



Mental Health: A Luxury or a Necessity?

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Introduction

School, a place meant to provide the necessary education for teenagers, has slowly started to shift from maximizing a student's human potential to a place where students' mental health begins to derail. Mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and burnout are becoming increasingly common as teens are being confronted with large and unmanageable workloads. As of now, the topic surrounding the relation of negative mental health effects and schooling has become unavoidable, and it's time to ask: Are schools taking the necessary precautions to care for students' mental health?

Understanding Teenage Mental Health

Mental health is defined as the state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with life's stresses, realize their full potential, acquire skills, work efficiently, and contribute to their communities (World Health Organization, 2022). During adolescence, students are often faced with increased exposure to mental health challenges. Despite this knowledge, teenage mental health is often overlooked, coined as just "going through a phase," or even "a part of growing up," even if the situation runs deeper than that. Ignorance of how to properly address mental health issues can lead to inefficiency in a student's ability to retain knowledge, benefit from schooling, create healthy social relationships, and ultimately decrease a student's quality of life (Compass Health Center, 2024). Each year, about one in six adolescents aged 10-19 experiences some type of mental health disorder, most commonly being diagnosed with ADHD, anxiety, and depression (World Health Organization, 2024). Teenagers struggling with mental health disorders can develop a range of unhealthy habits that affect them physically, emotionally, and, of course, mentally, but what doesn't help is the stigmatization

surrounding mental health and how it's preventing teens from getting the help they need. There are a dozen factors that can contribute to a teenager's declining mental health, but the one major factor that sticks out is school. The constant academic pressures and expectations to perform your best; it's only natural that issues such as depression, anxiety, stress, and, not to mention, physical conditions like fatigue, will follow (Vallejo, 2023). Yet many of these problems are swept under the rug, often at the expense of a person's emotional well-being.

The Roles Schools Take in Addressing Mental Health

Although schools do not intentionally mean to cause this stress, they are often unprepared when it comes to handling mental health crises. In the United States alone, only 48% of public schools reported being effective in providing school-based mental health services, while the other 52% of schools struggled to properly provide mental health resources to students in need. Now this isn't because the school didn't want to provide these resources, but rather because the 52% lacked sufficient funding, a shortage of licensed mental health professionals as part of the faculty, and an overall lack of mental health training among staff (Brown & Carrington, 2025). This means that students, a part of that 52% don't have direct access to specialized mental health care, and are at a higher risk of bullying online and in person. This mistreatment of students is unfortunately the outcome of what happens when mental health is stigmatized. The term "mental illness" itself often conveys a negative connotation, because having a "mental illness" is viewed as being inferior or "sick." Unfortunately, in some cases, students even begin to stigmatize themselves (Kung, 2025).

The Impact of the Stigma

This stigma surrounding mental health ultimately creates inequalities in both the quality and quantity of education that students receive (Smith & Applegate, 2018). And while national resources like the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, SAMHSA, and NAMI exist and are undoubtedly important, they do not replace the accessibility that school-based mental health resources provide. Many students need consistent therapy or counseling services that require referrals, waitlists, or parental involvement, which many students may not feel one-hundred percent comfortable seeking out. So the main question remains: Are schools taking the necessary precautions to care for students' mental health?

Actionable Reform

Many of the factors mentioned above, the pressure to perform well, the lack of resources, and the stigma surrounding mental disorders, all seem to point to "yes", but to change that answer, schools need more than

awareness campaigns; they need applied reform. Mental health care should not be a luxury but rather a necessity in schools all across the country. Funding for licensed mental health professionals, mental health training, policy change, and above all, a shift in mindset that allows schools to properly approach the topic of mental health in a way that values mental health just as much as academic achievement, are crucial elements to fostering a healthy community within schools.

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