

Research Paper

Attitudes and Beliefs Towards Psychotherapeutic Treatment among School Students

Shreya Prakash^{1*}, Dr. Sunita Purty²

ABSTRACT

Over the decades, a multitude of researches have pointed towards school going students as being one of the most vulnerable populations for mental health concerns like depression and anxiety. This thus indicates towards a need to study treatment seeking behaviours among this population. The main objective of this study is to identify awareness and understand the attitudes of Indian school going students towards psychotherapy as a treatment option for their concerns. A sample of 60 students aged between 16-19 years were taken from both government and private schools. A semi-structured sociodemographic data sheet was prepared and tools like Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Help Scale and Belief in Efficacy of Psychotherapy Scale were administered to assess attitudes towards psychotherapeutic treatment. The results of the study were found to be interesting and will be discussed in the full paper. The results and conclusion of the present study are expected to greatly contribute to designing Mental Health Awareness programmes at school level.

Keywords: *Students, School, Psychotherapy, Attitude, Beliefs*

Many researches have indicated towards school students being a vulnerable population for developing illness like depression and anxiety. According to World Health Organisation, the prevalence age for depression in India begins as early as 15 years of age, and being linked to high suicidality, it is the second most leading cause of death in adolescents and young adults. Depression in students often reveals as persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, and declining academic performance, while anxiety may lead to excessive worry, difficulty in concentrating, and avoidance behaviors (Kessler et al., 2007). Research indicates that high levels of stress in school environments contribute to the onset of these conditions, particularly due to factors such as pressure of homework, peer pressure, bullying, and fear of failure (Twenge et al., 2018). Moreover, the increasing use of social media has been linked to heightened likelihood of developing anxiety and depression, as students often compare themselves to unrealistic online standards and face cyberbullying (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of Clinical Psychology, Postgraduate Institute of Behavioural and Medical Sciences, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

²Associate Professor, Dept. of Clinical Psychology, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Hospital, Jaipur, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: September 16, 2025; Revision Received: September 05, 2026; Accepted: September 09, 2026

© 2026, Prakash, S. & Purty, S.; licensee IJIP. This is an Open Access Research distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any Medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Despite the growing prevalence of these issues, mental health remains an under-addressed concern in schools, often due to stigma, lack of awareness, and insufficient resources (Patel et al., 2018). Early intervention and support systems, including counseling services and mental health awareness programs, are crucial in extenuating the long-term consequences of these conditions.

Studies indicate that the utilization of mental health services remains significantly low as only 20–30% of adolescents with mental health issues go for professional help, with barriers such as stigma, lack of awareness, and tendency to be independent (Merikangas et al., 2011). School-based mental health services play a critical role in bridging this gap, providing accessible support through counselling, peer programs, and teacher interventions (Weist et al., 2017).

Some studies suggest that many adolescents lack adequate knowledge about available mental health services and the benefits of professional intervention, often perceiving mental health issues as personal weaknesses rather than medical conditions requiring treatment (Gulliver et al., 2010). Stigma, misinformation, and cultural beliefs may further contribute to reluctance in seeking help, with adolescents frequently preferring to rely on peers or family rather than opt for professional treatment modalities (Rickwood et al., 2007). Research also highlights disparities in awareness based on socioeconomic background, with adolescents from lower-income families being less informed about therapy options due to limited mental health literacy and fewer school-based resources (Patel et al., 2018).

Adolescents' attitudes and beliefs towards psychotherapy-

Psychotherapy has been defined by Wolberg (1967) as "The treatment, by psychological means, of problems of an emotional nature in which a trained person deliberately establishes a professional relationship with the patient with the object of removing, modifying, or retarding existing symptoms, of mediating disturbed patterns of behavior, and of promoting positive personality growth and development."

Psychotherapy is a highly effective treatment for adolescent depression and anxiety, helping young individuals develop coping mechanisms, improve emotional regulation, and address underlying psychological stressors. Among the various therapeutic approaches, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the most widely used and evidence-based treatment for adolescent mental health disorders (David et al., 2018). CBT helps adolescents identify negative thought patterns, challenge irrational beliefs, and develop healthier coping strategies, leading to significant reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety (Weersing et al., 2017). Another effective approach is Interpersonal Therapy (IPT), which focuses on improving social relationships and communication skills to alleviate emotional distress (Mufson et al., 2004). Additionally, Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) have shown promising results in reducing anxiety and improving emotional resilience in adolescents by promoting self-awareness and stress management (Zoogman et al., 2015).

Adolescents' attitudes and beliefs toward psychotherapy are shaped by various personal, social, and cultural factors. While some adolescents view therapy as a valuable tool for coping with emotional distress, others hold negative perceptions due to stigma, lack of awareness, or misconceptions about mental health treatment (Gulliver et al., 2010). Many adolescents express concerns about confidentiality, fear of judgment, or skepticism about the effectiveness of therapy, which may discourage them from seeking professional help (Rickwood et al., 2007). Additionally, cultural beliefs and familial influences play a

significant role in shaping their willingness to engage in psychotherapy, with some viewing it as unnecessary or a sign of weakness (Michelmores & Hindley, 2012)

Aim of the Study

The current study aims to understand and assess the awareness, attitudes and belief in the efficacy of psychotherapy as a treatment option among school students. Furthermore, the sample was divided into two groups- Students of Government school and Private school respectively to investigate for any disparity between the two groups. The study took place in December 2023.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 120 students (60 belonging to Government school and 60 belonging to Private school). Convenience sampling method was employed and two schools based in Raipur, Chhattisgarh were approached for data collection- Swami Atmanand School (Government school) and Dakshinamurti School (Private school).

Inclusion criteria

Both male and female students were included in the study, who were between the age range of 16-19. Only students who could understand, speak and write in English were included.

Exclusion criteria

Any students who were unable to understand or read English were excluded from the study.

Instruments

A semi structured sociodemographic data sheet was prepared by the researcher to collect information on student's background, awareness about mental illness and its treatment

- 1. The Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help – Short Form (ATSPPH-SF)**- also known as ATSPPHQ-10, is a 10-item version of the original Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Questionnaire (ATSPPHQ) developed by Fischer and Farina (1995). It was created to provide a more efficient measure of attitudes toward mental health services while maintaining the reliability of the original 29-item version. For this 10-item scale respondents rate in a likert-type format the degree in which they agree or disagree with the item; alternatives are “agree,” “partly agree,” “partly disagree,” and “disagree.” Scores range from 0 to 30 with a higher score indicating a more positive attitude toward help seeking (Fischer & Farina, 1995). The Cronbach's alpha for the ATSPPHQ-10 has been reported to range from 0.80 to 0.90, which indicates good internal consistency.
- 2. Belief in the efficacy of psychotherapy**- Developed by E.G. Volpe (2014), the Belief in the Efficacy of Psychotherapy scale is a 13-item scale developed to measure outcome expectations for therapy exclusively (i.e., is psychotherapy helpful?). It has items that focus on mainly 3 things- expectations for psychotherapy, help seeking behaviours and Lay beliefs about mental health. The BEP scale measures the general cultural belief system (i.e., non-patients) and their beliefs about psychotherapy and therapists specifically, rather than other forms of mental health services. The Cronbach's alpha of BEP was found to be at 0.83. An Exploratory factor analysis revealed that all 13 items of the scale were loading onto a single factor with Eigen value of 5.4.

Attitudes and Beliefs Towards Psychotherapeutic Treatment among School Students

Procedure

Data acquired from the sociodemographic sheet regarding awareness about mental illnesses and awareness about psychotherapy were converted into frequency and percentage scores. T-test was used to compare means of scores obtained on belief in the efficacy of psychotherapy scale and Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help (SF) questionnaire for both groups- Government school students and Private school students. A correlation was drawn between Attitude towards seeking Professional psychological help and Belief in the efficacy of Psychotherapy.

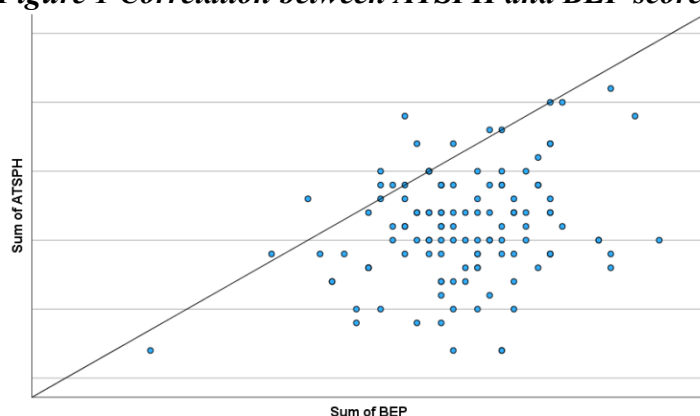
RESULTS

61.67% Government school students responded 'yes' when asked if they were aware about mental illnesses in comparison to 66.67% private school students responding 'yes'. It was found that 66.67% government school students reported 'yes' when asked if they were aware about psychotherapy as a treatment option in comparison to 70% private school students responding 'yes'.

Table 1. Means scores of Government school students and private school students on ATSPH scale and BEP scale

Government school students		Private school students	
ATSPH	BEP	ATSPH	BEP
10.67	43.06	15.08	43.83

Figure 1 Correlation between ATSPH and BEP scores



The mean score for Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help was found to be 10.67 for Belief in the Efficacy of Psychotherapy was 43.06 in government school students. The mean score for Attitude Towards Seeking Professional Help was found to be 15.08 and for Belief in the Efficacy of Psychotherapy was found to be 43.83 in private school students.

The scores on Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help were found to be highly correlated with the scores of Belief in the Efficacy of Psychotherapy ($r = 0.276$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the awareness, attitudes, and beliefs regarding psychotherapy among school students. One of the key observations is that awareness about mental illnesses and psychotherapy was relatively high among both government and private school students. However, private school students demonstrated slightly higher awareness levels, with 66.67% aware of mental illnesses and 70% aware of

Attitudes and Beliefs Towards Psychotherapeutic Treatment among School Students

psychotherapy, compared to 61.67% and 66.67% in government school students, respectively. This suggests that while mental health awareness is present among students, targeted interventions may still be necessary to further educate them on the significance of mental health care and the benefits of professional psychological help.

The mean scores for attitudes toward seeking professional help were notably different between the two groups. Private school students had a higher mean score (15.08) compared to government school students (10.67), indicating a more favorable attitude toward seeking professional psychological help. This difference could be attributed to several factors, including exposure to mental health education, accessibility to counseling services, or cultural and socioeconomic influences. Private schools may have more resources and programs dedicated to mental health awareness, leading to a more open attitude toward seeking psychological support.

When examining the belief in the efficacy of psychotherapy, both groups had relatively similar mean scores (43.06 for government school students and 43.83 for private school students), with no significant statistical difference. This suggests that regardless of school type, students generally recognize psychotherapy as an effective treatment for mental health concerns. However, the relatively moderate scores indicate that while there is some belief in the effectiveness of psychotherapy, misconceptions or skepticism about its benefits may still exist.

A crucial finding in the study is the significant correlation ($r = 0.276$) between attitudes toward seeking professional help and belief in the efficacy of psychotherapy. This correlation suggests that students who have a stronger belief in the effectiveness of psychotherapy are more likely to have positive attitudes toward seeking professional help. This finding highlights the importance of promoting confidence in psychotherapy as a valid and effective treatment, as strengthening these beliefs could encourage more students to seek mental health support when needed.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The study highlights a positive relationship between belief in the efficacy of psychotherapy and attitudes toward seeking professional help. While awareness levels were similar across both school types, private school students demonstrated a more favorable attitude toward seeking help. However, the belief in the effectiveness of psychotherapy did not significantly differ between the two groups. These findings emphasize the need for continued efforts in mental health awareness, stigma reduction, and accessibility to psychological services in schools to foster a more supportive environment for students' mental well-being.

Findings of the current study must be interpreted considering certain limitations. The study was conducted on a sample from only two schools in Raipur, hence more similar researches based on a larger sample from different parts of the country may provide additional insight into attitudes and beliefs in efficacy of psychotherapy among school students. Directions for further research imply multiple subgroups based on sex, socioeconomic status and area of residence (urban, rural, etc.) for a better understanding of respective needs for designing school mental health awareness programs, screening and psychotherapy facilities for students.

REFERENCES

- Burns, B. J., Costello, E. J., Angold, A., Tweed, D., Stangl, D., Farmer, E. M. Z., & Erkanli, A. (2013). Children's mental health service use across service sectors. *Health Affairs*, 22(5), 101-110.
- David, D., Cristea, I., & Hofmann, S. G. (2018). Why cognitive behavioral therapy is the current gold standard of psychotherapy. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 9, 4.
- Gonzalez, A., Alegria, M., Prihoda, T. J., Copeland, L. A., & Zeber, J. E. (2011). How the relationship of attitudes toward mental health treatment and service use differs by age, gender, ethnicity/race, and education. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 47(5), 487-497.
- Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., & Christensen, H. (2010). Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people: A systematic review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 10, 113.
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2007). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593-602.
- Merikangas, K. R., He, J., Burstein, M., Swanson, S. A., Avenevoli, S., Cui, L., ... & Swendsen, J. (2011). Service utilization for lifetime mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: Results of the National Comorbidity Survey-Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 50(1), 32-45.
- Micheltore, L., & Hindley, P. (2012). Help-seeking for suicidal thoughts and self-harm in young people: A systematic review. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 42(5), 507-524.
- Mufson, L., Dorta, K. P., Moreau, D., & Weissman, M. M. (2004). Interpersonal psychotherapy for depressed adolescents. *The Guilford Press*.
- Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(8), 1427-1438.
- Patel, V., Saxena, S., Lund, C., Thornicroft, G., Baingana, F., Bolton, P., ... & Unützer, J. (2018). The Lancet Commission on global mental health and sustainable development. *The Lancet*, 392(10157), 1553-1598.
- Radez, J., Reardon, T., Creswell, C., Lawrence, P. J., Evdoka-Burton, G., & Waite, P. (2021). Why do children and adolescents (not) seek and access professional help for their mental health problems? A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 30(2), 183-211.
- Rickwood, D., Deane, F. P., Wilson, C. J., & Ciarrochi, J. (2007). Young people's help-seeking for mental health problems. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 4(3), 218-251.
- Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2018). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a nationally representative dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 128(3), 185-199.
- Weersing, V. R., Jeffreys, M., Do, M. C., Schwartz, K. T., & Bolano, C. (2017). Evidence base update of psychosocial treatments for child and adolescent depression. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 46(1), 11-43.
- Wei, Y., Hayden, J. A., Kutcher, S., Zygmunt, A., & McGrath, P. (2015). The effectiveness of school mental health literacy programs to address knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking among youth. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 7(2), 109-121.

Attitudes and Beliefs Towards Psychotherapeutic Treatment among School Students

- Weist, M. D., Rubin, M., Moore, E., Adelsheim, S., & Wrobel, G. (2017). Mental health screening in schools. *Journal of School Health*, 77(2), 53-58.
- Wolberg, L. R. (1967). *The technique of psychotherapy* (2nd ed.). Grune & Stratton.
- Zoogman, S., Goldberg, S. B., Hoyt, W. T., & Miller, L. (2015). Mindfulness interventions with youth: A meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*, 6, 290–302

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Prakash, S. & Purty, S. (2026). Attitudes and Beliefs Towards Psychotherapeutic Treatment among School Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(3), 1806-1812. DIP:18.01.163.20261403, DOI:10.25215/1403.163