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Institut Penyelidikan Tingkahlaku Kesihatan



ASSESSING TEACHERS' ROLE IDENTIFICATION OF ADOLESCENTS AT RISK OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

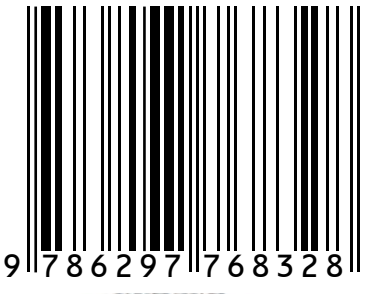
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ASSESSING TEACHERS' ROLE TO SUPPORT IDENTIFICATION OF ADOLESCENTS AT RISK OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



ASSESSING TEACHERS' ROLE TO SUPPORT IDENTIFICATION OF ADOLESCENTS AT RISK OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

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A MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR, IHBR



Children are our future. A strong foundation in mental health is vital for a thriving future for adolescents. Unfortunately for many adolescents, mental health remains an unaddressed crisis. Early support is critical, if left untreated, these problems can evolve into lifelong struggles with anxiety, depression and other chronic mental health conditions.

Schools are in unique position to support students in need of help. Worldwide, teachers have begun to be trained to undertake a supporting role to school counsellors in supporting adolescents' mental health issues. Teachers could be trained to detect early warning signs and connect them with the right support. Hence, there was a need to study teachers' readiness to take on this responsibility in Malaysia.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health (NCEMH) who have multiple times provided grants to fund studies on mental health carried by our Institute. I hope this current collaboration can be continued for many years to come.

It is our hope that the findings of the study would give evidence to stakeholders in the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Education (MOE) in designing the right interventions for school mental health programmes in the country. It is hoped that the results of the study could also be used to improve the relevant teachers' mental health training modules.



Dr. Manimaran Krishnan Kaundan
Director
Institute for Health Behavioural Research National Institutes of Health,
Ministry of Health Malaysia

A MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR, NCEMH



Mental health is the foundation of a thriving future—yet for many adolescents, it remains an overlooked crisis. Mental disorders and self-harm account for 19% of the disease burden among young people aged 10–19. If left unaddressed, mental health among adolescents could spiral into depression, bullying, substance use that could lead to poor academic outcomes with consequences lasting well into adulthood.

Schools are on the frontline of this battle. Teachers as daily observers of students' behaviour and wellbeing, hold a unique position to identify these struggles early and assist them to seek appropriate support. But are our teachers equipped, aware and comfortable to step into this role? This study seeks to answer that critical question by exploring educators' knowledge, perceptions, and readiness to support students' mental health.

The findings will assist policies and interventions by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to ensure schools become the institutions where mental wellbeing is prioritized alongside academic success. By bridging the gaps in care today, we invest in healthier, more resilient generations tomorrow.

We hope that findings from the study provides evidence-based insights into educators' current capacity to address mental health in Malaysian schools. Moreover, data from this study would assist the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) in designing scalable, school-centered mental health programmes. By equipping teachers with the right tools and fostering cross-sector partnerships, we hope to reduce the adolescent mental health burden from the early stages.

Dr. Nurashikin Binti Ibrahim
Director
National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health (NCEMH)

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ABBREVIATIONS

- **WHO** World Health Organization
- **MOH** Ministry of Health Malaysia
- **MOE** Ministry of Education
- **MHLCSE** Mental Health Literacy Capacity Survey for Educators
- **SBP** Sekolah Berasrama Penuh (Full Boarding School)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Traditionally, school counsellors or school psychologists often play the part of providing professional mental health assistance in schools. However, the shortage of these professionals resulted in many school going adolescents with mental health issues remain undiagnosed. Given the high level of need but short supply of mental health support in and outside of schools, school psychologists can work with teachers in implementing and promoting social-emotional educational practices in the classrooms. Due to the teachers' unique position in schools, the Mental Health Literacy and Capacity Survey for Educators (MHLCSE) was developed to assess teachers' awareness, knowledge, and comfort in supporting students' mental health.

The study objective was to investigate teachers' mental health literacy to support adolescents' mental wellbeing in schools. It is hope that the study findings will provide evidence-based data for stakeholders that could assist in developing mental health training for teachers in adolescents' mental health as well as to assist the stakeholders in developing the best strategies for adolescents' mental health intervention programme.

The cross-sectional nationwide study received the participation of 6567 teachers. Most of the respondents were female teachers (72%), were Malays (78%) with a proportionate of teachers teaching Year 5, Year 6, Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3. Majority of the respondents have been in service for more than 20 years (n = 1917, 29.2%) and the least are teachers within 6-10 years (n = 817, 12.4%). Finding from the study shows that awareness on mental health is higher among Full Boarding Schools (SBP) and Day schools (Sekolah Harian) teachers. Knowledge is higher among teachers in SBP, talent schools and religious schools. However, in terms of comfortability in communicating with students and parents, Day school teachers scored higher compared to other school categories. The study also found that teachers' level of knowledge and perceived importance on mental health decline with longer years of service. The Southern zone which encompassed of Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka showed high mean scores for all four domains.



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