



Social adjustment and mental health among secondary level students in terms of gender and locality in Cooch Behar District, West Bengal

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Abstract

The primary aim of the study is to examine the social adjustment and mental health among secondary level students in the Coochbehar district of West Bengal, India. A descriptive survey research design was used for conducting the present study. For the purpose of the study, a total of eight high schools, including four from urban areas and four from rural areas, were conveniently selected. And, 160 10th standards (80 boys and 80 girls) were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using Mental Health scale developed by Sushma Talesara and Akhtar Bano and the Adjustment Inventory developed by A.K.P. Sinha & R.P. Singh (2005). The researchers applied statistical methods such as Z-score, Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), t test and Pearson's Product-moment correlation for the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The findings revealed that the majority of students, regardless of gender or locality, exhibited "average" levels of both social adjustment and mental health. A smaller proportion of students fell into the "extremely unsatisfactory" or "extremely high" social adjustment categories, while mental health outcomes included a notable percentage in the "poor" and "very poor" ranges, with only a few in the "very good" category. No significant differences in social adjustment were observed based on gender and locality. However, while mental health did not vary significantly by gender, urban students demonstrated better mental health outcomes compared to rural students. A weak positive correlation was found between mental health and social adjustment, suggesting a modest relationship between these two variables. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, particularly for rural students, to improve mental health and social adjustment outcomes.

Keywords: Adjustment, social adjustment, mental health, secondary level students

Introduction

Adjustment is a common term people use in everyday life. For instance, when traveling on a bus or train, we often hear or say things like, "We need to adjust to make space for others." Similarly, when a guest stays with us for a few days, we make arrangements to accommodate them comfortably. In simple terms, adjustment refers to adapting to situations or making changes to fit new circumstances. According to Saffer (1961) "Adjustment is the process by which a living organism maintains a balance between its need and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs." The process of adjustment starts at birth and continues throughout life. Human beings possess an extraordinary ability to adapt to new situations, not just in terms of physical demands but also in navigating social pressures and complexities. Adjustment plays a vital role in personal development of every individual. How well an individual adapts to their physical and social surroundings affects their overall well-being. Since our environments are constantly changing, it's important for people to adjust and adapt accordingly. In this way, adjustment involves maintaining a harmonious relationship between individuals and their surroundings, including the people around them (Crow & Crow, 1956)^[3].

In the Indian Education System, secondary school education is a key stage for adolescents, typically covering Grades IX to XII. According to World Health Organization (WHO) the individuals who are in the age between 10 to 19 years are adolescents. This phase is often described as a time of "storm and stress" (Arnett, 1999)^[2] and is crucial for preparing young people for adulthood (Valverde *et al.*, 2012)^[15]. During this phase of life, students undergo

significant physical, emotional, and social changes. According to the American Psychological Association (2002)^[1], the changes adolescents experience can be grouped into five main areas: physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral. Among these, social challenges/adjustment is more common during adolescence than at any other stage of life (Tremppala & Malmberg, 2002)^[14]. Social adjustment is a critical aspect for secondary-level students. It's an important part of human life, as it helps individuals adapt to and interact effectively in various social situations. Social adjustment refers to the ability of students to adapt to various social environments, including family, school, and peer groups. It encompasses the process of developing appropriate social behaviors, forming positive relationships, and dealing with social expectations and pressures. Social adjustment can be defined as a psychological process. It frequently involves coping with new standards and values. According to Sofyan Willis (2012), Social adjustment of students at school is adjustment to teachers, subjects, peers, and the school environment. A teacher's friendly and supportive attitude helps students feel comfortable and understand the teacher better, making adjustment easier. Additionally, positive relationships with peers are essential for students' social development, as they foster a sense of belonging and connection within the school environment.

According to Havighurs (1952), schools have important roles and responsibilities in helping students achieve their developmental tasks. At the secondary level, students experience significant transitions that influence their emotional, social, and educational adjustment. Due to rapid physical changes in appearance and heightened sensitivity

during this stage, some students may find it difficult to interact comfortably with their peers. This indicates that certain students continue to experience challenges in making proper social adjustments within the school environment. Hence, it becomes essential for secondary schools to create a positive and supportive climate that promotes healthy adjustment and overall mental well-being among students. Mental health, on the other hand, includes the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of individuals. It affects how students think, feel, and behave in daily life. A person's social, emotional, and psychological well-being are all associated with mental health. It is the mental condition of an individual who is exhibiting adequate levels of passion and behavioral adjustment. Mental wellness refers to individuals achieving their full potential, managing daily life pressures effectively, working efficiently, productively and contributing positively to their communities (Walker, J. 2005) [16]. Poor mental health during adolescence can lead to issues like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, all of which can further hinder the process of social adjustment. Adolescence is the most critical transition phase in one's life span which is characterized by tremendous growth and potential. At this stage, established behavior patterns of the adolescents have long lasting effects on the mental health and well being that may be positive or negative. At the global level, it is estimated that approx. 20% of youth experiences mental health problems each year (Kessler 2005) [6]. Adolescents bears a greatest risk of mental-health conditions during their transition stage i.e. from Childhood to Adulthood (Kessler & others, 2005) [6].

Review of Literature

Saravanan & Tamizharasi (2024) tried to find out social adjustment among higher secondary adolescent students. The study found that most adolescents (62%) showed a high level of social adjustment, while 20% showed an above-average level. A smaller number (8%) had either average or extremely high levels. The place of living, education and occupational level of mother got associated with the level of social adjustment.

D'souza and Tripati (2022) [4] investigated the mental health and social adjustment of middle school girls from urban and rural areas. The findings revealed a significant disparity in adjustment levels between middle school girls in rural and urban settings. Furthermore, the study identified noteworthy correlation between the mental health and social adjustment of middle school girls in both rural and urban schools.

Talluri (2022) [13] investigate Social Adjustment among Secondary School Students. The researcher did not find any significance difference in social adjustment of students with respect to gender and locality of students.

Kumar (2021) [7] carried out a study to investigate Mental Health and Adjustment Problems of Higher Secondary Students

Shinde (2018) [11] conducted a research study on Mental Health and Adjustment among College Students. The study found no significant gender differences in social and emotional adjustment. It also found no significant gender differences in mental health. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that adjustment was not significantly associated with mental health.

Shokeen (2017) investigated to explore the relationship between mental health and social adjustment of adolescents. The findings revealed a positive significant relationship

between the Mental Health and Social Adjustment in the adolescents.

Sankar, Wani & Indumathi (2017) [9] investigated the level of mental health among adolescent boys and girls. They found that boys had higher levels of mental health than girls and observed a significant difference between the mental health scores of the two groups

Murgan (2017) studied to examine the correlation between the mental health and adjustment levels of students in higher secondary school. The findings revealed a significant relationship between the mental health and adjustment of higher secondary school students. However, the study found significant difference in the mental health of male and female higher secondary school students

Significance of The Study

The study is significant as it explores how gender and locality (urban vs. rural) influence students' social adjustment and mental health. Locality often correlates with socioeconomic conditions, which can influence both social adjustment and mental health. Students from rural areas may face different challenges than those from urban areas, such as access to education, family expectations, and exposure to community resources. This research could bring awareness to how these factors play a role in students' psychological well-being and adjustment to school life.

The findings of this study can be crucial in advocating for the development of targeted mental health programs in schools. Based on the gender and locality differences, recommendations could be made for interventions that address specific social and mental health needs, helping schools offer more effective support systems to students. Additionally, this study will provide valuable insights for other researchers interested in exploring this topic further.

Objectives of the Study

1. To measure the Social Adjustment Levels among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender and Locality
2. To measure the Mental Health Levels among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender and Locality
3. To find out the difference in the Social Adjustment among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender
4. To find out the difference in the Social adjustment among Secondary Level Students in terms of Locality
5. To find out the difference in the Mental Health among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender
6. To find out the difference in the mental Health among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender
7. To find out the relationship between Mental Health and social Adjustment among Secondary Level students

Hypotheses of the study

All the hypotheses are formulated in null form based on objectives 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

1. There is no significant difference in Social Adjustment of Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender
2. There is no significant difference in Social adjustment of Secondary Level Students in terms of Locality
3. There is no significant difference in Mental Health of Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender
4. There is no significant difference in Mental Health of Secondary Level Students in terms of Locality

- There is no significant relationship between Mental Health and Social Adjustment of Secondary Level students

Delimitation of the study

- The study is delimited to the in the Coochbehar district of West Bengal
- The study is delimited to Secondary Level School Students of rural and urban areas of Coochbehar district
- The study is restricted to government aided Bengali medium secondary schools
- The study is delimited to gender and locality

Methodology

Method: The Descriptive Survey Method was used to carry out the present study.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique of the Study: In the present study, all students studying in class X within the Cooch Behar district under the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) were considered as the population. For sample selection, the researchers used a combination of convenience and simple random sampling technique to select eight (8) schools, comprising four urban and four rural high schools as well as 160 secondary level school students. Initially, convenience sampling technique was used to identify and choose the schools. Subsequently, the researchers selected 160 students (80boys and 80 girls) using simple random sampling technique. From each school, 10 boys and 10 girls were selected for the study.

Tools of The Study

The following tools were used to carry out the present study

- Adjustment Inventory:** The Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS), developed by A.K.P. Sinha and R.P.Singh (2005) was used to assess the adjustment of secondary level students in two areas namely Emotional and Educational Adjustment. The inventory comprised 60 items for three areas of adjustment, namely Emotional, Social and Educational. The reliability of the inventory was determined by split-half method (0.93), test-retest method (0.94), and K-R formula-20 (0.93). For the present study, only the social adjustment dimension of the tool was used to collect data from students.

- Mental Health Scale:** Mental Health scale by Sushma Talesara and Akhtar Bano was used for the present study. This scale consist 54items. The scale is categorized into five dimensions: (i) Schools related causes (ii) Home related causes, (iii) Peer group related causes. The reliability value of the scale is 0.72

Statistical Techniques

The researchers applied statistical methods such as Z score Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), t test and Pearson’s Product-moment correlation for the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the first objective

- Objective 1:** To measure the Social Adjustment levels among Secondary Level students in terms of Gender and Locality

Table 1: Distribution of Social Adjustment Levels among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender and Locality

Social Adjustment Levels	Z Score Range	Gender				Locality			
		Boys		Girls		Urban		Rural	
		N (80)	%	N (80)	%	N (80)	%	N (80)	%
Extremely Unsatisfactory	+2.01 & above	2	2.5	5	6.25	4	5	3	3.75
Unsatisfactory	+1.26 to +2.00	4	5	6	7.5	5	6.25	5	6.25
Below Average	+0.51 to +1.25	13	16.25	11	13.75	12	15	12	15
Average	-0.50 to +0.50	39	48.75	41	51.25	38	47.5	42	52.5
Above Average	-0.1.25 to -0.51	13	16.25	12	15	13	16.25	12	15
High	-2.00 to -1.26	6	7.25	4	5	6	7.5	4	5
Extremely High	-2.01 & below	3	3.75	1	1.25	2	2.5	2	2.5

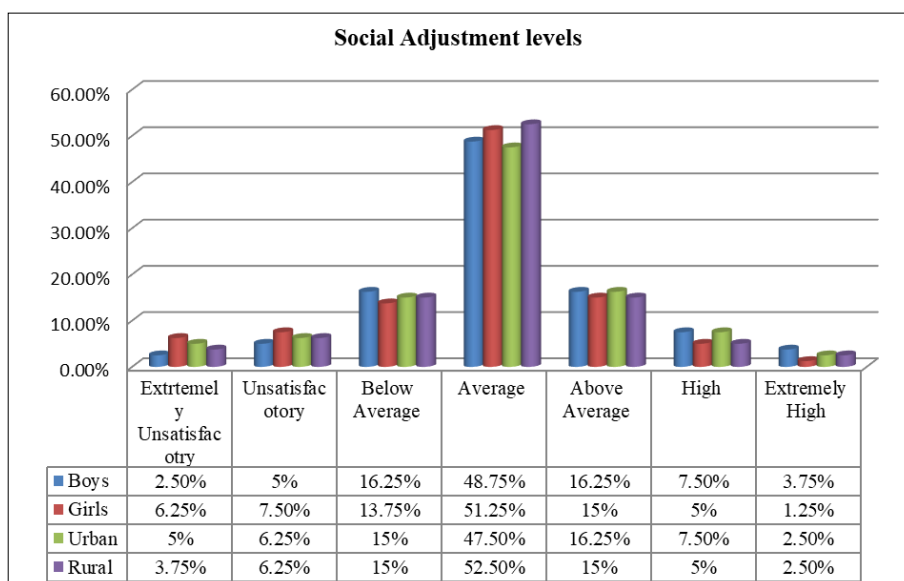


Fig 1: Graphical Presentation of Social Adjustment Levels of Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender and Locality

Interpretation: Table 1 and Figure 1 display the levels of social adjustment among secondary-level students, categorized by gender (boys and girls) and locality (urban and rural), using Z-scores to classify social adjustment into seven levels. The majority of students, across both gender and locality, fall into the "Average" social adjustment category (boys: 48.75%, girls: 51.25%, urban: 47.5%, rural: 52.5%). Smaller proportions of students exhibit "Extremely Unsatisfactory" (boys: 2.5%, girls: 6.25%, urban: 5%, rural: 3.75%) or "Extremely High" social adjustment (boys: 3.75%, girls: 1.25%, urban: 2.5%, rural: 2.5%). The distribution indicates that social adjustment levels are

relatively consistent across gender and locality, with most students demonstrating average adjustment and smaller percentages showing either significant challenges or exceptional adjustment. This suggests that social adjustment is generally stable among students, with no major disparities based on gender or locality.

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the second objective

- **Objective 2:** To measure the Mental Health Levels among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender and Locality

Table 2: Distribution of Mental Health Levels among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender and Locality

Mental Health Levels	Z Scores Range	Gender				Locality			
		Boys		Girls		Urban		Rural	
		N (80)	%	N (80)	%	N (80)	%	N (80)	%
Extremely Good	+2.01 & above	3	3.75	4	5	4	5	3	3.75
Very Good	+1.26 to +2.00	5	6.25	7	8.75	6	7.25	6	7.25
Good	+0.51 to +1.25	13	16.25	11	13.75	13	16.25	11	13.75
Moderate	-0.50 to +0.50	37	46.25	34	42.5	36	45	35	43.75
Poor	-0.1.25 to -0.51	10	12.25	14	17.5	12	15	12	15
Very Poor	-2.00 to -1.26	7	8.75	5	6.25	3	3.75	8	10
Extremely Poor	-2.01 & below	5	6.25	6	7.25	6	7.25	5	6.25

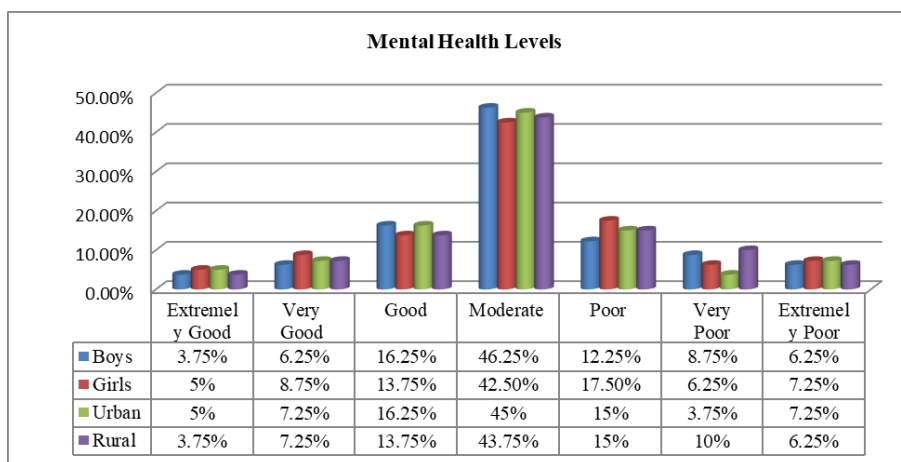


Fig 2: Graphical Presentation of Mental Health Levels among Secondary Level Students in terms of their Gender and Locality

Interpretation: Table 2 and Figure 2 present the levels of mental health among secondary-level students, categorized by gender (boys and girls) and locality (urban and rural), using Z-scores to classify mental health into seven levels. The majority of students, across both gender and locality, fall into the "Moderate" mental health category (boys: 46.25%, girls: 42.5%, urban: 45%, rural: 43.75%). A smaller proportion of students exhibit "Extremely Good" mental health (boys: 3.75%, girls: 5%, urban: 5%, rural: 3.75%), while a notable percentage fall into the "Poor" (boys: 12.25%, girls: 17.5%, urban: 15%, rural: 15%) and

"Very Poor" categories (boys: 8.75%, girls: 6.25%, urban: 3.75%, rural: 10%). Overall, the distribution suggests that mental health levels are relatively similar across gender and locality, with most students experiencing moderate level of mental health and a smaller but significant proportion facing challenges in the lower mental health categories.

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the first hypothesis

- **H₀₁:** To find out the difference in Social Adjustment among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender

Table 3: Result of 't' test in the Social Adjustment among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender

Gender	N	M	SD	DF	Observed t- Value	Critical t- Value	Remarks at 0.05 Level
Boys	80	9.18	3.29	158	1.16	1.97	Not Significant
Girls	80	8.62	2.98				

Interpretation: Table 3 examines the difference in social adjustment between boys and girls secondary-level students, with 80 boys and 80 girls participating. Boys had a slightly higher mean social adjustment score (M = 9.18, SD = 3.29)

compared to girls (M = 8.62, SD = 2.98). However, the observed t-value of 1.16 is less than the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 significance level (with 158 degrees of freedom), indicating that the difference in social adjustment

ability between boys and girls is not statistically significant. This suggests that gender does not significantly influence social adjustment levels among secondary-level students in this study.

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the second hypothesis

H02: There is no significant difference in Social adjustment among Secondary Level Students in terms of Locality

Table 4: Result of ‘t’ test in the Social Adjustment among Secondary Level Students in terms of Locality

Locality	N	M	SD	DF	Observed t- value	Critical t- value	Remarks at 0.05 Level
Urban	80	8.65	3.38	158	0.27	1.97	Not Significant
Rural	80	8.51	3.31				

Interpretation: Table 4 compares the social adjustment among secondary-level students from urban and rural localities, with 80 students in each group. Urban students had a slightly higher mean social adjustment score (M = 8.65, SD = 3.38) compared to rural students (M = 8.51, SD = 3.31). The observed t-value of 0.27 is less than the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 significance level (df = 158), indicating that the difference in social adjustment between urban and rural students is not statistically significant. This

suggests that locality does not significantly influence social adjustment levels among secondary-level students in this study.

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the third hypothesis

H03: There is no significant difference in Mental Health among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender

Table 5: Result of ‘t’ test in the Mental health among Secondary Level Students in terms of Gender

Gender	N	M	SD	DF	Observed t- value	Critical t- value	Remarks at 0.05 Level
Boys	80	166.53	23.56	158	1.21	1.97	Not Significant
Girls	80	162.25	21.12				

Interpretation: Table 5 compares the mental health of secondary-level students based on gender, with 80 boys and 80 girls participating. Boys had a slightly higher mean mental health score (M = 166.53, SD = 23.56) compared to girls (M = 162.25, SD = 21.12). However, the observed t-value of 1.21 is less than the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 significance level (df = 158), indicating that the difference in mental health between boys and girls is not statistically

significant. This suggests that gender does not significantly influence mental health outcomes among secondary-level students in this study.

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the fourth hypothesis

H04: There is no significant difference in Mental health among secondary Level students in terms of Locality

Table 6: Result of ‘t’ test in the Mental health among Secondary Level Students in terms of Locality

Locality	N	M	SD	DF	Observed t- Value	Critical t- Value	Remarks at 0.05 Level
Urban	80	169.76	19.81	158	3.12	1.97	Significant
Rural	80	159.02	23.66				

Interpretation: Table 6 examines the difference in mental health between secondary-level students from urban and rural localities, with 80 students in each group. Urban students had a higher mean mental health score (M = 169.76, SD = 19.81) compared to rural students (M = 159.02, SD = 23.66). The observed t-value is 3.12 which exceeds the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 significance level (df = 158), indicates a statistically significant difference in mental health between the two groups. This suggests that

locality significantly impacts mental health, with urban students exhibiting better mental health outcomes than their rural counterparts.

Analysis and Interpretation of the data related to the fifth hypothesis

H05: There is no significant relationship between Mental Health and Social adjustment among Secondary Level Students

Table 7: Result of Correlation between Mental Health and Social Adjustment of Secondary Level Students

N	ΣX	ΣY	ΣX^2	ΣY^2	ΣXY	r (correlation of coefficient)	P -Value	Remarks at 0.05 Level
160	1383	26431	13577	4435551	230270	0.170387131	0.147558	Not Significant

Interpretation: Table 7 presents a correlation analysis between Mental Health and Social Adjustment among 160 secondary-level students, revealing a weak positive correlation (r = 0.17), indicating that as Mental Health improves, Social Adjustment tends to improve slightly. However, the p-value of 0.147558, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level, suggests that this correlation is not statistically significant, meaning the observed relationship

could be due to random chance rather than a meaningful association.

Major Findings of The Study

- In terms of social adjustment level, the majority of students, across both gender and locality, were found "Average social adjustment" A Smaller proportion of students were found "Extremely Unsatisfactory level" and "Extremely High level" social adjustment.

- Similar to social adjustment, the mental health of most students, both in terms of gender and locality, was found to be “average”. A small number of students were found to have “very good” mental health, while a significant percentage were in the “poor” and “very poor” categories.
- The researcher did not find any significant difference in the social adjustment of students based on gender and locality.
- The researcher also did not find any significant difference in mental health based on gender. However, a significant difference was observed in mental health among urban and rural students. Urban students showed better mental health outcomes than their rural counterparts.
- The investigators found weak positive correlation between mental health and social adjustment among students.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight that the majority of students, irrespective of gender or locality, exhibit "average" levels of social adjustment and mental health. This suggests that most students are coping reasonably well with their social environments and psychological well-being. However, the presence of smaller proportions in the "extremely unsatisfactory" and "extremely high" social adjustment categories, as well as a significant percentage in the "poor" and "very poor" mental health categories, indicates that a notable subset of students faces challenges. These students may require targeted support to improve their social and psychological outcomes.

The absence of significant differences in social adjustment based on gender and locality implies that factors influencing social adjustment are likely universal, such as family support, peer relationships, or school environment, rather than being tied to specific demographic variables. On the other hand, the significant difference in mental health between urban and rural students, with urban students faring better, points to potential disparities in access to resources, such as mental health services, educational facilities, or socio-economic opportunities. Rural students may face unique stressors, such as limited access to mental health care, social isolation, or economic hardships, which could contribute to poorer mental health outcomes.

The weak positive correlation between mental health and social adjustment suggests that while better mental health may contribute to improved social adjustment, the relationship is not strong. This indicates that other factors, such as personality traits, coping mechanisms, or external support systems, may also play a significant role in shaping social adjustment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that while most students demonstrate average levels of social adjustment and mental health, a significant minority struggles with poor mental health and social adjustment challenges. The lack of gender-based differences in both areas underscores the need for inclusive interventions. However, the disparity between urban and rural students' mental health highlights the urgent need for targeted support in rural areas, such as improved access to mental health services and community-based programs. The weak correlation between mental health and social adjustment suggests that

interventions should address both psychological well-being and social skills development holistically. Future research could explore additional factors influencing these outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted interventions to support vulnerable student populations. Overall, addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering healthier, more resilient student communities.

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