

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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**The state of school mental health within the educational environment.**

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**Abstract**

The psychological dimension holds significant importance for learners, and achieving mental health has become a pressing concern that facilitates the educational process for students and enhances their academic performance. A student's mental well-being in school is considered a gateway to overall health, and the absence of psychological disorders among students is a key indicator of mental health within the school environment. In this research paper, we conducted an exploratory study by analyzing data related to various psychological disorders over the past three academic years (2020–2021, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023), with the aim of identifying some indicators of declining mental health within the school setting.

**Keywords:**

Mental health, school environment, school health.

**Introduction**

There is no doubt that the school plays a vital role in fostering appropriate psychological development and promoting students' mental health. As the second most influential educational institution after the family, the school welcomes children around the age of six, at a time when education has become a social necessity widely sought after by families, particularly in light of contemporary societal and cultural advancements.

Therefore, the school—where a child spends many formative years—must provide a supportive environment that promotes sound psychological growth. It should serve as an extension of the family by reinforcing its positive aspects and attempting to rectify any shortcomings in the child's upbringing.

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Within the school setting, the child acquires knowledge, skills, and psychological orientations that significantly shape essential aspects of personality. The more balanced these aspects are and the more they support psychological adaptation, the better positioned the child is to attain mental well-being in both the present and future.

Achieving such outcomes is one of the core missions of modern education.

### **Problem Statement**

Mental health is a topic of significant concern among researchers and specialists, as it represents a fundamental requirement throughout an individual's life and daily interactions with others. As Hamza Barakat (2008, p. 407) states, mental health is a positive condition encompassing both mental and physical well-being, rather than merely the absence of psychological illness.

Since the 1980s, mental health within the school environment has attracted growing educational and health-related attention. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other relevant sectors such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Solidarity, emphasized the importance of school health as a primary concern. A notable step in this direction was the ministerial memorandum issued on November 21, 1983, which stressed the need to focus on the school environment where the student is raised. It called for care and attention to student health through preventative measures, hygiene, and fostering healthy habits. Daily practices such as health screenings, monitoring student well-being, and maintaining clean and safe school facilities—like rest areas, playgrounds, toilets, and proper lighting and heating—were also mandated (Abdul Rahman bin Salem, 2000, p. 285).

In a study by Didier and Jeanine (2010) on school health care and modern methods of evaluating school health programs, a survey was conducted to assess students',

teachers', and school principals' understanding of school health. The sample included 20 teachers, 200 students, and 100 principals. The results revealed a general lack of awareness regarding school health concepts, outdated health programs, and the ineffectiveness of those currently implemented (Turki Nasser Al-Rasheedi, 2011, pp. 11, 41).

The concept of mental health continues to provoke interest across various segments of society, largely driven by a desire to understand what mental health entails and how it manifests in daily life. Mental health as a concept is best understood in contrast with mental health disorders, just as physical health is understood in relation to physical illness. Thus, illness signifies a deviation from health, and maladjustment represents a qualitative change from psychological equilibrium (Abdul Rahman bin Salem, op. cit., p. 287).

The relationship between mental health and education emerged from the observation of students' psychological maladjustment in schools and the resulting need to address these issues. The field of mental health significantly influenced educational thought by shifting attention from purely intellectual development to emotional and social growth. Unlike traditional education, which focused on cognitive development, modern education emphasizes emotional and social well-being, addressing students' emotional problems and psychological adjustment strategies (Mostafa Khalil, 1983, p. 3).

A study by Stolz and Stolz (1944) demonstrated that physical defects, regardless of their nature, are a major source of distress for students, especially

during adolescence. These defects may lead to anxiety, feelings of inferiority, aggression, and other forms of personal and social maladjustment (ibid., pp. 184–185).

Fatima Bidi's (2017) study titled "*The Level of Mental Health Among Primary School Students*" aimed to assess students' mental health from their own perspective and to determine whether differences in mental health levels were associated with variables such as gender, age, academic performance, parental order, and educational level. The study sample consisted of 101 randomly selected students enrolled in regular education during the 2016–2017 academic year in selected schools in the Municipality of M'sila (Latifa Jammah, 2017).

Based on the above, this study seeks to address the following two main research questions:

- What is the current state of mental health in the school environment?
- What psychological disorders can be considered indicators of declining mental health among students?

### **1. Research Hypotheses**

- Behavioral disorders are considered an indicator of poor mental health.
- Language and communication disorders are considered indicators of poor mental health.
- Anxiety disorders are among the indicators of poor mental health.

### **2. Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study stems from the crucial role mental health plays as a

scientific field grounded in four key domains—structural, preventive, diagnostic, and therapeutic—which can be applied to the educational process and its dynamics. These domains address the various interactions and levels of effectiveness among all the components and elements involved in education. The school is a complex social environment comprising teachers, staff, and students who differ in age, cultural background, and social status, which can lead to the emergence of numerous issues or symptoms of psychological, behavioral, or psychosomatic disorders.

The importance of this study lies in the ability of these four domains to manage factors that may affect the educational process and the overall school climate. Particularly, identifying indicators of psychological disorders is of great importance, as such disorders may contribute to the deterioration of a student's mental and physical health, thereby influencing their behavior in school, within the family, and in society at large.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To understand the concept of mental health within the school context.
- To identify the role of the school in promoting mental health for both students and teachers.
- To explore the influence of the school environment on mental health.
- To identify indicators of psychological disorders that may lead to the deterioration

of students' mental and physical well-being.

#### 4. Scope of the Study

- **Geographical Scope:** School health monitoring and screening units in the Wilaya of M'sila.
- **Temporal Scope:** The three academic years (2020–2021, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023).
- **Sample:** School students in the Wilaya of M'sila affiliated with school health screening and monitoring units.

#### 5. Definition of Terms Operational Definitions:

- **School Health:** Refers to the totality of health services provided within school health screening and monitoring units by school health teams operating in educational institutions across the Wilaya.
- **Mental Health:** A state of psychological well-being that enables the student to cope with life's pressures, realize their potential, learn effectively, and contribute to their local community. It is an integral part of overall health and well-being, supporting students' individual and collective capacities to make decisions, build relationships, shape their environment, and contribute positively to their school setting. Mental health is a fundamental right of every student and is crucial for personal, social, and economic development.
- **School Environment:** Refers to the physical setting of the school, including classrooms, gardens, playgrounds, laboratories, lighting, and ventilation—factors that collectively create an environment conducive to learning. This includes the provision of modern, well-designed buildings that meet all school-

related needs, maintenance of cleanliness, fair distribution of students across classrooms, availability of comfortable seating, and provision of teaching tools and materials. The school environment is an educational space where students receive instruction across various subjects and educational stages, including primary, middle, and secondary levels. In many countries, this is known as compulsory primary education. School environments worldwide are governed by regulatory frameworks that ensure administrative staff and students adhere to rules that maintain order, foster discipline, and support the educational mission.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 1. Mental Health:

Mental health is the individual's ability to experience happiness, establish sincere relationships with others, and recover to a stable state after exposure to crises or psychological stress. Mental health does not merely signify the absence of disease; rather, it reflects social and personal adjustment, a sense of satisfaction, happiness, vitality, and emotional stability. (Cara et al., 2009, p. 52)

#### 1.1. Importance of Mental Health:

Achieving mental health among individuals is essential for the prosperity and development of society. Individuals free from psychological disorders are better equipped to fulfill their societal roles effectively. A society cannot thrive if its

members suffer from mental health challenges. The significance of mental health can be summarized in the following points:

1. Mental health enables individuals to cope with life's challenges.
2. It supports healthy social development.
3. It enhances the ability to learn effectively.
4. It reinforces physical health.
5. It increases individual competence and productivity.
6. It reduces deviant behaviors and violations of societal norms.  
(Abdel Hamid, 2001, pp. 14–16)

**1.3. Indicators of Mental Health:** Mental health is characterized by several observable indicators, including:

1. Positivity.
2. Optimism.
3. Realistic self-assessment of one's abilities.
4. Setting achievable goals.
5. Ability to establish successful social relationships.
6. Respect for cultural norms while maintaining a degree of personal autonomy.
7. Self-control.
8. High psychological endurance.
9. Success in work and personal satisfaction with one's job.  
(Rolland, 2016, p. 132)

#### 1.4. Indicators of Mental Health

Perspectives differ on identifying indicators of mental health. For instance, Magarios proposed nine indicators of mental health:

1. **Realistic Acceptance of Personal Limitations:** The ability to understand

one's physical and mental abilities and boundaries without exaggerating or underestimating them.

2. **Enjoyment of Social Relationships:** The capacity to form successful social bonds, accept others, appreciate them, and feel a sense of belonging within family and friendship circles.
3. **Success and Satisfaction in Work:** A person's ability to succeed in their job and experience satisfaction from it.
4. **Optimism and Engagement with Life:** Approaching life with optimism, free of undue worry or fear.
5. **Coping with Daily Frustrations:** Sufficient ability to handle life's everyday setbacks.
6. **Fulfillment of Needs and Drives:** Meeting both physiological and psychological needs effectively.
7. **Stability of Personal Attitudes:** Consistent thinking patterns and a solid philosophical framework guiding the person's behavior and decisions, without frequent vacillation or inconsistency.
8. **Acceptance of Responsibility:** Taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions, indicating emotional maturity and self-confidence.
9. **Emotional Stability:** A state of internal harmony where various personal drives are balanced and do not conflict with each other.  
(Orpana & Vachon, 2016, p. 36)

#### 1.5. Mental Health and the School Environment

The school is one of the most significant educational institutions that play a vital role in shaping students. Students spend a substantial portion of their lives in school, acquiring experiences, skills, and attitudes that help them navigate life in general and

prepare for professional life in particular. This underlines the school's critical influence on behavior and personality development.

School psychological adjustment refers to a student's ability to attend school, separate from parents, adapt to systems established by groups other than the family, and participate in group activities—all of which are powerful sources of pressure on children. The way parents and teachers handle these requirements can turn the school experience into either a positive and healthy developmental phase or a significant obstacle in the child's personal growth.

Common and serious school-related challenges that may affect healthy development include:

- Excessive pressure to overcome separation anxiety from home.
- Academic expectations that exceed the student's actual capabilities.
- Use of threats or violence to enforce behavioral compliance.
- Harsh criticism or reprimand for academic or social shortcomings.

- Overprotective parenting that hinders the child's independence. (Han & Gong, 2012, p. 45)

### 3. Applied Framework

#### 3.1. Methodology and Procedures

- **Research Method:** This study employed the **descriptive-analytical method**, which was used to describe and analyze data from the school health screening and monitoring units in the Wilaya of M'sila over the past three academic years (2020–2021, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023).
- **Study Population:** Students from the three educational levels—**primary, middle, and secondary**—who are affiliated with the school health units in the Wilaya of M'sila.
- **Research Instruments:** Statistical tables from the school health units of the Wilaya of M'sila, documenting discovered psychological disorders. For the purposes of this study, three types of disorders were selected due to their interrelation:
  - **Language disorders** (e.g., stuttering and other speech issues)
  - **Behavioral disorders** (e.g., addiction, aggression)
  - **Anxiety disorders** (e.g., generalized anxiety disorder, phobias)

### 1. Statistical Tables of Mental Disorders Among Cases Detected by School Health Screening and Follow-Up Units (Modified According to the Article)

From the table, we observe:

A significant variation and increase in the number of students affected by language and communication disorders, such as stuttering and other speech impairments.

ACADEMIC YEAR	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
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DISORDER	SECTIONS				
LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS	636	PRIMER			
	294	MIDDLE			
	76	SECONDARY			
	1006	TOTAL			
	12,80	PERCENTAGE			
	900	PRIMER			
	177	MIDDLE			
	66	SECONDARY			
	1143	TOTAL			
	10,66	PERCENTAGE			
	968	PRIMER			
	219	MIDDLE			
	67	SECONDARY			
	1254	TOTAL			
	8,31	PERCENTAGE			

As well as **anxiety disorders**, including **phobias and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)**

ACADEMIC YEAR		2020-2021					2021-2022					2022-2023				
DISORDER	ANXIETY DISORDER	SECTIONS														
		PRIMER	MIDDLE	SECONDARY	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	PRIMER	MIDDLE	SECONDARY	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	PRIMER	MIDDLE	SECONDARY	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
		416	459	369	1244	15,82	498	335	949	1782	16,61	870	723	688	2281	15,12

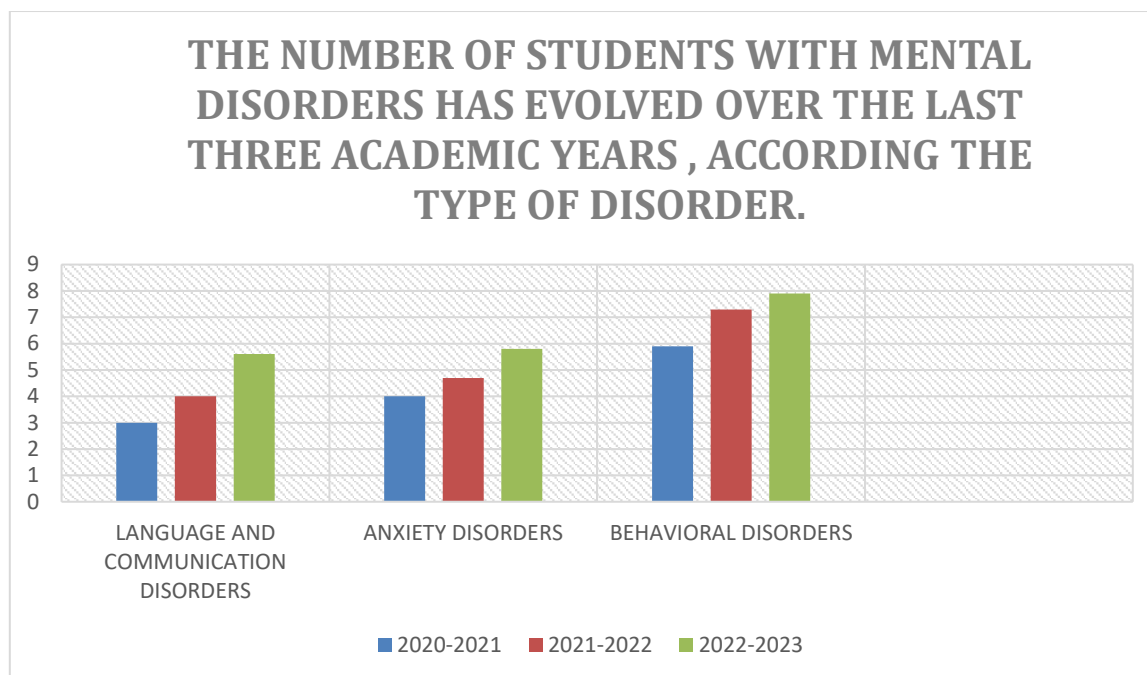
As well as the presence of **behavioral disorders**, particularly **addiction and aggressiveness**, across the three educational levels (primary, middle, and secondary), starting from the academic year **2020–2021**

ACADEMIC YEAR		2020-2021					2021-2022					2022-2023				
DISORDER	SECTIONS	PRIMER	MIDDLE	SECONDARY	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	PRIMER	MIDDLE	SECONDARY	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	PRIMER	MIDDLE	SECONDARY	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE





rise in behavioral disorders and anxiety disorders compared to language and communication disorders, as illustrated in the following graph:



### Discussion and Analysis:

It is evident from the previous table and the corresponding graphs that various psychological disorders within the school environment serve as clear and strong indicators of low mental health. Students with poor psychological adjustment suffer from psychological stress, which they express in multiple ways, such as hesitation, anxiety, phobias, violent behavior during play, selfishness, egocentrism, lack of self-confidence, the use of offensive language, and inappropriate behavior in interactions with others. They may also exhibit hatred of school and attempts to escape from it. Poor psychological adjustment may manifest in behavioral disorders such as theft, addiction of various kinds, lying, nail-biting, tendencies toward withdrawal, shyness, jealousy, speech and language

defects, and other behavioral problems, which negatively impact self-esteem.

The results of this study align with previous research, such as the study by Fatima Bedi (2017), titled "Mental Health Level of Primary School Students." This study aimed to assess the mental health levels of primary school students and revealed differences in the prevalence of various psychological disorders in this age group. Similarly, the study conducted by Stolz and Stolz (1944) highlighted that physical defects, regardless of their type, are a source of distress for students, especially during adolescence. The impact of these defects often manifests as anxiety due to mockery from peers, bullying, and teasing about appearance, which in turn fosters aggressive behavior and feelings of inferiority, along with other forms of personal and social maladjustment. These

issues may lead to severe consequences, such as drug addiction and other forms of deviant behavioral disorders.

### **Findings and Recommendations:**

Based on the previous discussion, the researcher sought to highlight the most significant psychological disorders that can affect the mental health of students. To ensure a healthy school environment conducive to achieving educational goals, which include fostering generations free from mental illnesses and psychological issues, equipped with confidence and a desire for success and achievement, and capable of fulfilling their responsibilities in advancing and progressing society, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Establish modern schools that align with the development and modernization trends followed in most countries, and activate the role of school health screening and monitoring units, not just for statistical purposes but primarily for prevention and psychological support.
2. Create an educational environment that supports the conditions necessary for mental health.
3. Promote mental health awareness among all personnel within educational institutions.
4. Provide specialized training and professional development courses for teachers to raise awareness of mental health.

### **Conclusion:**

Mental health, by definition, is a state of psychological, physical, and social well-being, free from psychological disorders

and diseases. It plays a crucial role in human life, as it helps individuals maintain psychological and social balance, thus enabling positive adaptation to both themselves and their surrounding environment. This, in turn, assists in overcoming various psychological disorders and illnesses. Mental health has diverse indicators, both internal and external, that are related to others, and these indicators can be used to assess the level of an individual's psychological health. The degree of presence of these indicators in an individual determines their mental health status.

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