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WHO: World Health Organisation

# Research Report

Topic 3: Addressing the increase in mental disorders in children.



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## Introduction

Mental health plays a crucial role in children's well-being, influencing children's development. Recent data indicates a concerning rise in mental health disorders among children and adolescents globally. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that approximately 15% of adolescents aged 10–19 experience a mental disorder, with conditions such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders being most common.

This report looks at why mental health problems in children are increasing. The purpose is to find solutions worldwide to improve the situation. By focusing on prevention, early support, and fair access to care, we can create a better and healthier future for kids everywhere.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Mental Health:** According to the World Health Organisation, it is a state of well-being in which an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community. Mental health is a basic human right. Childhood mental disorders are conditions that are being diagnosed under the age of 18 (it shapes the development into adulthood).

**Prevalence:** According to the Cambridge dictionary it is the fact that something is very common or happens often. It can be defined in this context as the proportion of a population found to have a particular condition at a specific time.

**Protective Factors:** According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) it can be defined as the conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that mitigate or eliminate risk, thereby increasing the health and well-being of children and families.

**Risk Factors:** According to SAMHSA as well, it is the characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.

## Background Information

### Early 1900s – Beginnings of Psychological Studies in Children

Early studies in the 20th century by pioneers like Sigmund Freud and John Watson laid the foundation for understanding the psychological development of children.

### 1990s – Global Awareness and Increased Advocacy

WHO first officially recognized childhood mental health problems as a public health concern, marking a significant step in global efforts to address this issue. *Source: World Health Organisation (WHO), "Mental Health in Childhood: Challenges and Needs," 1995*

## **2012 – WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020**

WHO launched the Global Mental Health Action Plan, aiming to provide support and resources for children's mental health. *Source: World Health Organisation, "Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020," 2012*

## **2017 – Increased Attention to Digital Media and Mental Health**

Studies began to link excessive screen time and social media exposure to increases in mental health issues among children, particularly anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem. This became a major area of focus for mental health organisations worldwide. *Source: American Psychological Association, "The Impact of Social Media on Children's Mental Health," 2017*

## **2020 – The COVID-19 Pandemic and Mental Health Crisis**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought mental health challenges to the forefront, with widespread disruptions to children's education, family life, and social interactions.

## **Major countries and organisations involved**

**World Health Organisation (WHO):** created in 1947 by the United Nations, the WHO is a key organisation among the world peace that led initiatives to address mental health disorders.

**United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF):** created in 1946 by the United Nations, UNICEF plays a significant role in the protection of children by founding solutions to improve their integration, education and development.

**European Union (EU):** created in 1992, the EU supports collaborative research among the countries and funds programs aimed at preventing and treating mental health disorders in young people.

**United States of America (US):** The US has seen a significant rise in mental health issues among children and adolescents, particularly conditions like anxiety, depression, and ADHD. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 5 children in the US have a mental health disorder, with suicide being one of the leading causes of death among adolescents.

**United Kingdom (UK):** According to NHS Digital report in 2021, the UK has seen a sharp rise in mental health problems among children, with around 1 in 10 children experiencing mental health disorders. Anxiety and depression are particularly common.

**Japan:** According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), Japan has been making significant strides in child mental health, focusing on preventing school-related stress and social anxiety. The Japanese government and various non-profit organisations have worked on integrating mental health education into schools and addressing rising rates of youth suicide.

**India:** India has one of the highest rates of child mental health problems in the world, according to a study made in 2020 by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), up to 12% of children experience mental health disorders.

## Relevant UN Resolutions

### *UN General Assembly Resolution 46/119 (1991)*

The Right to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Mental and Physical Health.

*"The General Assembly... adopts the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care."* ([UN Documents](#))

### *UN General Assembly Resolution 66/254 (2012)*

Mental Health and Well-Being: A Call for Action

*"The General Assembly... decides to establish an open-ended intergovernmental process... to conduct open, transparent and inclusive negotiations on how to strengthen and enhance the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system."* ([Bibliothèque numérique des Nations Unies](#))

### *UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being (2015)

*"Tackling mental health should not only be approached as a health issue. Promoting good mental health is also inextricably linked with respect for human rights and sustainable development."* ([Organisation des Nations Unies](#))

## Previous attempts to Solve the Issue

### **World Health Organisation (WHO) Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020**

It provided technical support to nations, promoting policies that address child mental health. WHO-supported projects in Sri Lanka and India helped integrate mental health services into schools and primary health care settings, benefiting children at risk.

### **UNICEF's "A World Fit for Children" (2002)**

It improved the integration of mental health services in education systems and increased international collaboration to improve mental health support for children. UNICEF's collaboration with the Philippines helped establish psychological support services in schools, particularly for children affected by violence and natural disasters.

### **Japan's "School Mental Health Project" (2016)**

The project integrated mental health education into school programmes and trained teachers

to recognize mental health issues in students. This initiative contributed to lowering the discrimination around mental health in schools. Tokyo schools implemented mental health counselling services, and teachers were trained to identify early signs of mental distress in students.

### **United Kingdom's "Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper" (2017)**

The Green Paper led to the establishment of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools. Pilot programs for MHSTs were launched in areas like Manchester and Bristol, improving access to mental health professionals in schools and providing early support for students.

### **Possible Solutions**

**Enhance Access to Mental Health Services:** Increase the availability of child and adolescent mental health services, particularly in underserved areas.

**Integrate Mental Health into Education Systems:** Implement mental health education and support services within schools to promote early identification and intervention.

**Support Families:** Provide resources and support to families to create nurturing environments that promote children's mental well-being.

**Regulate Digital Media Use:** Develop guidelines to manage children's exposure to digital media and address cyberbullying.

**Promote Research and Data Collection:** Encourage research to better understand the prevalence and causes of mental disorders in children, facilitating evidence-based interventions.

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