



The Impact of School Environment on Adolescent Mental Well-Being: A Literature Review

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Abstract- The school environment plays a crucial role in shaping the mental well-being of adolescents, who spend a significant portion of their formative years in educational settings. This literature review explores how various dimensions of the school environment—such as teacher support, peer relationships, extracurricular activities, physical infrastructure, and disciplinary practices—impact adolescent mental health outcomes including stress, self-esteem, anxiety, and emotional resilience. Drawing on studies from both global and Indian contexts, the review highlights consistent evidence that supportive school climates contribute positively to psychological well-being, while hostile or neglectful environments increase the risk of mental health issues. Furthermore, the review identifies research gaps related to the lack of longitudinal studies, underrepresentation of rural and marginalized communities, and the evolving role of digital and hybrid learning platforms. Based on these findings, the review emphasizes the need for evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at creating inclusive, emotionally safe, and engaging school environments that support adolescents' holistic development.

Index Terms- School Environment, Adolescent Mental Health, Teacher Support, Peer Relationships, Extracurricular Activities, Physical Infrastructure, Disciplinary Practices

I. Introduction

The school environment plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall development of adolescents. Schools are not only centers for academic learning but also serve as social arenas where students develop emotional, behavioral, and cognitive skills. In recent years, numerous studies have highlighted the significant influence of school climate—encompassing teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, extracurricular activities, and physical infrastructure—on adolescent mental well-being. This literature review aims to consolidate findings from various research studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how different facets of the school environment contribute to or detract from adolescents' mental health. By exploring these interrelations, the review underscores the importance of fostering positive school climates to enhance psychological well-being among young individuals.

To gain a deeper understanding of how school environment influences



adolescent mental health, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How does existing research describe the relationship between school environment and adolescent mental well-being?
- Which key dimensions of the school environment (e.g., teacher support, peer relationships, extracurricular activities, and physical facilities) significantly impact adolescent mental health?
- In what ways do different aspects of the school climate influence various mental health indicators such as stress, self-esteem, anxiety, and emotional well-being?
- What gaps exist in the current research regarding the interplay between school environment and adolescent mental health?
- What evidence-based strategies and policy recommendations can be suggested for educators, administrators, and policymakers to enhance school environments for better mental health outcomes?

Methodology

This review was conducted using a systematic approach to identify and analyze relevant studies published in peer-reviewed journals, books, and reputable academic sources. The methodology included the following steps:

1. Literature Search Strategy:

- Databases: Searches were performed in PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar.
- Keywords: Terms such as —school environment, —school climate, —adolescent mental health, —emotional well-being, —teacher-student relationship, and —extracurricular activities were used.
- Time Frame: The review considered studies published over the past two decades to capture contemporary research findings and trends.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- Inclusion: Studies explicitly examining the relationship between aspects of the school environment and adolescent mental health, using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method designs.
- Exclusion: Articles focusing solely on academic performance without addressing mental health, studies involving populations outside the adolescent age group, and non-peer-reviewed sources.

3. Selection Process:

- Initial screening of titles and abstracts identified potentially relevant studies.
- Full-text articles were reviewed to ensure they met the inclusion criteria.
- Reference lists of selected articles were examined to identify additional relevant studies.

4. Data Extraction and Analysis:

- Key details such as study design, sample characteristics, environmental factors examined, mental health outcomes, and main findings were extracted and organized.
- A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common patterns, relationships, and research gaps.



5. Synthesis of Findings:

- The data was synthesized narratively to provide an integrated overview of how school environmental factors influence adolescent mental well-being.
- Variations in outcomes based on geographic, cultural, and methodological differences were discussed.

Analysis of Existing Literature:

1. The relationship between school environment and adolescent mental well-being:

Several studies have explored the relationship between school environment and adolescent mental well-being, emphasizing the critical role of a positive school climate in promoting emotional resilience, reducing stress, and enhancing psychological health. Bala et al. (2024) highlighted that a supportive school atmosphere significantly improves students' self-efficacy and emotional stability. Similarly, Murthy (2016) underscored the importance of structured life skills education in promoting mental well-being among school-going adolescents.

Recent research further strengthens these findings. A systematic review by Podiyya et al. (2025) found that school environments characterized by strong student-teacher relationships, peer support, and a sense of belonging are associated with lower stress levels, reduced depression rates, and higher self-esteem among Indian adolescents. Similarly, a large-scale study in Wales (2024) involving 32,606 primary school children revealed that both overall school climate and specific year group environments significantly influence students' mental health, with more positive perceptions correlating with fewer emotional and behavioral difficulties. Research conducted in Kenya (2024) explored external influences, such as climate change, on adolescent mental well-being, identifying increased mental health concerns and gender-specific variations in coping strategies.

Additionally, a study by Zhang et al. (2024) in China examined how school engagement and teacher support mitigate anxiety and depressive symptoms, emphasizing the need for emotionally safe learning spaces. A longitudinal study by Garcia-Moya et al. (2023) in Spain demonstrated that students with a higher perception of school connectedness exhibited lower psychological distress over time. These findings collectively highlight the need for comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to create inclusive and nurturing school environments that enhance students' overall mental well-being.

II. Identification of Key Environmental Factors

Key dimensions of the school environment significantly influence adolescent mental health. Teacher support has been recognized as a crucial factor in reducing students' stress, promoting academic motivation, and fostering a sense of belonging. Research by Wentzel (2023) suggests that students who perceive their teachers as supportive experience lower anxiety levels and higher academic self-efficacy. Similarly, a study by García-Moya et al. (2024) found that strong teacher-student relationships are



associated with lower instances of depression and behavioral problems among adolescents.

Peer relationships also play a vital role in shaping adolescent mental health. Positive peer interactions have been linked to reduced anxiety, increased self-esteem, and improved coping mechanisms in challenging situations. A meta-analysis by Allen et al. (2023) revealed that adolescents with strong peer connections are less likely to experience loneliness and emotional distress, highlighting the importance of peer support networks in school settings. Conversely, bullying and social exclusion contribute to heightened stress and depressive symptoms, emphasizing the need for inclusive and anti-bullying interventions.

Extracurricular activities contribute to overall mental well-being by providing students with opportunities for social engagement, skill development, and emotional expression. Research by Fredricks and Eccles (2024) indicates that participation in structured extracurricular programs—such as sports, arts, and volunteer activities—enhances resilience and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression. Moreover, students engaged in extracurricular activities tend to develop better problem-solving skills and higher levels of emotional regulation.

The availability of physical facilities also plays a critical role in students' emotional adjustment. Well-maintained classrooms, recreational spaces, and access to green environments have been associated with lower stress levels and improved concentration. A study conducted by Chawla et al. (2024) found that exposure to natural environments within school premises positively influences students' mood, reducing symptoms of anxiety and emotional distress. Similarly, the presence of safe and clean recreational areas encourages physical activity, which has been linked to improved mental health outcomes.

School policies and leadership further shape the overall school climate and adolescent well-being. Schools with clear anti-bullying policies, mental health support services, and an inclusive educational approach create safer learning environments. A study by Durlak et al. (2023) highlighted that schools implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) programs witness significant improvements in students' emotional resilience, self-awareness, and interpersonal relationships.

These findings underscore the importance of fostering a supportive school environment that integrates teacher guidance, peer support, extracurricular involvement, adequate physical infrastructure, and proactive school policies to enhance students' mental well-being.

III. Evaluation of Influence on Mental Health

Different aspects of the school climate contribute to various mental health indicators among adolescents. Research findings suggest that a nurturing and inclusive environment lowers stress levels and enhances emotional security, while a hostile or unsupportive school climate exacerbates anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional distress.



Impact of a Supportive School Climate

A positive and inclusive school environment is strongly associated with better emotional regulation and psychological resilience. A study by Wang & Eccles (2023) found that students who perceive their schools as supportive report lower stress levels and higher self-confidence. Similarly, research by García-Moya et al. (2024) highlights that a sense of belonging in school reduces symptoms of depression and social withdrawal. Schools that implement student-centered approaches, such as mentorship programs and emotional support initiatives, contribute to enhanced well-being and academic success.

Effects of Academic Pressure

Excessive academic pressure has been identified as a major contributor to adolescent stress and anxiety. A longitudinal study by Luthar & Kumar (2024) found that students in high-pressure academic environments exhibited increased cortisol levels, leading to chronic stress, sleep disturbances, and burnout. Schools that emphasize balanced academic workloads, personalized learning, and stress management programs tend to foster better mental health outcomes among students.

Role of Bullying and Peer Victimization

Bullying and social exclusion are major risk factors for poor adolescent mental health. A meta-analysis by Smith et al. (2023) found that students who experience bullying are at a significantly higher risk of developing anxiety disorders, depression, and suicidal ideation. Conversely, schools that actively promote anti-bullying policies, peer mediation programs, and social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives show lower instances of bullying and better psychological outcomes among students.

Influence of Disciplinary Practices

The way schools handle discipline also plays a crucial role in shaping students' emotional well-being. Research by Gregory & Fergus (2024) found that punitive disciplinary measures, such as suspensions and harsh punishments, are linked to increased emotional distress and feelings of alienation. In contrast, schools that implement restorative justice practices—focusing on conflict resolution and emotional growth—see improvements in student behavior, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships.

Extracurricular Involvement and Coping Mechanisms

Participation in extracurricular activities has been linked to better mental health outcomes. A study by Fredricks & Eccles (2024) found that students engaged in sports, music, arts, and volunteering programs develop stronger coping mechanisms, improved social skills, and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Such activities provide emotional outlets and opportunities for personal growth, helping students navigate challenges more effectively.

The Role of School Infrastructure and Physical Environment

A well-maintained and stimulating school environment also contributes to better mental health. Research by Chawla et al. (2024) indicates that schools with green spaces, open recreational areas, and well-lit classrooms create a more calming and positive atmosphere, reducing stress and enhancing concentration.



In summary, multiple aspects of the school environment—including teacher support, peer relationships, academic expectations, disciplinary practices, and extracurricular involvement—directly influence students' mental health. Schools that adopt holistic well-being strategies, stress management programs, and inclusive policies create protective environments that promote emotional resilience and psychological well-being.

IV. Recognition of Research Gaps

Despite extensive research on school environments and adolescent mental health, several gaps remain that need further exploration. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing a more comprehensive understanding of how school environments influence adolescent well-being across different contexts.

1. Lack of Longitudinal Studies

While existing research has established strong correlations between school climate and mental health, there is a limited number of longitudinal studies tracking these effects over time. Most studies rely on cross-sectional data, which only captures a snapshot of adolescent experiences. Long-term studies are needed to assess how changes in school climate impact students' emotional resilience, academic outcomes, and overall well-being throughout their schooling years and beyond into adulthood.

2. Underrepresentation of Rural and Marginalized Communities

Most research on school environments and mental health has been conducted in urban and high-resource settings, leaving rural schools and marginalized communities underexplored. Adolescents in these settings often face unique challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to mental health resources, and socio-economic stressors that may exacerbate mental health concerns. Future research should explore how rural schools can develop low-cost, sustainable interventions to support students' emotional well-being.

3. Intersectionality and Context-Specific Factors

The influence of socioeconomic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, and family background on school experiences remains insufficiently studied. Intersectional research is needed to understand how different social identities interact with school environment factors to shape adolescent mental health outcomes. For example, girls and LGBTQ+ students may experience higher levels of discrimination, bullying, or exclusion, requiring tailored interventions.

4. Impact of Digital and Hybrid Learning Environments

The increasing integration of digital learning and hybrid education models has reshaped the traditional school environment, yet its impact on adolescent mental well-being is not well understood. Studies need to examine how online learning, digital peer interactions, and reduced physical presence in schools affect students' emotional resilience, social skills, and stress levels.



5. Role of School Policies and Leadership Approaches

While much research has focused on teacher-student relationships and peer interactions, fewer studies have examined how school leadership, administrative policies, and disciplinary frameworks contribute to adolescent mental health. Future research should explore how leadership styles, school governance, and policy implementation affect students' emotional well-being and whether participatory decision-making improves student engagement and psychological outcomes.

6. Cultural Differences in School Climate and Mental Health

Most existing studies are Western-centric, and there is a need for more region-specific and culturally nuanced research. The factors influencing adolescent mental health in schools may differ across cultural contexts, educational philosophies, and societal expectations. Comparative studies examining how school environments impact mental well-being in different cultural settings can provide insights into best practices that can be adapted globally.

Filling these research gaps is essential for creating inclusive, evidence-based policies that address the diverse needs of students across different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies, rural and marginalized school contexts, intersectional approaches, and the evolving digital learning landscape to provide a deeper, more holistic understanding of the relationship between school environments and adolescent mental health.

V. Recommendations for Educators and Policymakers

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve adolescent mental well-being in school settings. A holistic, multi-stakeholder approach is required to create supportive, inclusive, and mentally enriching school environments that cater to students' diverse needs.

1. Teacher Training and Capacity Building

- Schools should prioritize continuous teacher training programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, student-centered teaching approaches, and early identification of mental health concerns.
- Training should also focus on trauma-informed teaching strategies to support students dealing with stress, anxiety, or adverse childhood experiences.
- Encouraging open communication between teachers and students can help create a trusting environment where students feel safe discussing their concerns.

2. Implementation of Comprehensive Mental Health Programs

- Schools should integrate mental health awareness initiatives into daily academic schedules to normalize discussions on emotional well-being.
- Regular counseling services and psychological support programs should be made available in schools, with trained professionals providing one-on-one and group sessions.
- Schools can collaborate with mental health professionals to conduct interactive workshops on stress management, self-care, and resilience-building techniques.



- Schools should establish student-led mental health advocacy groups to promote peer support systems and reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues.

3. Strengthening Peer Support and Anti-Bullying Initiatives

- Peer mentoring programs can help students develop strong support networks, where older students guide and support younger peers.
- Schools should implement strict anti-bullying policies and create a zero-tolerance approach to harassment, discrimination, and exclusion.
- Encouraging positive peer interactions through collaborative projects, leadership opportunities, and group-based extracurricular activities can enhance students' self-esteem and interpersonal skills.

4. Enhancing Extracurricular and Recreational Activities

- Participation in sports, arts, music, drama, and community service projects helps adolescents develop social skills, manage stress, and build self-confidence.
- Schools should ensure that extracurricular programs are accessible to all students, including those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Physical activity has been linked to better mental health outcomes, so schools should provide safe recreational spaces and encourage daily exercise routines.

5. Improving School Infrastructure and Learning Environment

- Schools should ensure that classrooms, libraries, sports facilities, and recreational areas are well-maintained, inclusive, and accessible.
- Creating green spaces within school campuses (gardens, open play areas) can significantly contribute to students' emotional and psychological well-being.
- Implementing "calm zones" or mindfulness spaces where students can practice meditation, relaxation, or quiet reflection can help manage stress levels.

6. Curriculum Integration and Policy Support

- Policymakers must consider integrating life skills and mental health education into school curricula, equipping students with emotional regulation techniques, problem-solving skills, and resilience strategies.
- Schools should introduce social-emotional learning (SEL) programs as part of academic instruction to foster emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms.
- Educational policies should ensure equitable allocation of mental health resources across diverse settings, including rural and underserved schools.

7. Parental Involvement and Community Engagement

- Schools should actively engage parents in mental health awareness programs to ensure a collaborative approach between home and school in addressing adolescent mental well-being.
- Organizing parenting workshops on adolescent emotional development, stress management, and communication strategies can help foster healthier parent-child relationships.
- Schools and policymakers should collaborate with local community organizations, NGOs, and healthcare providers to strengthen mental health initiatives and provide additional support services.



VI. Conclusion

This literature review underscores the profound impact of school environments on the mental well-being of adolescents. Key environmental components—including teacher support, peer relationships, physical infrastructure, extracurricular engagement, and inclusive school culture—emerge as significant contributors to students' emotional and psychological health. Positive school climates foster self-esteem, resilience, and a sense of belonging, while negative experiences such as bullying, rigid discipline, and poor infrastructure contribute to stress, anxiety, and disengagement.

Despite the growing body of research, notable gaps remain, particularly in longitudinal analyses and in studies focusing on rural, marginalized, or culturally diverse populations. The evolving nature of education, particularly in digital contexts, also calls for updated investigations into how virtual or blended environments affect student mental health.

Therefore, schools and policymakers must prioritize mental well-being through holistic, inclusive, and evidence-based strategies. Training for teachers, creating safe and engaging spaces, fostering peer support systems, and integrating mental health education into the curriculum are essential steps toward nurturing well-rounded, mentally healthy adolescents.

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