

## Issue of Mental Health and Character Strength in Adolescents: A Cross-Cultural Review

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Received  
26 Sep. 2016

Reviewed  
28 Sep. 2016

Accepted  
29 Sep. 2016

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*The present review paper is an attempt to innumerate the issue of awareness about mental health and character strength like gratitude in adolescents in order to focus attention of social scientists on this concern. Understanding about conceptual links of mental wellness and character strength may provide effective way to pursuit of well-being and happiness in human life. Most importantly, the teen population for whom ethical approach seems invaluable and who are at a critical development stage of making key choices about their future. Hence, identifying indicators of mental health and human values like gratitude may equip adolescents with both intrapersonal and interpersonal resources which would help by facilitating adaptive negotiations of the complex adult world. Present author has tried to demonstrate the need of some scientific exploration to enhance the mental wellbeing across culture, because India is known for their cultural diversity and a balanced development should always consider equality across different communities.*

**Key words-** Mental health, gratitude, awareness about mental health

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Mental health at present is a prime concern of discussion for all the humanities. It has now more critical issue with the increasing speed of materialistic development of human communities. Because in this rat race of success mental health has become the most avoidable aspect of daily life activities. In the modernity of 21<sup>st</sup> century when the concept of digital India has been accepted widely, a single sign of cold and fever in children will produce hours of internet surfing for care and remedies by parent, but still a numbers of important indicators of mental health do not take any serious attention by the same guardians. While WHO officially says that, "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. In the light of this statement government and health organization should consider this issue on priority level, but it is a big question that how it will be possible to aware the people of a country like India which has a lots of variations in their belief system.

India has a rich diversity in its population which incorporates a number of cultures, religions, languages, racial differentiation, castes, communities and social groups. The classification of people in terms of their access to social and economic opportunities and their involvement in the process of development is based on

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two factors. The first is spatial differentiation, which refers to the feasibility of a region in terms of geographical locality. The second factor is the distinctiveness of residents. Sujatha(2000) has argued that the dominance of one category over others is based on some predefined strength and rooted in the social stratification system. This inequality and differentiation is ubiquitous in India, especially in the case of formal education and resource access related concern. It leads to a more serious issue like mental health related awareness. One such marginalized group is the Scheduled Tribes. Although central and state governments have attempt to provide all the opportunities to enhance the health, educational and socio-economic level of tribe population, but psychological aspect is still neglected. An important psychological construct is emotion that plays the central and useful role in everyday life. Identify, express, understand, regulate, and use the emotions are important to enhance mental well-being in human being. As more and more evidence suggests that emotions do not only color people's lives, but are absolutely essential to people's survival and adaptation (Cosmoses & Toby, 2000). According to "Tomorrow's Foundation" a non-governmental organization, working on education and mental health of tribal teens in Dantewada district, an alarming condition of mental health related issues are present in the concern population, but they are fully unknown by this fact. Therefore, it seems that variables like mental health and approach towards this problem in tribal youths are very critical to their complete development point of view.

Issue of unawareness is not only observed in under developed societies like tribes, but it also may view in so-called highly modern cities. Bangalore is the mental health capital of the country because of NIMHANS, but awareness level of this town is still poor if not distorted. Citizens run for the rights of lakes, tress and animals, protest against statements of corrupt politicians and senseless religious issues, but

there is no talk about behavioral problems in dally activities. Bengalurians – please run for mental illness; and not for just mental health. I request volunteers from Corporate, schools and colleges to display banners and campaigns that rip the stigma away. User patients and families display courage by doing the marathon for the cause. "Suffering from a mental illness does not mean that the individual is sick or insane. There is a difference between a person with mental illness and a person of an unsound mind. Even the Law supports it. Equally important is the fact that unsoundness of mind is not a permanent everlasting phenomenon. Visiting a psychiatrist doesn't necessarily mean that a person is insane.

Mental health is going to be how big challenge for human society, it can be understood by the report of global health, in which metal health was ranked as 10<sup>th</sup> in biggest global health issues world-wide (Nathe, 2015). Ethiopia is just one country that began focusing on mental health services in 2014, when it trained health workers to provide mental health care within prisons for the first time. As the civil unrest, economic instability, and traumatizing Ebola outbreaks of 2014 continue into 2015, mental health needs will only become more urgent—and so will the need for more trained social service workers, psychiatrists, and other health workers.

Mental illness is a mental health problem that affects a person's thinking and behavior. In a report on mental health status in India Sinha (2015) has argued that everybody is vulnerable to mental illness. While genetic factors do play a role in the onset but it is not always. There are families with a history of mental illness, and other family members show no signs of it. On the other hand, there are families with no predisposition to mental illness, and it suddenly strikes any family member. "Happy Mental Health Awareness month of May" is the greeting from Dr. Nirmala Srinivasan of Action for Mental Illness (ACMI), Bangalore. ACMI is an advocacy initiative work-

ing pan India for the rights and needs of persons with mental illness (PMI) and disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety disorder, and OCD. It was founded in 2003 by Ms. Laila Ollapally, advocate, Karnataka High Court, and Dr. Nirmala Srinivasan, disability activist and an Ashoka Fellow since 2003. "There was stigma related to TB some several years back not any longer. So also HIV/AIDS, thanks to the patronage from the government and Bill & Melinda Foundation has made spectacular public debut! But not mental illness (MI)! Wonder how we mixed up mental health with mental illness? Illness is the flip side of wellness; and hence, at the root of mental wellness is to address the issue of illness due to mental disorders clinically classified as Illness.

Government of India has classified MI under non-communicable diseases such as Cancer, Blindness etc. Perhaps Mental Health needs a standalone administrative set up under the Ministry of Health to give it visibility as an illness. MI means a disorder of mood, thought, perception, orientation, and memory which affect the overall functions of social cognition and behaviour causing distress to the individual and his/ her family; this also includes such condition precipitated by substance abuse and alcohol. Unlike mental retardation (MR), MI can affect anyone anytime depending on the individual's genetic predisposition. How much of nature and how much of nurture eludes scientific explanation of causes of MI. As far as public awareness goes, it is still not accepted as an illness of the brain. Implicit in this misunderstanding, is the absence of lab reports or x-rays that are dominant diagnostic tools for other illnesses. Misconception becomes myths characterised by occult beliefs, witchcraft, stories of violence, homicide and suicide or popular belief as behavioural fancies of a spoilt adult!

Social Stigma is a reality of mental illness that delays treatment even among educated urban middle class Indians. Education does not

correlate with awareness when it comes to information on MI. Popular belief among urbanites is associating MI with stress and tension arising out of high achiever syndrome. Seeking help gets delayed because stress is dismissed as universal; nothing abnormal and to be overcome with holiday packages or job change! Or the other extreme is to romanticize the illness. In between the two, there is plethora of alternative treatments that range from Reiki to hypnosis to aroma therapy. While we are not against any of these, even the slightest dip in a person's performance, behaviour, moods and responses are early warning signals warranting medical intervention. This is my message for mental health awareness in 2015, please come out openly and in huge numbers. Talk about mental illness, it doesn't matter if you're a caregiver, user (patient), or just an individual (Sinha, 2015).

Mental health is not an alone phenomenon. It is highly associated with a number of variables related to daily life activities and more importantly with the system of our human values. Because it may clearly seen that, level of stress and numerous mental health related issues are increasing with so-called development of societies and modernity. Therefore, to enhance the level of mental health human strength related variables like cultural values should be protect and encouraged.

According to Narula (2015) character strengths have a prominent position because the meaning of a happy and a well lived life is strongly connected to human virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It makes sense to include gratitude and forgiveness in the scientific pursuit of adolescent's development precisely because it helps build personal resources for ensuring happiness, well-being, and social integration and generatively as they are at a crucial stage in their life where social identity and belonging go hand in hand. Character strengths in adolescents have been also associated with desirable outcomes such as such as delay gratifi-

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cation, kindness and altruism (Scales et al, 2000) and also reduction of problems like sexual risk-taking, substance use, alcohol abuse, smoking, violence (Park, 2004b).

Gratitude can be classified as human strength and virtue (Peterson and Seligman 2004). Gratitude is a powerful emotion which can release you from a negative bonding (Froh, 2007). Focus on the good things instead of the bad can make you attract great good in your life. But if you are weighted down with un-forgiveness, it is hard to open the door to gratitude. Feelings of revenge, un-forgiveness and blame can linger within us for a long time, filling us with negativity and keeping us away from being good and happy. Gratitude shares a common and fundamental component - of *empathy and philanthropic behaviour* (Karremans, Van Lange & Holland, 2005). Thus, gratitude is conceptually linked as positively valence, pro-social, empathy-based character strengths associated with psychological and physical health. Hence by cultivating these strengths, begins a cycle that actually attracts healthy self esteem, a positive attitude and good things into one's life. It may understand by Orthodoxy (1908) "the goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale. The test of all happiness is gratitude (G.K. Chesterton), and the quotes of Meister Eckhardt "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is "Thank you," it will be enough.

Above studies and empirical evidences shows that mental health is really a critical issue for human being and character strength may importantly be considered by guardians to ensure mental wellness of youths. Psychologists are interested in this concern and some attention in world literature are demonstrated but very less in Indian literature and non studies were found to establish cross-cultural understanding about stated variables.

The issue of mental health becomes more critical when in the modern world, achievement is getting multidimensional and there is a ruthless competition among students to excel. Students suffer to control their emotions in order to face various situations in school life and keep pace with the demands of the human race. The way of managing emotions is decisive for better performance. Success in life can be explaining by emotional measures at a large scale. Parent and teachers always focus on academic performance by nurturing intelligence and they give slightest importance to their emotions and mental health. Therefore, some scientific investigation about mental health related issues and character strength like gratitude across culture is highly needed in Indian circumstances; especially it is much required in tribal areas situated in middle India. Because the population of these region are considered as under developed and the students are not getting exposure like urban residents.

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