

A Study on Mental Health and Higher Education Awareness among XII Standard Tribal Students

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ABSTRACT

Mental health and awareness of higher education opportunities play a crucial role in shaping students' academic engagement, aspirations, and future career pathways, particularly among students from marginalized communities. Tribal students at the higher secondary level often face psychological, social, and educational challenges that influence their readiness for higher education. The present study aims to assess the level of mental health and higher education awareness among XII standard tribal students and to examine gender differences in these variables. A survey method was adopted, and the sample consisted of XII standard tribal students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using an investigator-developed mental health scale and a higher education awareness scale. percentage analysis and t-test were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that the majority of tribal students exhibited a moderate level of mental health and higher education awareness. Significant gender differences were found in certain dimensions of mental health, namely anxiety, emotional well-being, and overall mental health, as well as in higher education awareness. The study highlights the need for targeted psychological support and structured guidance programme to enhance both mental well-being and awareness of higher education opportunities among tribal students.

Keywords: Mental Health, Higher Education Awareness, Tribal Students, Higher Secondary Education, Gender Differences

1. Introduction

Mental health is a crucial determinant of students' academic engagement, emotional stability, and future aspirations, particularly during adolescence a phase marked by psychological, social, and educational transitions. In recent years, increasing academic pressure, competitive examinations, socio-economic challenges, and changing educational expectations have heightened mental health concerns among school students (WHO, 2022). For students belonging to tribal communities, these challenges are often intensified due to geographical isolation, limited access to educational resources, cultural marginalization, and inadequate guidance systems (UNESCO, 2021). Higher education awareness refers to students' understanding of post-school educational opportunities, institutional pathways, career options, eligibility requirements, and the long-term value of higher education. Adequate awareness plays a significant role in shaping students' academic motivation, goal setting, and decision-making (NCERT, 2020). However, tribal students often experience limited exposure to higher education information due to socio-economic constraints, lack of role models, and insufficient institutional support (Government of India, 2020). Mental health and higher education awareness are closely interrelated. Positive mental health enhances self-confidence, resilience, and future orientation, which are essential for planning higher education pathways. Conversely, poor mental health may result in low academic self-concept, anxiety, and diminished aspirations (OECD, 2021). Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the mental health status and higher education awareness of tribal students at the higher secondary level, providing insights that can inform educational planning, counselling interventions, and policy implementation.

2. Need and Significance of the Study

Tribal students constitute a significant segment of India's school population; however, they continue to experience persistent educational disadvantages such as higher dropout rates and lower transition to higher education. Understanding the mental health status of tribal students at the higher secondary level is essential, as psychological well-being plays a crucial role in shaping academic performance, learning motivation, self-confidence, and career aspirations. In this context, the present study assumes significance by providing empirical evidence on the mental health status of XII standard tribal students and by assessing their level of awareness regarding higher education opportunities. Further, the study examines the relationship between mental health and higher education awareness, thereby highlighting the psychological factors that influence students' educational aspirations and decision-making. The findings of the study are expected to assist teachers, counsellors, and school administrators in designing appropriate guidance and support interventions tailored to the needs of tribal students. Moreover, the study offers valuable insights for policymakers to strengthen inclusive education practices and guidance services in alignment with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. By addressing both psychological and educational dimensions, the study contributes to a holistic understanding of tribal students' preparedness and readiness for higher education.

3. Review of Literature

Yan et al (2025) compared teachers' and students' mental health. multilevel regression analyses suggest that higher teacher positive mental health was linked to higher student positive mental health and lower student depression; higher teacher depression were correlated with higher student depression; and teacher life satisfaction and anxiety were not correlated with any indicators of student mental health. The study highlights the significant association between teacher mental health and student mental health. Ja Niene et al (2023) stated that the more positive perception of mental health climate and higher levels of both positive mental health and sense of belonging were significantly associated with lower levels of depression. Significant interactions existed between positive mental health and climate and sense of belonging and climate with buffering effects being most pronounced for students reporting high levels of positive mental health. Saikia and Padmavathy (2025) studied higher education students' awareness towards the human rights dimensions in relation to nature of residence, levels of education, stream and age group. The result revealed there is a significant difference in awareness towards the human rights dimension among higher education students on the basis of their nature of residence, nature of qualification and age level but not on stream of study. Pherson et al (2021) indicated injustice in their midst: social work students' awareness of immigration-based discrimination in higher education. Findings showed that the survey-based study measures undergraduate social work students' knowledge regarding immigration-based educational discrimination and assesses their understanding of how social work's ethical mandates require them to respond. Most respondents, 83.4%, agreed that it is segregation to exclude such students from the university, but 25% were unaware of discriminatory practices within their own university.

4. Objectives of the Study

- ❖ To assess the level of mental health and higher education awareness of 12th tribal students.
- ❖ To find out the significant difference in the mental health of 12th tribal school students based on gender
- ❖ To find out the significant difference in the higher education awareness of 12th tribal school students based on gender

5. Hypotheses of the Study

- ❖ The level of mental health and higher education awareness of 12th tribal students.
- ❖ There is no significant difference in the mental health of 12th tribal school students based on gender
- ❖ There is no significant difference in the higher education awareness of 12th tribal school students based on gender

6. Research Methodology

[a] Method of the Study

The survey method was employed to gather quantitative data using standardized tools and a structured awareness questionnaire. This method enabled the researcher to study existing conditions without manipulating variables.

[b] Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of XII standard tribal students studying in government and government-aided higher secondary schools.

[c] Sample of the Study

A sample of XII standard tribal students was selected from higher secondary schools for the study.

[d] Tools used

Mental Health

The mental health scale was developed by the investigator. The initial draft of the tool was submitted to subject experts to establish content validity, based on whose suggestions several statements were reframed and modified to improve clarity and relevance. A pilot study was conducted with 50 XII standard tribal students drawn from different schools to refine the instrument. The final version of the scale consisted of 38 statements, rated on a five-point Likert scale of agreement, covering the dimensions of anxiety, sense of security, optimism, emotional well being and self-esteem. The maximum and minimum possible scores on the scale were 190 and 38, respectively. The reliability of the tool was established using Cronbach's Alpha method, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Higher Education Awareness

The higher education awareness scale was developed by the researcher to assess the level of awareness among tribal students regarding higher education. A pilot study was conducted with 50 XII standard tribal school students selected from different schools to standardize the tool. The scale was administered to these students to examine the clarity, relevance, and suitability of the items. The final version of the instrument consisted of 20 items, measured on a three-point scale, covering the dimensions of awareness of higher education and its benefits. The minimum and maximum possible scores on the scale were 20 and 60, respectively, indicating the respondents' level of awareness.

[e] Sampling Technique

The stratified random sampling technique was used present study.

[f] Statistical Techniques Used

The following statistical techniques were employed for data analysis:

- **Percentage Analysis** – to interpret categorical data.
- **Inferential Statistics** – To find out the significant difference mental health and higher education awareness [t-test].

7. Data analysis and Interpretation

[A] Percentage Analysis

Table-1 Level of 12th Standard Tribal School Students in Mental Health

| Dimensions | Low | | Moderate | | High | |
|----------------------|-----|-------|----------|-------|------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Anxiety | 187 | 23.73 | 491 | 62.30 | 110 | 13.95 |
| Sense of Security | 179 | 22.71 | 494 | 62.69 | 115 | 14.59 |
| Optimist | 129 | 16.37 | 569 | 72.20 | 90 | 11.42 |
| Emotional well being | 132 | 16.75 | 577 | 73.22 | 79 | 10.02 |
| Self Esteem | 122 | 15.48 | 572 | 72.58 | 94 | 11.92 |
| Total | 114 | 14.46 | 540 | 68.52 | 134 | 17.00 |

Interpretation

- The above table it is noticed that 577 (73.22%) 12th standard tribal school students are in moderate level in the emotional well being dimension.
- 79 (10.02%) 12th standard tribal school students have high emotional well being while 132 (16.75%) have low emotional well being.
- 115 (14.59%) 12th standard tribal school students are in high level in the sense of security dimension while 179 (22.71%) school students are in low level in sense of security.

Table-2 Level of 12th Standard Tribal School Students Higher Education Awareness

| Dimension | Low | | Moderate | | High | |
|-----------|-----|-------|----------|-------|------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Awareness | 193 | 24.49 | 485 | 61.54 | 110 | 13.95 |
| Benefit | 131 | 16.62 | 559 | 70.93 | 98 | 12.43 |
| Total | 143 | 18.14 | 538 | 68.27 | 107 | 13.57 |

Interpretation

- 559 (70.93%) 12th standard tribal school students are in moderate level in the benefits dimension.
- 98 (12.43%) 12th standard tribal school students have high level benefits while 131 (16.62%) have low level benefits.

[B] Inferential Statistics

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mental health of 12th standard tribal school students based on gender.

Gender: Male and female 12th standard tribal school students do not differ in mental health.

Table -3 Mean Difference in Mental Health of 12th Standard Tribal School Student Based on Gender

| Variables | Male (406) | | Female (382) | | 't' value | S/NS |
|----------------------|------------|-------|--------------|-------|-----------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| Mental health | 17.63 | 4.65 | 18.64 | 4.21 | 3.21 | S |
| Anxiety | 29.78 | 4.52 | 30.26 | 4.36 | 1.52 | NS |
| Sense of Security | 36.78 | 4.92 | 37.90 | 3.94 | 1.76 | NS |
| Optimist | 23.97 | 3.51 | 24.91 | 3.24 | 3.94 | S |
| Emotional well being | 21.24 | 4.27 | 21.98 | 4.08 | 0.25 | NS |
| Self Esteem | 129.41 | 15.50 | 133.71 | 14.16 | 4.09 | S |
| Total | | | | | | |

*Significant at 5% level NS-Not Significant, S-Significant

Interpretation

From the above table it is found that significant differences are not noted in three cases, senses of security, optimist, and self-esteem. Hence it is concluded that the hypothesis is not accepted in these cases. As there is significant difference in three cases, anxiety, emotional wellbeing and overall mental health, it is concluded that the hypothesis is accepted in these cases.

Conclusion

- Male and female 12th standard tribal school students do not differ in dimensions senses of security, optimist and self-esteem of mental health.
- Male and female 12th standard tribal school students differ in dimensions anxiety, emotional wellbeing and total scores of mental health.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the higher education awareness of 12th standard tribal school students based on gender.

Gender: Male and female 12th standard tribal school students do not differ in higher education awareness.

Table -3 Mean Difference in Higher Education Awareness of 12th Standard Tribal School Student Based on Gender

| Variables | Male (406) | | Female (382) | | 't' Value | S/NS |
|-----------|------------|------|--------------|------|-----------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| Awareness | 22.38 | 2.84 | 22.95 | 2.52 | 2.99 | S |
| Benefits | 27.65 | 4.19 | 28.80 | 3.30 | 4.27 | S |
| Total | 50.05 | 5.54 | 51.80 | 4.53 | 4.85 | S |

*Significant at 5% level S-Significant

Interpretation

From the above table it is found that there is significant difference in all cases awareness, benefits and overall higher education awareness, it is concluded that the hypothesis is accepted in these cases.

Conclusion

- Male and female 12th standard tribal school students do not differ in dimensions senses of awareness, benefits and total score of higher education awareness

8. Findings of the Study

- 577 (73.22%) 12th standard tribal school students are in moderate level in the emotional well being dimension.
- 79 (10.02%) 12th standard tribal school students have high emotional well being while 132 (16.75%) have low emotional well being.
- 115 (14.59%) 12th standard tribal school students are in high level in the sense of security dimension while 179 (22.71%) school students are in low level in sense of security.
- 559 (70.93%) 12th standard tribal school students are in moderate level in the benefits dimension.
- 98 (12.43%) 12th standard tribal school students have high level benefits while 131 (16.62%) have low level benefits.

- Male and female 12th standard tribal school students do not differ in dimensions senses of security, optimism and self-esteem of mental health.
- Male and female 12th standard tribal school students differ in dimensions anxiety, emotional wellbeing and total scores of mental health.
- Male and female 12th standard tribal school students do not differ in dimensions senses of awareness, benefits and total score of higher education awareness

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Schools should implement regular mental health screening and counselling services to support the emotional well-being of tribal students.
2. Career guidance and higher education awareness programme should be organized at the higher secondary level, with a special focus on tribal students.
3. Teachers should be trained to identify signs of anxiety and low self-esteem among students and provide timely academic and emotional support.
4. Gender-sensitive guidance and counselling interventions should be introduced to address differences in mental health and awareness levels.
5. Collaboration between schools, parents, and community organizations should be strengthened to create a supportive learning environment for tribal students.
6. Policymakers should enhance guidance services and inclusive education initiatives in line with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

10. Conclusion

The present study provides valuable insights into the mental health status and higher education awareness of XII standard tribal students. The findings indicate that most tribal students possess a moderate level of mental health and awareness regarding higher education opportunities, suggesting partial preparedness for post-school transitions. However, the presence of gender differences in certain dimensions of mental health and higher education awareness highlights the need for gender-sensitive interventions. The results emphasize that positive mental health is essential for fostering confidence, motivation, and future-oriented thinking among tribal students. Enhancing awareness of higher education pathways can further empower students to make informed academic and career decisions. Overall, the study underscores the importance of integrating mental health support and educational guidance within the school system to promote equitable access to higher education for tribal learners.

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