic achievements because Mental Health and well-being are a prerequisite for getting through academic success and as such mental health problems become a barrier to learning of the children. Children and adolescents are the important components of human resource of a society. This period is the opening of the window of opportunity and sets the stage for a healthy and productive adulthood. Therefore, a balanced Mental Health is a base of healthy development of adulthood and later years of life. So, Mental Health of children is an essential component for their growth and development.

Adolescence, the second decade of life (10-19 years) is a critical life transition from childhood to adulthood in the human development process. At this stage the school going children pass through a period of major change in their physical, physiological, psychological, emotional and personality state with changing patterns of social interactions, expectations, and relationships. Adolescence is a period of rapid changes in all dimensions of development and it demands a continued adjustment with the ever changing developmental process. These factors generally bring about new stress, and emotional and behavioural problems and relationship problems in their life affecting psychosocial development. According to the UNICEF, in 2009 there were an estimated 1.2 billion adolescents in the world, forming around 18% of the global population. According to the census 2011 the adolescent population of India is 253.2 million which constitute 20% of Indian population.
Mental Health is an integral and essential component of Health. The World Health Organization (1948) defined Health in its constitution as “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”, and as such health comprises of healthy body, healthy mind, productive work abilities and healthy social relationship. Mental Health is “A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community” (WHO 2001). So, Mental Health and well-being are fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life. As such mental health refers to maintenance of successful mental activities like- maintenance of relationship, maintenance of productive daily activities, and maintenance of the ability to adapt to change and cope with stress. Briefly Mental Health can be defined as how a person thinks, feels, acts when faced with life situation.

Adolescence is a period of acquiring intellectual, psychological and social competence which bring about a change in physical (biological), social and psychological areas of functioning consisting of academic achievement, setting of goals of life, development of healthy interpersonal relationship, setting self-identity and preparing for participating in the community life. The three factors, that is, Social factors, Psychological factors and Biological factors together determine the Mental Health of a person. Mental Health problem has become a global concern as it affects the developmental process of not only the individual, but also the development of society or the nation. In India people are less aware about Mental Health and its promotion. Though it is very important in present context, it remains a neglected area unless it becomes a serious mental illness.

The objective of the study was to find out the prevalence rate of Mental Health problem and its different dimensions of adolescent school going children with respect of the variables like gender, medium of instruction, locality of school they study, type of family they belong to, and number of sibling(s). The study also tried to find out the predictors of Mental Health problem and critically analyze it.
The present study was conducted based on cross-sectional survey research framework using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is a user-friendly multi-informant screening tool for identifying both emotional and behavioural problems in children. The study was conducted on a total participants of 1361 students (N=1361) of the age group of 12 to 16 years (mean age 13.56 years) studying in class VIII and IX attending four English and six Bengali medium schools randomly chosen from Kolkata and its suburban areas. The data so gathered were statistically analyzed using SPSS package, version 20.0.

Out of the total students, 9.3% students had Very High or abnormal SDQ score, which means the prevalence rate of overall Mental Health problem of adolescent school going children was found to be 9.3%. These children have definite and severe Mental Health problem and require immediate interventions. Another 7.3% children under study were rated High and they were on the borderline. They may suffer from Mental Health problem in future, if not taken care of. Prevalence of Mental Health problem was more in male students than that of female students with significant difference. A significant difference in overall Mental Health problem was found between adolescent children attending English and Bengali medium schools with English medium students scoring more than Bengali medium students. Mental Health problem was found more in children attending schools located in urban area than the children attending schools located in rural areas) and the difference was found to be statistically significant. Children belonging to joint family were found to have Mental Health problem more than the children from nuclear family, but the difference was found statistically insignificant. The prevalence of Mental Health problem was found more in single child of the parents than that of children having one or more siblings and the difference was found to be significant. Prevalence of Emotional Problem was found more in female students than male students; more in English medium students than Bengali medium students; more in students studying in schools located in urban areas than students of rural schools; more in children belonging to joint family than children belonging to nuclear family; and single child of the parents than children having sibling(s). Significant difference in the rate of prevalence was observed only in medium of instruction. Conduct Problem was more in males than female; more in English medium students than Bengali medium; more in students studying in urban schools areas than rural schools; more in
children belonging to nuclear family than joint family; and single child of the parents than children having sibling(s). Significant difference in the rate of was observed in gender, medium of instruction, and locality of the school. Hyperactive Problem was found more in males than female students; more in English medium than Bengali medium students; more in students studying in urban schools than rural schools; more in children of joint family than nuclear family; and single child than children having sibling(s). Significant difference was observed in gender, and medium of instruction. Significant difference in the rate of prevalence of peer problem and pro-social problem was observed only in gender with male students scoring more than the females. Emotional problem was found to be the principal predictor of Mental Health problem.

The major findings emerged through the present study would be important contributions for improvement of our understanding about Mental Health problem of the adolescents and its various dimensions. Positive mental health is a key to a range of development outcomes, including enhanced productivity and earnings, better employment, higher educational achievement, improved human rights protection and promotion, better health status and improved quality of life. In India Mental health issue is important, but it is a neglected area, particularly of children and adolescents. In general it is expected that the findings of a research will help to make generalization and use it for appropriate decision or policy making for the population from whom the sample has been drawn. The findings of the present study also indicates the need of early detection of Mental Health problems of the adolescents attending schools for timely intervention and promotion of positive Mental Health for a better and holistic development of the future citizens of the country considering that positive Mental Health would be a resource for social and economic prosperity. The policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, educationists and all concerned may adopt some realistic strategies for promotion of Mental Health in the light of the present study.

Key words: Mental Health, adolescence, SDQ, intervention, holistic, realistic strategy