

The Journal's Vision

The Indian Journal of School and University Mental Health & Wellbeing (IJSUMHW) is intended as an intellectually engaging and relevant space for reflection on, and improvement of, school and university mental health and well-being in India. We aim for the Journal to occupy an important online niche as a place to discuss how schools, students, teachers, and higher-education systems will flourish. The main concern of the Journal is the Mental Health and Well-being of all who live and work in schools, colleges, and universities, in the hope of combining scholarly rigour and practical relevance. This idea of bringing research to life is at the centre of everything the journal stands for.

Research on how students and teachers can do better doesn't actually trickle down into school and college classrooms, where it can make a real difference. And, in fact, in most schools and universities across the country, students feel marginalised. For this Journal to contribute to the mental health of all students and teachers, in every aspect of life, it is important to publish research which actually has a meaningful connection to the work teachers, counsellors, school principals, educationists, administrators and policymakers do or need to do in schools and colleges every day in all areas of schools and colleges in the country. The ultimate goal is for this Journal to make an effective contribution to the welfare of all Indian students and teachers, helping schools and universities grow into safe, inclusive and equitable places where everyone feels welcome, valued and respected.

Because, at heart, any real concern for mental and emotional wellbeing must necessarily go beyond individuals to consider the wider community, and indeed the broader community within which the schools and colleges are located. No student will flourish if she knows that at her school or university, she cannot expect not to be discriminated against; if she experiences ostracism, prejudice, or threats; or if staff feel unsupported or undervalued. As this idea goes even further, 'unsafe' can manifest in various guises: structural, social, and psychological.

So, schools and other educational institutions can be unsafe at the levels of organisation, structure, and the organisation of schooling, teaching processes, and services for Mental Health and Well-being, also by neglecting to support and foster 'safe' communities and interactions among staff and students. It means all schools, universities, and institutions need to embrace the need to organise their systems, structures, and cultures so that each student and member of staff feels safe, well, looked after, and included. One reason why the journal places so much importance on the India-centric approach and on the contributions of Indian researchers is precisely the need to recognise the enormous diversity found across India at all levels.

Many models seem to be successfully transferred to other contexts, but that doesn't mean that they would work in India the way they work elsewhere. Indian students come from highly varied backgrounds, and so are the institutions. Some institutions are resourced, private, elite institutions, while others are state-owned, under-resourced, and struggling. Indian students and staff cannot all fit the same models. Indeed, Indian cultures and the social and political systems within which they operate are immensely varied, spanning vast regions, languages, religions, ethnicities, castes, and classes, as well as urban-rural divides.

Educational institutions also mirror these vast regional differences, so a mental health initiative developed in one of these to serve as a mental health centre will need to be adapted to local circumstances, practices, and values before it can be used effectively in another part of India. In other words, while there might be useful points of contact from models developed in other countries, there must be many opportunities for scholars working in other countries. Still, these researchers need to maintain a keen interest in developing them in local circumstances, for and by people from the local context and locale. The journal is therefore keen to provide space to local researchers and practitioners. As noted already, much remains in its early stages in India.

We have yet to develop very sophisticated conceptual and research-practice understandings of issues related to student and staff Mental Health and Well-being across schools and universities. While there will, no doubt, be many references to international research and practice, the central focus will be on work which is in and from India. A significant number of those associated with the Journal are based in India, while others are based internationally but have a deep commitment to working in the country, particularly in partnership with institutions and professionals there.

As will be obvious, mental health in schools and colleges will not be addressed from any perspective other than an interdisciplinary one, and the Journal strongly encourages contributions from across these subjects. Psychology, education, public health, and many others can help address some of the complexities. Some researchers will draw only on their own disciplinary perspective and language - and that will be fine. And in other areas, a multi-disciplinary approach would be best and may provide new pathways for understanding and action; the Journal would welcome many papers that take this approach. The intention is to encourage research that leads to action, be it in the classroom, at the institution, or at the policy level.

It will mean giving priority to publishing action research, the sort of research that aims to solve problems and make a real difference for schools, students and staff. This will take various forms, including

programme evaluations, descriptions of new models of service delivery and contributions to policy reviews and reform processes. And it will also include accounts of how changes have come about and what it has taken to achieve those changes. The ultimate objective, therefore, of this journal is to bring better mental and emotional health to all Indian school students and staff by ensuring our institutions promote greater Mental Health and Well-being for the entire community- students, staff, and the community.

Also, as is obvious from this premise, the intent is to address the broader infrastructure and organisational/ cultural issues in schools and Universities, as mental health and well-being cannot be separated from the overall quality and functioning of these institutions. By publishing work that directly examines institutions and their roles in fostering or undermining individual well-being, the journal aims to promote deeper understanding and change in the wider culture and functioning of education in India. All those with a special interest in this, particularly, those from any underrepresented populations including children and young person, girls and women, young persons with disabilities, and those from marginalized or under-resourced background; are encouraged to send in contributions, whether of a research or reflective nature, to help foster dialogue with each of the different groups who share interest and knowledge in student and staff mental health in education settings across India.

Concepts like early help and the cultivation of resilience and strength have consistently resurfaced over the years within the kinds of work the journal both considers and encourages. What early help signifies is that distress and vulnerability are identified at the outset rather than allowed to escalate into crises. As such, the journal champions an orientation wherein the school/university proactively searches out cues of struggle and offers an intervention that is not just “too late, too little”, but an infrastructure where individuals can reach out without undue reservation or fear. Resilience and strength are viewed as abilities to be developed in relationships, in the classroom, among peers, and at the policy level, rather than as qualities an individual possesses or lacks at birth.

Along these lines, the journal is concerned with works demonstrating how anticipatory strategies – or strategies for coping proactively in response to academic demands, inter-personal challenges, familial obligations, financial concerns and the gamut of experiences which impact upon student life, school and university environment, can be developed, including those that address the maintenance of optimism and the generation of a sense of purpose. These kinds of capacities are seen as fundamental in shaping an individual’s trajectory throughout life (even beyond school/university) and not as secondary ‘add-ons’ in our perspective on mental health and wellbeing.

Ultimately, however, access, ethics, and respect have to underpin all our endeavours. Access involves making conversations, knowledge, and opportunities for engagement in relevant discussions accessible not just to specialists. Ethics involves not just methodological considerations in research but also ethical considerations regarding representation, positions of power, and responsibility within discourses on mental health in education.

Respect relates to the importance and acknowledgement of all contributions that are to be had, be it amongst academicians and practitioners, between students and staff, or between policy-makers and citizens, because the nexus of ideas, more often than not, arises out of interaction with each other.

Finally, and most crucially, we, in the Journal, are also acutely aware of the gradual and incremental nature of much social change, at both the structural and attitudinal levels within education and mental health settings, and adopt an approach of long-term, persistent, and sustainable, though pragmatic, growth. The Indian Journal of School and University Mental Health and Wellbeing strives to do exactly this.

Prof. Namita Ranganathan

Editor in Chief & Retired Professor
Department of Education, University of Delhi

Dr. Jitendra Nagpal – MD, DNB

Editor in Chief & Sr. Consultant Psychiatrist
Inst. of Child Development & Adolescent
Wellbeing Moolchand Medcity, New Delhi