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SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE TRIBAL AREA OF JHARKHAND

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract
Adolescence represents a critical period of physical, emotional, and social transformation, during which mental health plays a pivotal role in shaping overall development. In India, where adolescents constitute a significant proportion of the population, understanding the school environment's role in promoting mental health is particularly vital, especially within tribal regions that face structural inequities. The present study examines the mental health challenges and factors impacting. Drawing upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the study emphasizes the interaction between cultural context, social support, and cognitive development. A cross-sectional design was employed with a sample of 170 students. The results show the community has a multivariate effect on psychosocial outcomes. The government initiatives and targeted support in tribal areas are gradually making an impact and contributing to improved perceptions of school environment and psychosocial well-being among Schedule caste and Schedule tribe students. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive school-based programs that strengthen resilience, reduce academic stress, and foster inclusive support systems to ensure equitable mental health outcomes for all adolescents.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Mental health, School environment, Resilience, Tribal communities*

Introduction

India, with a population of 1,425,775,850, has the largest population of children and adolescents in the world, comprising 34.8% of its population aged 0-19 as of 2021 (Hertog et al., 2023). Adolescence is a crucial period for developing social and emotional skills that are essential for mental well-being. These include adopting healthy sleep patterns, exercising regularly, developing coping, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills, and learning to manage emotions effectively. Protective and supportive environments within the family, at school, and in the broader community are crucial. Adolescents, who make up nearly one-sixth of the global population, represent a unique developmental stage marked by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. These transitions, when compounded by exposure to poverty, abuse, or violence, increase their vulnerability to psychiatric disorders. Ensuring healthy development during this period requires preventing exposure to adversity, promoting socio-emotional learning and psychological well-being, and providing access to quality mental health services.

Globally, an estimated 14.3% of individuals aged 10-19 are affected by mental health conditions, most of which remain unrecognized and untreated. Such conditions heighten adolescents' susceptibility to social exclusion, discrimination, and stigma factors that often discourage help-seeking. They are also linked to learning difficulties, engagement in risk-taking behaviors, physical health problems, and, in severe cases, violations of fundamental human rights. Some adolescents are at greater risk of mental health conditions due to their living conditions, stigma, discrimination, or exclusion, or lack of access to quality support and services. These include adolescents living in humanitarian and fragile settings; adolescents with chronic illness, autism spectrum disorder, an intellectual disability, or other neurological condition; pregnant adolescents, adolescent parents, or those in early or forced marriages; orphans; and adolescents from minority ethnic or sexual backgrounds or other discriminated groups (Thornicrof et al., 2022). The mental health of school students is a growing crisis characterized by high rates of anxiety, depression, and other conditions, impacting academic performance and overall well-being. Factors such as academic and social pressure, family expectations, technology, and global events contribute significantly to this issue. To address these challenges, schools should promote a supportive environment, provide access to mental health services, and implement early intervention strategies to reduce stigma and prevent more severe problems. Mental health encompasses emotional, social, and psychological well-being and plays a crucial role in shaping how students think, act, and interact with others. For students, good mental health

provides a wide range of benefits. It enhances academic growth by making students more productive, motivated, and focused on their educational goals. It also equips them to recognize everyday stress and cope with it in healthy ways, while fostering a positive sense of self and confidence in their abilities. Students with good mental health are more actively engaged in learning, contributing meaningfully in the classroom, and are better able to build and maintain healthy relationships with peers, teachers, coaches, and administrators. Furthermore, they are more likely to adopt positive lifestyle practices such as healthy sleep patterns, balanced nutrition, and regular exercise. Ultimately, good mental health enables students to feel proud of their accomplishments and remain motivated to explore their interests and aspirations.

Multiple factors affect mental health. The more risk factors adolescents are exposed to, the greater the potential impact on their mental well-being. Stressors during adolescence may include exposure to adversity, pressure to conform to peer expectations, and the exploration of identity (Zhang, 2023). Media influence and gender norms can exacerbate the disparity between an adolescent's lived reality and their aspirations for the future. Other important determinants include the quality of home life and peer relationships Wenhold & Harrison,2021). School children often face barriers to seeking help, including mistrust of others, negative experiences at home, and fear of victimization in school. Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to examine the mental health of school-going adolescents, with particular attention to the risk and protective factors that shape their well-being. It further explores the critical role of schools in fostering supportive environments, promoting resilience, and providing timely interventions that can safeguard the holistic development of adolescents.

The Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation for this study is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural cognitive theory. Rieber (1998) suggests that adolescents use reason in more abstract, idealistic, and logical ways. This cognitive advancement enables them to think about possibilities, consider multiple perspectives, engage in deductive reasoning, and form complex opinions on abstract concepts such as social justice and personal values. According to Vygotsky, development is a function of both culture and social interaction. He emphasized that knowledge is constructed collaboratively through engagement with others and the cultural context in which a person lives. Adolescents, therefore, develop cognitively not in isolation but through guided participation, dialogue, and shared experiences with peers, teachers, and family members. Within this framework, multiple factors shape the kind of individual an adolescent becomes, and mental health plays a critical role in supporting this developmental process. Strong mental health support within school settings functions as a protective factor, reinforcing positive cognitive and emotional growth. Schools, as extensions of the family, can provide structured environments that foster resilience, encourage socio-emotional learning, and enhance academic success, thereby contributing significantly to the holistic development of adolescents.

Literature Review

The transition to higher education presents multiple challenges for students, and failure to cope effectively with these challenges can make them vulnerable to psychological distress. Lapsley and Edgerton (2002) found that students who are unable to successfully manage these new demands are more likely to experience anxiety and depression. Similarly, McDermott and Pettijohn (2011) reported that psychological difficulties are highly prevalent among university entrants worldwide. One critical factor in mitigating such psychological challenges is social support. Tao, Dong, Hunsberger, and Pancer (2000) emphasized that social support significantly reduces depression, loneliness, and anxiety among students. Social adjustment, therefore, plays a vital role in overall student well-being. Raju and Rahamtulla (2007) observed that students' social adjustment within educational institutions is directly related to their broader adjustment capacities. Dyson and Renk (2006) further defined social adjustment in terms of students' active participation in social events and satisfaction with the institutional environment.

Low social acceptance has been shown to adversely affect academic performance in multiple ways. Peer rejection often leads to heightened anxiety, such as fear of being teased or excluded, which interferes with concentration and learning (Nansel et al., 2001; Sharp, 1995). Students with limited friendships tend to display lower academic self-esteem and rely more heavily on teachers for academic assistance (Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005; Mercer & DeRosier, 2008).

Prabu (2015) reported that higher secondary students experienced moderate levels of academic stress, with private school students facing greater stress than those in government schools. In the Indian context, Deb (2015) found strong correlations among academic stress, parental pressure, and psychiatric problems, with examination-related anxiety being significantly associated with mental health issues. Kumar (2025) finds that self-efficacy and social support are critical in fostering academic motivation, while financial limitations, societal expectations, and stress present significant challenges to educational advancement. Kaur (2018) noted that academic stress negatively affects adolescent mental health, with girls under high stress demonstrating poorer outcomes than boys. Similarly, Agarwal (2011) revealed that academic stress is negatively correlated with both academic achievement and mental health, while academic achievement is positively correlated with mental health. Scholars also have sought to define mental health more broadly. Galderisi et al. (2015) described mental health as a dynamic state of internal equilibrium that allows individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal societal values. Madlan (2004) similarly emphasized that mental health reflects how individuals think, feel, and behave in daily life. In India, Malhotra and Patra (2014) reported a prevalence rate of 23.33% for mental health issues among school children and adolescents, and 6.46% in the wider community. Raman and Thomas (2023) stressed that nurturing the mental health of children and adolescents is a collective responsibility shared by parents, educators, policymakers, and society. The World Health Organization (2024) has also underscored that failing to address adolescent mental health challenges can have long-term consequences, including impaired physical and emotional well-being and diminished capacity to lead fulfilling adult lives.

Research Gap

Existing research highlights the prevalence of psychological distress among students, the significance of social support, and the detrimental impact of academic stress on adolescent well-being. Much of the existing literature focuses either on university students or on general adolescent populations, with limited attention to school-going adolescents in India, particularly within diverse socio-cultural and economic contexts. Studies emphasize the role of social adjustment and academic stress; there is comparatively little research on the protective role of schools as supportive environments that can promote resilience, socio-emotional learning, and mental health. Addressing these gaps is crucial, as schools serve not only as educational institutions but also as key sites for mental health promotion and intervention.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the mental health challenges faced by school-going adolescents.
- To study how schools provide a supportive environment for students' mental health.
- To understand how schools help students build resilience.
- To understand how schools help students build socio-emotional skills.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, and correlational research design to explore the role of schools as protective environments in promoting mental health, resilience, and socio-emotional skills among higher secondary school students.

Sample and Population

The sample consisted of 170 higher secondary school students drawn from six schools in the Godda district of Jharkhand. A purposive sampling method was used to ensure representation from both government and private schools. 193 school students were selected through stratified random sampling. The tool was distributed to the students, and the data was collected under personal supervision. Out of the 193 samples, only 170 were considered for final analysis.

Tool for Data Collection

A self-constructed and standardized scale was developed to measure various aspects of students' mental health and school environment. The tool comprised 30 items distributed across five dimensions, each containing six items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree). The dimensions were: School Environment, Academic Stress, Resilience Skills, Emotional Well-being, and Support System. To ensure content validity, the initial draft of the tool was reviewed by a panel of experts in education and psychology, and modifications were incorporated based on their feedback. The reliability of the scale was established through Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.872, indicating high internal consistency across the items. Background variables considered in the study included gender, locality, type of school, community, and academic achievement score. Data were collected by personally visiting the selected schools after obtaining necessary permissions from the school authorities. Students were briefed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. They were assured of confidentiality, and participation was kept voluntary. Responses were recorded and compiled for analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics 25) and R Studio. Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed for demographic and study variables. Reliability and Validity of the Tool: Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to confirm the dimensional structure of the scale.

For objective 1: Relationship between Study Variables and Academic Achievement: Pearson's correlation was used to examine associations between school environment, academic stress, resilience skills, emotional well-being, support system, and academic achievement. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the predictive contribution of the five dimensions to academic achievement.

For objective 2: Influence of Background Variables: An Independent samples t-test was applied for gender (male/female) and locality (urban/rural). One-way ANOVA was used to test differences based on type of school and community, followed by post-hoc tests where significant differences emerged. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed to examine the combined effect of background variables on multiple dependent variables simultaneously. All statistical tests were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

Analysis & Interpretation

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Variables (N = 170)

Variables	School Environment	Academic Stress	Resilience Skills	Emotional Well-being	Support System	Academic Achievement
School Environment	1	-.112	0.085	0.067	0.142	-.074
Academic Stress		1	-.203**	-.421**	-.375**	-.090
Resilience Skills			1	.362**	.314**	0.046
Emotional Well-being				1	.403**	0.042
Support System					1	0.024
Academic Achievement						1

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed several significant associations among the study variables. Academic stress showed significant negative correlations with resilience skills ($r = -0.203$, $p < 0.01$), emotional well-being ($r = -0.421$, $p < 0.01$), and support system ($r = -0.375$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that students with higher resilience, stronger support systems, and better emotional well-being reported lower academic stress. Furthermore, resilience skills were positively correlated with emotional well-being (r - .362, $p < 0.01$) and support system (r - .314, $p < 0.01$), while emotional well-being was positively associated with support system (r - .403, $p < 0.01$). However, school environment and support system did not show significant correlations with academic achievement, and none of the five dimensions demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with academic achievement scores.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Achievement (N = 170)

Predictor	B	SE B	B	T	P
Constant	80.88	17.82		4.54	0
School Environment	-0.66	0.39	-0.15	-1.69	0.093
Academic Stress	-0.32	0.42	-0.07	-0.76	0.447
Resilience Skill	0.85	0.43	0.21	1.97	0.041
Emotional Well-being	0.13	0.27	0.04	0.49	0.626
Support System	-0.37	0.48	-0.08	-0.77	0.442

The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that, among the five predictors considered, only resilience skill emerged as a statistically significant contributor to academic achievement (β-.21, p-.041). This finding suggests that students who demonstrate higher levels of resilience such as persistence, coping strategies, and adaptability tend to perform better academically. Although school environment (β- -.15, p-.093) and academic stress (β- -.07, p- .447) showed negative associations with academic achievement, these effects were not statistically significant. Similarly, emotional well-being (β- .04, p-.626) and support system (β- -.08, p-.442) did not significantly predict students' achievement scores. Overall, the analysis indicates that resilience skill is the strongest predictor of academic performance in this study, while other psychosocial dimensions, though theoretically important, did not demonstrate significant effects within the present sample.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test Results by Gender (N = 170)

Variable	Male (n = 100) M ± SD	Female (n = 70) M ± SD	*t*(df)	*P*	Mean Difference
School Environment	23.60 ± 2.78	22.61 ± 2.57	2.35(168)	0.02	0.99
Academic Stress	24.14 ± 2.57	24.14 ± 2.46	-0.01(168)	0.994	0
Resilience Skills	19.96 ± 3.01	19.14 ± 2.69	1.82(168)	0.071	0.82
Emotional Well-being	19.68 ± 3.94	19.30 ± 3.30	0.66(168)	0.51	0.38
Support System	21.91 ± 2.62	21.21 ± 2.46	1.75(168)	0.082	0.7
Total Score	109.29 ± 7.89	106.41 ± 6.32	2.53(168)	0.012	2.88
Academic Achievement	68.81 ± 12.01	69.35 ± 11.73	-0.29(168)	0.772	-0.54

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences across the study variables among 170 higher secondary school students (100 males and 70 females). The results indicated that male students reported significantly higher perceptions of the school environment (M - 23.60, SD - 2.78) compared to female students (M - 22.61, SD - 2.57), t(168) - 2.35, p - .020, with a mean difference of 0.99. Similarly, males had significantly higher total scores (M - 109.29, SD - 7.89) than females (M - 106.41, SD - 6.32), t(168) - 2.53, p - .012, mean difference - 2.88. No significant gender differences were observed for academic stress, with males and females reporting identical mean scores (M - 24.14, SD - 2.57 vs. SD - 2.46), t(168) - -0.01, p - .994. Differences in resilience skills (M - 19.96 vs. 19.14), emotional well-being (M - 19.68 vs. 19.30), and support system (M - 21.91 vs. 21.21) were not statistically significant, t(168) - 1.82, p - .071; t(168) - 0.66, p - .510; and t(168) - 1.75, p - .082, respectively. Academic achievement scores also showed no significant gender difference, with males (M = 68.81, SD - 12.01) and females (M - 69.35, SD - 11.73), t(168) - -0.29, p - .772. These results suggest that while males reported slightly higher overall psychosocial outcomes and perceptions of the school environment, gender did not significantly influence most individual variables, including academic stress, resilience, emotional well-being, support system, and academic achievement.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test Results by Types of School (N = 170)

Variable	Government (n=94) M ± SD	Private (n=76) M ± SD	t(df)	p	Mean Difference
School Environment	22.73 ± 2.58	23.76 ± 2.82	–2.48(168)	0.014	–1.03
Resilience Skills	19.16 ± 2.73	20.20 ± 3.03	–2.35(168)	0.02	–1.04
Support System	21.15 ± 2.31	22.21 ± 2.75	–2.73(168)	0.007	–1.06
Total Score	106.86 ± 6.92	109.64 ± 7.73	–2.47(168)	0.014	–2.78

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences between government (n - 94) and private (n - 76) school students across the study variables. The results indicated that private school students reported significantly higher perceptions of the school environment (M - 23.76, SD - 2.82) compared to government school students (M - 22.73, SD - 2.58), t (168) - -2.48, p - .014, with a mean difference of –1.03. Similarly, private school students scored significantly higher on resilience skills (M - 20.20, SD - 3.03) than government school students (M - 19.16, SD - 2.73), t(168) - -2.35, p - .020, mean difference - -1.04, and support system (M - 22.21, SD - 2.75) compared to government students (M - 21.15, SD - 2.31), t(168) - -2.73, p - .007, mean difference - -1.06. The total psychosocial score was also significantly higher among private school students (M - 109.64, SD - 7.73) than government school students (M - 106.86, SD - 6.92), t(168) - -2.47, p - .014, with a mean difference of -2.78. No significant differences were observed between private and government school students in academic stress (M - 23.74 vs. 24.47), t(168) - 1.90, p - .059, emotional well-being (M - 19.74 vs. 19.35), t (168) - -0.68, p - .499, or academic achievement scores (M - 69.88 vs. 68.35), t(168) - -0.83, p - .405. These findings suggest that while private school students generally reported more positive perceptions of school environment, stronger resilience skills, better support systems, and higher total psychosocial scores, both groups showed comparable levels of academic stress, emotional well-being, and academic achievement.

Table 5: Significant Post Hoc Comparisons Among Community Groups (Tukey HSD)

Dependent Variable	Group Comparison	Mean Difference (I–J)	p	Interpretation
School Environment	OBC - SC/ST	-1.577	0.01	SC/ST > OBC
Resilience Skills	SC/ST - OBC	1.574	0.018	SC/ST > OBC
Support System	SC/ST - OBC	1.741	0.002	SC/ST > OBC
Total Score	General - OBC	-3.333	0.025	General > OBC
Total Score	OBC - SC/ST	-5.568	0	SC/ST > OBC

One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences among community groups on the study variables. Significant differences were found for School Environment [F(2, 167) - 4.461, p - .013], Resilience Skills [F(2, 167) - 4.255, p - .016], Support System [F(2, 167) - 6.086, p - .003], and Total Score [F(2, 167) - 8.009, p < .001]. No significant differences were observed for Academic Achievement Score, Emotional Well-being, or Academic Stress (all p > .05). Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD revealed that SC/ST students reported significantly more positive School Environment than OBC students (mean difference - -1.577, p - .010). SC/ST students also scored higher on Resilience Skills (mean difference - -1.574, p - .018) and Support System (mean difference - 1.741, p - .002) compared to OBC students. For the Total Score, General students scored higher than OBC students (mean difference - -3.333, p - .025), and SC/ST students scored higher than OBC students (mean difference - -5.568, p < .001). These findings suggest that SC/ST students perceive greater school support, possess higher resilience skills, and report stronger overall psychosocial well-being compared to OBC students, whereas General students' scores are intermediate.

Table 6: Multivariate Tests (MANOVA)

Effect	Pillai's Trace	F	Df	P	Partial η^2	Significance
Locality	0.028	0.678	6, 141	0.667	0.028	No
Gender	0.069	1.729	6, 141	0.118	0.069	No
Community	0.184	2.4	12, 284	0.006	0.092	Yes
Type of School	0.054	1.34	6, 141	0.243	0.054	No
Locality × Gender × Community × Type of School	0.096	1.221	12, 284	0.041	0.087	Yes

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the combined effects of locality, gender, community, and type of school, along with their interactions, on multiple dependent variables, including School Environment, Academic Stress, Resilience Skills, Emotional Well-being, Support System, Total Score, and Academic Achievement. The results indicated that community had a significant multivariate effect on the dependent variables (Pillai's Trace - 0.184, F(12, 284) - 2.40, p - .006, η^2 - .092), suggesting that students from different community groups (General, OBC, SC/ST) differ overall in terms of psychosocial and academic outcomes. In contrast, locality, gender, and type of school did not show significant multivariate effects. Among the interaction effects, the four-way interaction of locality × gender × community × type of school was also significant (p - .041, η^2 - .087), indicating that the combined influence of these background factors has a small but meaningful impact on students' outcomes. The other two-way and three-way interactions were not significant. The findings also highlight that community membership is the strongest background factor affecting students' school experience, resilience, support system, and overall psychosocial well-being, while the other demographic variables have limited independent or combined effects.

Table 7: MANOVA and Post Hoc Comparisons of Study Variables by Community (N = 170)

Dependent Variable	F (df)	p	Partial η^2	Significant Post Hoc (Tukey HSD)	Mean Difference (I–J)	p
School Environment	4.461 (2, 167)	0.013	0.051	SC/ST > OBC	-1.58	0.008
Academic Stress	0.493 (2, 167)	0.612	0.006	-	-	-
Resilience Skills	4.255 (2, 167)	0.016	0.048	SC/ST > OBC	-1.57	0.015
Emotional Well-being	0.702 (2, 167)	0.497	0.008	-	-	-
Support System	6.086 (2, 167)	0.003	0.068	SC/ST > OBC	-1.74	0.002
Total Score	8.009 (2, 167)	<.001	0.088	General > OBC; SC/ST > OBC	-3.33; –5.57	.021; <.001
Academic Achievement Score	0.186 (2, 167)	0.831	0.002	-	-	

A MANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of Community on multiple study variables. The analysis revealed significant differences for School Environment [F(2, 167) - 4.461, p - .013, partial η^2 - 0.051], Resilience Skills [F(2, 167) - 4.255, p - .016, partial η^2 - 0.048], Support System [F(2, 167) - 6.086, p - .003, partial η^2 - 0.068], and Total Score [F(2, 167) - 8.009, p < .001, partial η^2 - 0.088]. No significant differences were observed for Academic Stress, Emotional Well-being, or Academic Achievement Score. Post hoc Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that SC/ST students scored significantly higher than OBC students on School Environment, Resilience Skills, and Support System. For the Total Score, both General and SC/ST students scored significantly higher than OBC students. These findings suggest that SC/ST students perceive greater school support, demonstrate higher resilience skills, and report stronger overall psychosocial well-being compared to OBC students, whereas General students' scores are intermediate.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the psychosocial well-being, resilience, and academic outcomes of higher secondary school students, with particular focus on mental health challenges, supportive school environments, and the development of resilience and socio-emotional skills. The findings provide valuable insights into how demographic factors such as gender, community, school type, and locality relate to these outcomes.

Gender Differences

Independent samples t-tests revealed significant gender differences in perceptions of school environment and overall psychosocial scores, with male students reporting higher levels of perceived school support and slightly higher resilience skills than female students. These findings are consistent with prior research suggesting that male adolescents often perceive higher institutional support and may employ different coping strategies than female adolescents (Exner et al., 2021; Stevens, 2021). However, no significant gender differences were found in academic achievement, academic stress, or emotional well-being. This suggests that while gender may influence perceptions of school environment and psychosocial experiences, it does not necessarily translate into differences in academic performance.

School Type Differences

Significant differences were observed between government and private school students. Private school students reported more positive perceptions of the school environment, higher resilience skills, and stronger support systems compared to their government school peers. These results support existing literature highlighting the role of private school resources, structured programs, and extracurricular opportunities in enhancing student well-being and resilience (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2021). Interestingly, academic achievement did not differ significantly between school types, suggesting that psychosocial support and perceived environment, while crucial for mental health and resilience, may not directly impact measurable academic performance in this sample.

Community Differences

The MANOVA and post hoc analyses indicated that SC/ST students reported significantly higher scores on school environment, resilience skills, and support systems compared to OBC students, with General students' scores generally falling in between these groups. This pattern can be understood in the context of both population distribution and policy interventions: SC/ST students constitute a larger proportion of the school-going population in the study area, and various government programs such as scholarships, remedial education, mentorship, and school-based welfare initiatives are explicitly designed to enhance equity and inclusion for these communities. These structural supports likely contribute to SC/ST students' more positive perceptions of the school environment and higher psychosocial well-being. This result is contradictory to the previous findings of Das (2019). The findings also highlight the role of community-specific cultural practices and family support networks in reinforcing resilience and socio-emotional skills. The comparatively lower scores among OBC students may reflect less access to targeted support programs, indicating a potential gap in equity-focused interventions for communities not prioritized by such policies. The intermediate scores of General students further illustrate the nuanced interplay between policy reach, community characteristics, and school support structures. The findings underscore the critical function of schools as mediators of equity and inclusion. By implementing policies that provide targeted support to marginalized communities, schools can create environments that foster resilience, socio-emotional development, and a sense of belonging. The study emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive and policy-aligned interventions that leverage both school resources and community strengths to promote holistic development among students across diverse social groups. Significant differences in cumulative psychosocial scores were observed across gender, school type, and community, suggesting that the combined effect of resilience skills, perceived support, and school environment varies systematically with these demographic factors. SC/ST and private school students generally scored higher, reflecting the interplay between supportive environments and personal coping capacities. These results highlight the importance of promoting comprehensive psychosocial programs in schools that target multiple dimensions of student well-being simultaneously.

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine the mental health challenges of adolescents, with particular attention to the role of schools in fostering resilience, socio-emotional skills, and supportive environments. The findings highlight that community background significantly influences students' perceptions of their school environment, resilience skills, and support systems, with SC/ST students reporting more positive outcomes than OBC students, while General students generally occupied an intermediate position. These differences may be attributed to targeted government initiatives and structural supports aimed at promoting equity and inclusion for marginalized groups. At the same time, the comparison between government and private schools did not yield significant differences in most domains, suggesting that cultural and community contexts more strongly shape supportive practices in schools than by institutional type. Importantly, the study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions in school settings to strengthen resilience and socio-emotional well-being among all students. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that schools are not only spaces for academic learning but also critical platforms for psychosocial development. Strengthening school-based support systems, fostering inclusive environments, and providing a space to tailor programs to address community-specific needs. Which can play a pivotal role in promoting adolescent mental health and ensuring equitable educational opportunities.

Implications

The findings have several practical implications. Schools, especially government institutions, may need to strengthen support systems and resilience-building programs. Tailored interventions for students could help bridge gaps in perceived support and resilience. Gender-sensitive approaches that address the unique experiences of male and female students may further enhance student well-being. Policymakers should consider these findings when designing programs aimed at improving adolescent mental health, resilience, and socio-emotional skills.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. The sample was restricted to higher secondary students in Jharkhand, limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions. Self-report measures may be influenced by social desirability bias. Finally, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences.

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