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Health and Wellbeing Among Children and Youth in India

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A Mental Health Study of School Children

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ABSTRACT

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory illustrates the child as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Schools fall within the microsystem, in which the child's most direct inter actions with the immediate environment takes place. Schools are heterogeneous in nature. Children from diverse backgrounds and with unique life experiences come to study in them. Schooling brings with it diverse challenges, and adjustments like for instance separation anxiety from parents, transition from one level of schooling to the other, curricular expansion, examination stress, dilemmas regarding choice of career, issues of identity, relationships, and sexuality to name a few. Also, Schools may provide a crucial and formative role in combating serious problems later in life and promoting optimal human functioning as children spend their maximum waking hours in them. They can do so by organising mental health programmes. The present paper attempts to review the work done in the area of 'Education for Mental Health' in the Indian Context. Answers to the following questions have been sought in this endeavour: What are the specific mental health concerns of school going children? How are the school based mental health programmes and services conceptualised? What is the scope of integrating mental health in the systems already existing in the school? How do the national policies on mental health and education construct the concept of mental health?

"Children have only one chance of a childhood. They deserve to be protected from harm, to enjoy good emotional, mental and physical health, and to feel that they belong in their home, at school and in their local community"

—Barnardo's (1999)

The above mentioned quote by Thomas John Barnardo highlights the importance of this unique phase of life called 'childhood'. We all have been children and thus, we all believe that we know childhood. Our memories guide who we think we are in present, who we think we were in the past, and what we consider childhood should be for others. But, these memories are a rough terrain to traverse. Some of these memories are clear, rational and conscious and some operate at an unconscious level. We may say, childhood is an adult's construction. The concept of 'childhood' is a more general and abstract term non adult, while the notion of 'childhood' is an embodied individual defined as adult (Kehily, 2015). The status conceived by adults to those who are defined as not physical and/or sexual maturity, legal status, chronological age. Childhood as a stage is culturally defined. For instance, a child in Western countries may become economically active by 15 or 16 years of age. However, in some of the East Asian countries, children as young as 5 or 6 years work.