

Promoting School Mental Health Awareness in Bangladesh

Funded by: SiTara's Story

Implemented by: Innovation for Wellbeing Foundation

Introduction:

According to World Health Organisation, 50% of mental health issues are established by age of 14 and 75% by age of 24. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people aged 15 -29. Ten percent of primary school children suffer from a low sense of wellbeing.

According to Unesco, 23% of school students in Bangladesh are becoming victims of bullying. Unesco reported that, victims of bullying are nearly twice as likely to feel isolated, be unable to sleep at night, and contemplate suicide. It can also affect how well a child is able to concentrate on their studies, cause increased absenteeism or even lead to them dropping out of school. As a result, it is crucial for school authorities to ensure that children are able to attend and enjoy school, without the threat of harassment.

According to 2009 National survey, 18% children in Bangladesh have diagnosable mental illness.

But despite how common it is, help for mental ill health are hard to access. Lack of mental health literacy, skilled human resources, professional services and stigma can prevent children and young people from accessing mental health services they may need for their recovery and reintegration.

In addition to mental health concerns, drug related problems are gradually becoming a key concern in Bangladesh from a social, economic and, more importantly, health perspective.

Unfortunately, our schools are not doing enough to ensure a secure environment for their students, as evident from the large percentage of students that are reportedly being bullied. And in some cases, teachers and school staff themselves have been guilty of mistreating students. When the adults fail to realise what kind of impact this may have on young impressionable minds, then we have a serious problem on our hands.

With the support of SiTara's Story, Innovation for Wellbeing Foundation is promoting mental health awareness in schools in Bangladesh specially focusing girls from rural Bangladesh can flourish their full potential in a safe, just and enabling environment.

Detail of the programs:

This report cover the second phase of the collaboration covering the period from July to August 2019.

Following table shows the districts and schools covered in this period:

District	Upazila	School
Comilla:	Sadar	1. Bibir Bazar High School 2. Choara Girls High School 3. Durlavpoor Model High School 4. Roghupur Islamia Dakhil Madrasa 5. Roghupur Shahid Manik High School 6. Dholesshar High School 7. Hashmatunnesa High School 8. Comilla Housing State School & Collage 9. Bakhrabad Gas Adorsho High School 10. Italla Islamia Madrasa
Shirajganj	Shahzadpur	1. Koijuri High School & Collage 2. Koijuri Secondary School 3. Koijuri M I Fazil Madrasa 4. Shahjadpur Ibrahim Pilot Girls High School 5. Shripholtola J S Girls High School 6. Thutia High School & Collage 7. Syedpur High School 8. Jamirta High School 9. Porjona M N High School 10. Char Koijuri School & Collage

Following table shows the number of people covered during this period:

Type of Target Group	Male	Female	Total
Teachers	26	24	50
Students	30	70	100
Parents	-	100	100
Total	56	194	250

Activity-1: Mental Health First Aid Training for School Teachers

The partnership provided opportunity to build the capacity of a total number of 40 teachers from 20 schools on how to help a student developing a mental health problem, experiencing a worsening of an existing mental health problem or in a mental health crisis.

Youth Mental Health First Aid Training covers:

- What is Youth Mental Health
- Risk factors for Youth mental ill health
- Depression –signs and symptoms
- Anxiety Disorders –signs and symptoms
- Risk factors and warning signs of Self-Harm Behavior
- Risk factors and warning signs for suicide
- Protective factors for good mental health and Recovery
- Preventing mental health issues and promoting wellbeing
- The Youth MHFA action plan: ALGEE

Activity-2: Parenting workshop with Parents

As children learn lessons during adolescent development period, parents too, need to adapt their parenting techniques. Although adolescents generally begin spending more time away from their families, they still need active and aware parents. Parenting with love and approval, and taking a positive approach even in moments of frustration are effective ways to guide children.

The program allowed to work with 100 parents in two districts where they discussed strategies for positive parenting, including promoting self-esteem, communicating, resolving conflict and teaching responsibility.

The workshop discussed different types of parenting such as permissive parenting, authoritarian and authoritative parenting and focused on skills for authoritative parenting.

Group activity on non-judgmental Listening skills:

Group activity on Teaching Values to Adolescents

Teaching Mutual Respect for the Entire Family

Activity-3: Workshop with Students- learning empathy

While acknowledging that bullying is prevalent in schools and elsewhere, all school children had a right to a safe and supportive environment that was free from violence and aggression. Children had to be safeguarded from emotional distress and physical injuries, and had to be treated fairly. The anti-bullying workshop covered a range of issues which were relevant to teenagers today.

Facilitators worked with 100 students of class nine and ten from two districts in two separate events incorporating fun activities on individuals and team work addressing self-esteem, and self-image, bullying behaviours and ended by exploring choices teenagers had in choosing the right behaviour for themselves as well as when relating to others.

Appreciative of the fun activities used to effectively present serious topics to the 13 and 14 -year-olds, Rokeya Begum Shefali the Executive Director of the Aid Comilla hoped that there would be follow-up sessions. "This is to make sure that students applied what they had gained from the workshop and that there is responsible behaviour from them," she added. She shared that many teenagers were more comfortable speaking with a non-judgmental third party as compared to their own parents or even teachers whom they interacted with daily.

Student Aleya enjoyed the fun presentation and appreciated the hands-on activities in the workshop instead of a passive style of learning by just listening to a lecture. Her classmate Tahera felt that the tasks that students were asked to carry out, were fun and engaging.

Pauroma Preety Mallik who is a student counselor in Delhi Public School in Dhaka facilitated the interactive session along with Fatema Parvin Putul, National Trainer of Mental Health First Aid Bangladesh.

"The session was not at all boring for me because students were asking questions and participating in the session," Fatema Parvin said.

"Adolescence is a very confusing time for most people as they are trying to balance between childhood and teenagehood," Pauroma added. "The confusion is compounded as this period is when adolescents experience the greatest physical and emotional changes. Teenagers are often underestimated. "They often receive mixed messages from adults, when what they really need is support, understanding and love," she said.

Initiatives like the workshop may also increase willingness among teenagers to report bullying behaviour when they are given a safe environment to do so.

Conclusion:

Mental health problems are common in high school students given that half of the mental illness start at the age of 14. However, parents and teachers are not well informed about how to recognize mental health problems of the adolescents, how to provide support and what are the best treatments and services available. In mental health crises, such as a student feeling suicidal, deliberately harming themselves, having a panic attack, being acutely psychotic, a parent or teacher with appropriate mental health first aid skills can reduce the risk of the person coming to harm. A trained Mental Health First Aider in their social network can assist the affected student to get appropriate help. Positive Parenting skills will help parent to act as a role model for their children. They will be able to better understand the difficulties that their children may go through and become confident to provide right emotional support at the right time.

Ultimately, we need a substantial shift in our mindsets about the importance of children and their feelings. Children are more likely to thrive when we nurture their humanity, and offer them language and strategies and values to help them identify, express, and, thus, regulate their feelings. When parents, teachers, and students gain new awareness into the complex roots of mental health issues and adopt new strategies for addressing it, schools can lead the way.