

Strengthening Minds to Strengthen Society: Mental Health Interventions for Crime Prevention

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Abstract: *This paper explores the concept of Mental Health; it further explores the significance of Mental Health. It highlights the relationship between mental health and criminal behaviour, arguing that strengthening mental health can break cycles of trauma and can lead to build a safer society. It explores the role of educators, parents in strengthening mental health of individuals. No one is born a criminal; it develops through company, incidents, or situations. However, training the mind to think in a constructive rather than a destructive way can help reduce such cases. It explains how timely access to mental health support, can reduce the chances of them getting involved in crimes. The study also analyses the stigma associated with mental illness that may be a reason that leads to increase in crimes. Connecting these insights with the holistic vision of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the paper also shows how its emphasis on socio-emotional learning, mental well-being, and value-based education, resilience building and provides a framework for early intervention, stigma reduction, and prevention of antisocial tendencies.*

Keywords: Mental Health, National Education Policy 2020, Value Based Education, Resilience Building, Criminal Behaviour.

1. Introduction

Every country's future depends on its youth- its children. If they are shaped properly with the right knowledge, attitudes, and skills, the nation becomes stronger. According to the NCRB, Maharashtra's crime rate in 2023 was higher than the national average, ranking ninth among Indian states. This indeed is an alarming situation.

Youth often get involved in crime. There are many factors involved that leads to a development of criminal mind- set, like mental health issues, disassociation with family abuse at home, poverty, lack of resources, exposure to violence. Lack of support from family and friends, guidance, and positive role models, leading them to seek short-term gains or protection through illegal means.

It is very important that we support the youth by shaping them with right knowledge, skills like resilience and positive attitude to deal in every adverse situation. Just like, how our physical health needs our attention even our mental health demands our attention. We remember the phrase A sound mind in a sound body. Current data that indicates increase in number of youths involved in crime signifies the importance of mental health in education system.

Objectives of the Paper

- 1) To explain the concept and importance of mental health.
- 2) To analyse the link between mental health and criminal behaviour.
- 3) To understand the role of parents and educators in shaping positive mental health.
- 4) To highlight how NEP 2020 supports mental well-being.

2. Literature View

Concept of Mental Health

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being and influences how they think, feel, behave, and handle stress and relationships. In children and adolescents, good mental health supports self-control, empathy, problem-solving, resilience, and the ability to follow rules, which are all protective factors against delinquency and crime. Poor mental health can appear as irritability, aggression, withdrawal, substance use, or risk-taking, which, if ignored, may push a young person toward conflicts with peers, school authorities, and finally the law. Therefore, strengthening mental health is not only a medical or psychological concern but also a social and legal necessity for building safer communities.

Relationship between mental health and criminal behaviour

Research in criminal psychology shows that many offenders have a history of trauma, neglect, family conflict, or mental-health problems that were never addressed in time.

Conditions such as conduct problems, substance-use disorders, depression, and antisocial personality traits can reduce empathy, increase impulsivity, and weaken moral judgment, thereby raising the risk of violent or antisocial acts.

However, mental illness alone does not "cause" crime; crime usually emerges from the interaction of psychological vulnerabilities with social factors like poverty, peer pressure, unemployment, and easy access to weapons or substances. This understanding highlights why early identification and treatment of mental-health difficulties in youth are essential for crime prevention.

3. Role of parents and education in shaping mental health-

3.1 Parents and Family

The family is the first environment where a child learns to manage emotions, trust others, and understand right and wrong. Warm, consistent parenting, clear boundaries, and open communication promote secure attachment and psychological stability, while harsh punishment, rejection, and domestic violence increase the risk of anxiety, aggression, and later delinquency. Parental substance abuse, marital conflict, and neglect can leave children feeling unsafe and unsupported, making them more likely to seek acceptance in deviant peer groups or to express frustration through violence. Parent-education programmes and family counselling are therefore key strategies in protecting children's mental health and reducing the risk of conflict with the law.

3.2 Schools and Teachers

Schools play a central role in children's social and emotional development, spending many hours each day observing their behaviour. Teachers are often the first to notice warning signs such as persistent sadness, bullying, aggression, absenteeism, or sudden academic decline and can guide students to counselling or support services. Supportive classroom environments, life-skills education, peer-support programmes, and anti-bullying policies help students learn empathy, cooperation, and peaceful conflict resolution. When schools neglect these aspects and focus only on marks, students under stress may feel isolated or hopeless, increasing their vulnerability to risky or antisocial behaviour.

4. NEP 2020: mental health and value-based Education

4.1 Holistic development and well-being-

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises holistic development, stating that education must build intellectual, emotional, social, and ethical capacities, not only academic achievement. It supports reducing exam stress, promoting sports, arts, yoga, and co-curricular activities, and creating joyful, flexible learning environments that protect students' mental well-being.

4.2 Socio-emotional learning and values-

NEP 2020 highlights value education and socio-emotional learning, including empathy, respect for diversity, non-violence, responsibility, and constitutional values such as justice and equality. These values are expected to be woven across subjects, activities, and school culture so that students internalise prosocial attitudes that reduce aggression, bullying, and antisocial tendencies over time.

4.3 School counselling and support structures

The policy encourages schools to provide access to trained counsellors and mental-health professionals and to strengthen teacher training in child psychology and guidance. It also

calls for safe, inclusive campuses where students can speak about emotional difficulties without fear or stigma, promoting early intervention rather than waiting until behaviour escalates into serious misconduct.

5. Case illustration: Juvenile crime in Nashik city

Recent news reports from Nashik city describe a troubling pattern: while the number of registered juvenile cases has declined compared with the previous year, serious incidents involving minors—including detention for murder, attempted murder, and repeated group disturbances—have increased. Police records cited in the report show over 100 minors involved in serious offences in 2024 and more than 25 juveniles already linked to 15–20 disturbances in the current year, indicating that a smaller group of youth is engaged in increasingly violent behaviour. This situation suggests deeper psychological and social stress among certain adolescents, such as exposure to violence, inadequate parental supervision, academic pressure, unemployment, or substance abuse, combined with poor emotional regulation and weak value orientation. Applying NEP 2020, schools in such areas could respond by strengthening counselling services, running life-skills and value-education programmes, involving parents in awareness sessions, and collaborating with community agencies to provide constructive alternatives for at-risk youth.

6. Discussion

The theoretical review and the Nashik case together indicate that untreated mental-health problems, adverse family environments, and lack of value-based guidance can push a minority of young people toward serious crime, even when overall crime statistics improve. At the same time, evidence from psychology and education shows that early mental-health support, socio-emotional learning, and positive role models can significantly reduce aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

NEP 2020 provides a timely framework for integrating these protective practices into India's school system by prioritising holistic development, counselling, and values, but implementation gaps remain in many regions. Without sufficient counsellors, teacher training, and community involvement, the promise of NEP to address mental health and prevent delinquency cannot be fully realised.

7. Conclusion and Suggestions

Mental health, family environment, schooling, and value-based education are deeply interconnected factors that shape whether young people grow into responsible citizens or drift toward delinquency. The Nashik juvenile crime pattern underlines the urgent need to move beyond punitive responses and invest in early mental-health care, socio-emotional learning, and NEP 2020-aligned value education to break cycles of trauma and offending. Practical steps could include appointing counsellors in all secondary schools, conducting regular mental-health and parenting workshops, integrating life-skills and value-education periods in the timetable,

creating referral networks with local hospitals and NGOs, and using diversion and counselling for first-time juvenile offenders instead of only custodial measures. Such measures, grounded in NEP 2020, can strengthen young people's resilience and ethics, ultimately helping to reduce juvenile crime and promote safer, healthier communities.

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