Rajagiri Journal of Social Development
Volume 17, Issue 2, July-December 2025: 120-142
DOI: 10.5958/2583-7087.2025.00009.9

Research Article

# Relevance of School Social Work and Adolescent Psychological Well-Being: Perspectives of Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry

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This study focuses on Teacher Perspectives in Higher Secondary Schools in Puducherry regarding School Social Work and its influence on Students' Psychological Well-Being. Using Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews and Focused Group Discussions, qualitative data was collected and analysed to identify key themes related to the Psychological Well-Being of students, the role of Teacher, and the support systems within schools. Teacher highlighted the importance of a Nurturing and Positive Environment, emphasising emotional balance, goal orientation, and the cultivation of ethical behaviour. The study underscores the Collaborative Approach needed between Schools and families to address Students' Emotional Disturbances, influenced by Socioeconomic Factors, Family Background, and External Educational Environment Factors. Teachers also stressed the significance of early identification of psychological issues and the provision of diverse activities to foster Holistic Development. The findings advocate for the integration of Value-Based and Moral Education, along with the creation of diverse platforms for Students' Well-Being, such as sports and cultural activities. This study contributes to understanding the multifaceted role of Teacher and Schools in promoting Mental Health and suggests strategies for enhancing the supportive Educational Environment in Puducherry.

**Keywords**
Adolescence, school social work, psychological well-being, teacher perspectives, higher secondary schools

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a formative yet turbulent developmental phase marked by emotional intensity, identity formation, and increased vulnerability to psychological distress (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). The school environment, where adolescents spend a significant portion of their daily lives, plays a critical role in shaping their mental health and psychosocial development. However, escalating academic pressures, social media influence, family instability, and insufficient mental health literacy have compounded the

emotional challenges faced by students in recent years (Cohen et al., 2023; van Loon et al., 2020). Within this context, schools are no longer just educational institutions they are evolving into frontline platforms for early identification, intervention, and support for adolescent psychological well-being.

School social work, as a specialised discipline within educational settings, has emerged globally as a pivotal intervention to address mental health issues among school-going youth (Liu, 2023; Duggal and Bagasrawala, 2018). In India, however, its implementation remains fragmented, particularly in government schools, where systemic challenges such as inadequate staffing, stigma, and lack of integrated policies persist (Mann, 2015; Kumar, 2016). Teachers, who often serve as de facto counsellors, are expected to manage not only academic performance but also behavioural and emotional issues in the absence of structured support systems (O'Toole, 2023). Their insights are therefore essential to understanding the current realities of school-based mental health services.

In the Union Territory of Puducherry, a region with diverse socio-cultural dynamics and educational disparities, there is a growing need to contextualise mental health support. While adolescent mental health concerns are widely acknowledged, little is known about how teachers perceive the role and effectiveness of school social work in addressing these issues. Local studies have highlighted gaps in mental health literacy among educators and emphasised the urgency of collaborative interventions involving school, family, and community (Manjubairavi and Kumar, 2024; Venkataraman et al., 2019).

This study aims to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of higher secondary school teachers in Puducherry regarding the relevance and impact of school social work on adolescent psychological well-being. By using a qualitative approach, it seeks to identify core themes that illuminate teachers' roles, challenges, and recommendations for improving mental health support in educational settings. The findings are intended to contribute to the growing body of evidence advocating for the institutionalisation of school social work and the development of holistic, youth-centric mental health policies in India.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Puducherry, with its unique socio-cultural dynamics, provides an interesting case for studying the Relevance of School Social Work. The region has diverse Educational Institutions, ranging from Government to Private Schools, each with different resources and challenges (Government of Puducherry, 2020). Research on the Perspectives of Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry can offer insights into how School Social Work practices can be tailored to meet the Specific Needs of Students in this region (Kumar, 2016).

The perspectives of higher secondary school teachers in Puducherry regarding the role of School Social Work in promoting Adolescent Psychological Well-Being highlighted the critical contributions of social workers in educational settings. The mental

Health Professionals are essential in addressing the emotional and social needs of students, thereby fostering a supportive environment conducive to learning and personal development. School social workers addressed various crises that hinder students' learning, improving their academic and emotional outcomes (Mann, 2015). They implement programs that enhance students' emotional well-being and social consciousness, crucial for their overall development (Adediran and Feng, 2022). Schools served as vital platforms for mental health support, where social workers can advocate for and implement mental health initiatives (Duggal and Bagasrawala, 2018).

Promoting social well-being in schools leads to improved classroom environments, fostering mutual respect and reducing anxiety among students (Svamberk Sauerová and Jirásková, 2023). Effective interventions require collaboration among social workers, teachers, and parents, emphasising a holistic approach to adolescent mental health (Karadag, 2019). While integrating the school social work, it is vital for enhancing adolescent well-being, some may urge that the focus should also include strengthening parental involvement and community resources to create a more comprehensive support system for students.

The primary challenges faced by Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry when addressing students' mental health issues include a lack of training, stigma, and insufficient support systems. These factors hinder teachers' ability to effectively identify and assist the students experiencing mental health difficulties. Many teachers reported feeling unprepared to handle mental health issues due to inadequate training in mental health literacy and crisis intervention (Manjubairavi and Kumar, 2024; Parveen et al., 2024). A significant number of teachers expressed a desire for professional development in mental health care, indicating a gap in current educational programs (Manjubairavi and Kumar, 2024).

High levels of stigma among teachers contributed to reluctance in addressing mental health issues. Approximately, 72.9% of teachers exhibit personal stigma towards mental illness. Younger, male teachers and those with less experience are particularly prone to higher stigma levels, which can affect their interactions with affected students (Venkataraman et al., 2019). Teachers from Puducherry often feel overwhelmed and stressed due to the lack of institutional support and resources to address students' mental health needs (Manjubairavi and Kumar et al., 2024). The absence of structured mental health programs in schools further exacerbates the challenges teachers faced in providing adequate support (Tyler, 2014). While these challenges are significant, some teachers are actively seeking to create supportive environments for students, demonstrating resilience and commitment despite the obstacles they encounter. This highlighted the potential for positive change through targeted training and policy reforms.

School Social Work Interventions in Higher Secondary Schools in Puducherry can significantly impact adolescents' psychological well-being and academic performance. These interventions, often embedded within broader school-based programs, aims to address mental

health issues, reduce stress, and foster a supportive school environment. The effectiveness of such interventions is supported by various studies, which highlighted their potential to improve bot mental health outcomes and academic achievements among adolescents. School-based interventions have shown moderate effectiveness in reducing psychological stress among adolescents, particularly when targeted at selected student groups (Loon et al., 2020). Brief school-based interventions have demonstrated statistically significant improvements in mental health and well-being outcomes, with effects lasting up to a year post-intervention (Cohen et al., 2023).

A positive school climate, characterised by supportive student–teacher relationships and a sense of belonging, is associated with improved academic performance and reduced symptoms of depression and stress (Podiya et al., 2025). While the positive impacts of school social work interventions are evident, it is essential to consider the variability in effectiveness based on the specific context and implementation of these programs. Factors such as the school environment, the nature of the interventions, and the individual needs of the students and its students is crucial for maximising their effectiveness.

Teachers perceived the role of School Social Work as crucial in supporting students' mental health, recognising the need for a collaborative approach that includes students, teachers and mental health professionals. Teachers acknowledged their unique position to influence students' mental health positively but often feel underprepared due to a lack of adequate training and institutional support. They recommend strategies that involve comprehensive training programs and a collaborative support network to effectively address mental health issues in schools. Teachers see school social work as essential in addressing students' mental health needs, providing a structured pathway for intervention and support (Liu, 2023). They recognised the importance of a collaborative approach, involving parents, mental health professionals, and community organisations, to strengthen the support network for students (Karim, 2024). Many teachers feel ill-equipped to support students' mental health due to insufficient training and resources (O'Toole, 2023). Institutional barriers, such as lack of support systems and comprehensive mental health programs, hinder effective intervention (Karim, 2024).

Development of comprehensive training programs for teachers to equip them with the necessary skills to support students' mental health (Karim, 2024). Implementation of a collaborative support system that includes school social workers, mental health professionals, and community resources (Liu, 2023). Encouragement of policy changes that empower teachers as frontline advocates for mental health in schools (Karim, 2024). The studies also highlighted the gaps in training and institutional support, which are crucial for the successful implementation of mental health interventions in schools.

The review of literature underscores the critical role of School Social Work in promoting Adolescent Psychological Well-Being. From Early Intervention to fostering Resilience, School Social Workers significantly contribute to creating Supportive

Educational Environments. The Perspectives of Teachers are crucial in understanding the Practical Challenges and Opportunities in implementing these programs. In the context of Puducherry, exploring these Perspectives can help in developing targeted strategies to enhance the Mental Health and Well-Being of Students.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the Perceptive of Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry regarding the role and importance of School Social Work in promoting Adolescent Psychological Well-Being.
- To identify the challenges faced by Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry when addressing students' Mental Health issues and their collaboration with School Social Workers.
- To study the perceived impact of School Social Work interventions on the Psychological Well-Being and Academic Performance of Adolescents in Higher Secondary Schools in Puducherry.
- To gather recommendations from Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry on strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of School Social Work practices in supporting Students' Mental Health.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the Perspectives of Higher Secondary School Teacher in Puducherry regarding the role of School Social Work in promoting Adolescent Psychological Well-Being. A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to provide in-depth insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2013). The study was conducted in Puducherry, a Union Territory of India, known for its diverse Educational Institutions. The target population included Higher Secondary School Teachers from various Government and Private Schools in Puducherry. The Non-Probability Purposive Sampling Technique was adopted to ensure the inclusion of teachers across different school types. Teachers were selected based on their years of teaching experience and prior involvement in student mental health activities. This method ensured that the sample included Teachers from Government, Government-Aided, and Private Higher Secondary Schools in Puducherry, to ensure diversity in Institutional Context, who have substantial experience and involvement with Students' Mental Health issues. Approximately six Teachers from different Schools are selected to provide a diverse range of Perspectives. Data was collected using Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The Semi-Structured Interview and Focused Group Discussion guides were developed based on existing reviews and expert consultations. A pilot test was conducted with two teachers to ensure clarity and relevance. The tools were reviewed by two senior social work academicians for content validity. The Semi-Structured Interview guide included components such as teachers' understanding of Psychological Well-being, perceived role of School Social Workers, Early Signs of Psychological

Distress, current School-Based Support Systems, and Suggestions for improving Students' Mental Health Services. The Focused Group Discussion (FDG) covered broader themes such as Institutional Challenges, Collaborative Practices, Socio-Emotional Learning, the Role of Peer Groups, and School-Family Partnerships. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. All interviews and FGDs are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were systematically coded to identify key themes and patterns. An open coding process was used initially, followed by axial coding to relate codes to each other. Identified codes were grouped into themes that reflect the major findings of the study. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the data.

**Table 1: Major Themes Emerged**

| Major Themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Psychological Well-Being |
| 2. | Role of Teacher |
| 3. | Contribution of Teacher |
| 4. | Supportive Systems |
| 5. | Enabling the role of school |
| 6. | Impact of Risks on Psychological Distress of Students |
| 7. | Role of Parents |
| 8. | Role of peer groups |
| 9. | Voice of students for support of Teacher or other authority |
| 10. | Suggestions to strengthen the distress in school settings |

### Theme 1: Psychological Well-Being (PWB)

Teacher's Perception of Psychological Well-Being is explored here. Most of the Teachers expressed that the Psychological Well-Being of students means understanding the emotions of students. In this competitive world, students are getting disturbed emotionally, and it is very much essential that students be ready with sound minds in the future.

**Table 2: Sub-themes of Psychological Well-Being**

| Sub-Themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Positive and Nurturing Environment |
| 2. | Subjective Evaluation of Feelings and Perceptions |
| 3. | Emotional Balance |
| 4. | Goal-Orientation |
| 5. | Mentally Liberated and Fearless Students |
| 6. | Cultivation in a Healthy, Happy, Ethical Atmosphere |

### Positive and Nurturing Atmosphere

- Students living and learning atmosphere should be happy, healthy, peaceful, fear free, and stress-free. (Teacher 1)
- Mentally free and fearless students keep themselves in a complete state of Well-Being. (Teacher 5)
- Students who grow and nurture themselves in a healthy, happy, serene, and ethical atmosphere are Psychologically well. Psychological Well-Being means healthy, happy, and peaceful learning. Students should nurture good qualities in school. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 1, 5, and 6 stress the significance of a happy, healthy, peaceful, and ethical atmosphere. This suggests that the overall environment in which students learn plays a crucial role in their Psychological Well-Being.

**Subjective Evaluation of Feelings and Perceptions**

- Psychological Well-Being means how well they feel about themselves and others around them. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 introduces the idea that Psychological Well-Being is based on an individual's subjective evaluation of their feelings and perceptions. This implies that each Student's experience of Well-Being is unique and personal.

**Emotional Balance**

- It is self-acceptance, positive interpersonal relationships, autonomy, and life development. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 emphasises emotional balance, including self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, and life development. This suggests that a well-rounded emotional state involves personal growth and healthy connections with others.

**Goal Orientation**

- It is being aim-oriented, working hard to achieve the goal, and maintaining physical and Mental Health without any regrets that is a student's Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 brings in the element of being aim-oriented and working hard to achieve goals. This implies that students with a sense of purpose and dedication to their objectives contribute to their Psychological Well-Being.

**Mentally Liberated and Fearless Students**

- Mentally free and fearless students keep themselves in a complete state of Well-Being. (Teacher 5)
- Students who grow and nurture themselves in a healthy, happy, serene, and ethical atmosphere are Psychologically well. Psychological Well-Being means healthy, happy, and peaceful learning. Students should nurture good qualities in school. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 5 and 6 highlights the importance of mental freedom and fearlessness. This suggests that students who are liberated from mental constraints and unafraid are more likely to experience optimal Psychological Well-Being.

**Cultivation in a Healthy, Happy, Ethical Atmosphere**

- Students who grow and nurture themselves in a healthy, happy, serene, and ethical atmosphere are Psychologically well. Psychological Well-Being means healthy, happy, and peaceful learning. Students should nurture good qualities in school. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 specifically mentions the importance of an ethical atmosphere and cultivating positive qualities. This adds a moral dimension to the concept of Psychological Well- Being, implying that ethical behaviour and positive character traits contribute to a student's overall mental health.

**Theme 2: Role of Teacher**

The teacher's understanding of the role of the teacher in Adolescent Psychological Well-Being is explained here.

**Table 3: Sub-themes of Role of the Teacher**

| Sub-Themes |
|---|
| 1. Moral Responsibility and Mentorship |
| 2. Essential Role in Nurturing |
| 3. Boldness in Controlling Behaviour |
| 4. Guidance and Counselling |

### Moral Responsibility and Mentorship

- Being the mentor, it is also the teacher's moral responsibility to understand students' state of mind and help them get out of any critical emotional situation. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 emphasises the moral responsibility of Teachers to understand the emotional states of students and help them navigate challenging situations. This suggests a mentorship role beyond academics, where Teachers play a crucial part in the overall Well-Being of students.

### Essential Role in Nurturing

- The Teacher's role is essential in nurturing, guiding, and providing such an atmosphere for the student's Well-Being. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 underscores the essential role of Teacher in nurturing, guiding, and providing a positive atmosphere for students' Well-Being. This perspective highlights Teachers' holistic responsibility in shaping the overall environment for students to thrive.

### Boldness in Controlling Behaviour

- The Teachers should be bold enough to control the students' behavior, making them focus on their goals. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 brings attention to the importance of the teachers being bold enough to control student behaviour and keep them focused on their goals. This suggests that maintaining discipline and focus in the classroom supports students' Psychological Well-Being.

### Guidance and Counselling

- The Teacher's role is vital because Teaches' guide them whenever they encounter a problem. The Teachers counsel the students and give guidance. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 emphasises the vital role of Teachers as guides and counsellors. The idea is that students often turn to their Teachers for support and direction when facing challenges, reinforcing the mentorship aspect of a teacher's role in fostering Psychological Well-Being.

### Theme 3-Contribution of Teachers toward Psychological Distress of Students

Teacher' perceptions of the contribution of their role to the Psychological distress of students are explained here.

**Table 4: Sub-themes of Contributions of Teachers towards Psychological Distress of Students**

| Sub-Themes |
|---|
| 1. Direct Connection and Early Intervention |
| 2. Supportive Teacher-Student Relationship |
| 3. Collaboration among Teacher |
| 4. Motivation, Discipline and Role Modelling |
| 5. Inspiring Ethical Learning |
| 6. Emotional Support |

**Direct Connection and Early Intervention**

- Students should be directly connected with Teachers, and Teachers contribute by observing any emotional imbalance and counselling at the primary stage of the problem. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 underscores the importance of a direct connection between Teachers and students. They emphasise the role of Teachers in observing emotional imbalances and providing counselling at the primary stage of an issue. This approach involves proactive measures, such as personal connections, observational skills, and early intervention strategies.

**Supportive Teacher–Student Relationships**

- Students should feel happy when they are being heard by their teacher when the Teacher becomes their mentor, and when the Teacher is instrumental in helping them solve their problems. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 emphasises the significance of supportive teacher-student relationships. This involves active listening, empathy, mentorship, problem-solving, and creating a positive learning environment. The focus is on the teacher's instrumental role in helping students solve problems and fostering a sense of happiness through effective communication and mentorship.

**Collaboration among Teachers**

- Teachers should work together to identify deviations and set suitable structures for the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 highlights the importance of Teachers working together to identify deviations in students' Well-Being and establishing suitable structures to support Psychological health. This collaborative approach recognises that student success and Well-Being are influenced by various factors, requiring a holistic effort from the teaching community.

**Motivation, Discipline, and Role Modelling**

- By motivating and being a role model, the Teacher should be working with them, controlling them when they are demotivated, and being strict with them to maintain their Well-Being. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 emphasises the multifaceted role of Teachers in motivating and inspiring students, addressing demotivation, maintaining discipline, and serving as role models. This approach recognises the need for a balanced and supportive environment, where Teacher actively contribute to students' overall Well-Being.

**Inspiring Ethical Learning**

- Teachers should inspire and motivate more ethical learning through various pedagogical ways. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 focuses on the role of Teachers in inspiring and motivating ethical learning through various pedagogical approaches. This includes using diverse methods such as storytelling, anecdotes, speeches, and interactive activities to instil a commitment to ethical behaviour and lifelong learning in students.

**Emotional Support**

- Teachers should always give emotional support and help the students. Teachers observe the students; whenever they are in trouble or have problems, Teachers counsel and help them emotionally. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 stresses the importance of Teacher providing emotional support to students. This involves being attentive observers, offering counselling, and helping students navigate challenges beyond academic concerns. Building trust is highlighted as a crucial element in establishing effective emotional support.

**Theme 4: Supportive Systems**

The next section discusses Teacher' perspectives on the supportive mechanisms available to children experiencing Psychological distress.

**Table 4: Sub-themes of Supportive Systems**

| Sub-Themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Role of Trained Counsellors and School Leadership |
| 2. | Diverse Support Structures |
| 3. | Creating a congenial atmosphere |
| 4. | Inculcating moral values through activities |
| 5. | Holistic Approach to Education |
| 6. | School Management and Teacher's Role in |
| 7. | Residential Settings |

**Role of Trained Counsellors and School Leadership**

- Trained counsellors play an essential role in the Psychological Well-Being of the students. In certain schools, Teacher, the headmaster, and the Assistant headmaster all work on the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 emphasises the essential role of trained counsellors in addressing students' Psychological Well-Being. Additionally, the collaborative involvement of Teachers, headmasters, and assistant headmasters signifies a shared responsibility for Mental Health within the school community. This approach reflects a commitment to comprehensive care and leadership for active responsiveness in shaping a positive school environment.

**Diverse Support Structures**

- Sports, teamwork, management skills, playful ways of learning, art-integrated learning, peer group learning, and co-curricular activities are the available support structures that enable the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 emphasises a variety of support structures, including sports, teamwork, management skills, playful learning, art integration, peer group learning, and co-curricular activities. These mechanisms aim to promote physical health, mental well-being, and social connection, recognising that students' Psychological Well-Being is influenced by a combination of factors beyond academic instruction.

**Creating a Congenial Atmosphere**

- The school should create a congenial atmosphere for the students, as appointing the counsellors should be another way to reduce the Psychological Distress in students. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 underscores the importance of creating a positive school atmosphere to reduce psychological distress. This involves appointing counsellors, taking a preventive approach, recognising emotional needs, and adopting an integrated and holistic approach. The focus is on fostering a supportive environment that addresses individualised needs and promotes the Well-Being of all students.

**Inculcating Moral Values through Activities**

- Various moral values learned through day-to-day activities inculcate strength for the student, like many school-based activities such as role-play, mimes, etc., which are the better supportive ways for the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 highlights the significance of incorporating the moral values into daily activities, such as role-play and mimes. These activities provide experiential learning, strengthen inner resilience, and contribute to holistic development. They serve as better supportive ways to enhance students' Psychological Well-Being by encouraging creative expression & character development.

**Holistic Approach to Education**

- Life situations, anecdotes, and calamities provide hands-on experience, and the curriculum/syllabus entangled with activities, ITC, and integrated learning supports the stature of the students who face Psychological distress. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 advocates for a holistic approach to education that incorporates real-life situations, anecdotes, calamities, integrated learning, and information technology. This approach aims to support students facing Psychological distress by providing diverse learning experiences that enhance character, resilience, and practical skills.

**School Management and Teacher Roles in Residential Settings**

- School management creates a congenial atmosphere. The presence of trained counsellors plays a vital role in the Well-Being of the students. In every school, students stay in hostels, so Teacher take care of students as house masters and house mistress roles. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 emphasises the crucial role of school management, trained counsellors, and Teacher, particularly in residential settings. Teachers, taking on roles like house masters and house mistresses, provide personalised support, contributing to a holistic care model.

This approach recognises the unique needs of students who stay in hostels and underscores the importance of a supportive educational environment.

**Theme 5: Enabling the Role of School**

Teacher's perceptions about enabling the role of the school are mentioned below.

**Table 5: Sub-themes of Enabling the Role of School**

| Sub-themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Proactive Measures & Psychological Experts |
| 2. | Diverse Activities for Holistic Development |
| 3. | Self-Expression and Child-Centric Education |
| 4. | Value-Based Education |
| 5. | Moral Education and Virtues |
| 6. | Diverse Platforms for Well-Being |

**Proactive Measures and Psychological Experts**

- School is the place where students spend a lot of time. The school administration organises sessions for students' Psychological Well-Being and appoints Psychological experts in this regard. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 highlights the importance of school time and proactive efforts by the school administration to organise sessions for students' Psychological Well-Being. The appointment of Psychological experts indicates a commitment to addressing the emotional and mental aspects of students' growth alongside their academic development.

**Diverse Activities for Holistic Development**

- The school should schedule various activities for the holistic development of the students. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 emphasises the significance of scheduling diverse activities for holistic student development. This approach recognises that education goes beyond academics and should encompass physical, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects. The school's responsibility is to plan activities that cater to various needs and interests, fostering well-rounded individuals.

**Self-Expression and Child-Centric Education**

- Schools enable students' Psychological Well-Being by allowing them to self-express, help them maintain self-esteem, and provide child-centric education. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 emphasises the role of schools in promoting students' Psychological Well-Being by fostering self-expression, maintaining self-esteem, and providing child-centric education. This approach recognises the importance of creating a supportive environment that focuses on individualised support, Psychological safety, and holistic development.

**Value-Based Education**

- Schools should impart value-based education to inculcate the best for the child's overall development. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 underscores the importance of value-based education for a child's overall development. This involves teaching moral and ethical principles, social responsibility, and character development alongside academic subjects. This approach aims to cultivate positive qualities, prepare students for responsible citizenship, and contribute to long-term character development.

**Moral Education and Virtues**

- The school provides an opportunity to imbibe, enhance/inculcate morally based education, seeking the virtues-sincerity, punctuality, tolerance, team spirit/ comparison, empathy towards people in need, etc. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 emphasises the school's role in providing moral education and focusing on virtues such as sincerity, punctuality, tolerance, team spirit, and empathy. The ongoing process of imparting morally based education contributes to life skills development, fostering individuals with strong moral foundations.

**Diverse Platforms for Well-Being**

- Schools must provide many platforms for the students' Psychological Well-Being, such as sports and cultural activities, yoga, etc. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 highlights the importance of schools providing various platforms, including sports, cultural activities, and yoga, to support students' Psychological Well-Being. This approach recognises the holistic nature of education and the need for diverse options to contribute to a positive school culture and life skill development.

**Theme 6: Impact of Risks on Psychological Distress of Students**

This study examines the Teacher' perspectives on how different hazards affect the Psychological Well-Being of children.

**Table 6: Sub-themes of Impact of Risks on Psychological Distress of Students**

| Sub-Themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Collaborative Approach |
| 2. | Socio-demographic factors and Family Background |
| 3. | Mental Harassment from Authority Figures |
| 4. | External Factors in the Educational Environment |
| 5. | Multifaceted Risk Factors |
| 6. | Special Care for Emotional Students |

**Collaborative Approach**

- Students' emotions should be handled in the school and the family. Lonely students, who faced the emotional disturbance. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 emphasises the collaborative role of both school and family in addressing students' emotions, particularly those experiencing loneliness and emotional disturbance. This collaborative approach recognises the shared responsibility of educators and family members in fostering a supportive environment for students.

**Socio-economic Factors and Family Background**

- Socio-economic status, ethical and educational background, disturbed families, and family burdens are the risks that impact the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 underscores the impact of socio-economic status, ethical and educational background, disturbed families, and family burdens on students' Psychological Well-Being. The recognition of these risks highlights the importance of understanding the broader socio-economic and familial context that can contribute to students' Mental Health challenges.

**Mental Harassment from Authority Figures**

- When the students are mentally harassed/ tortured by their parents/other adults/ Teacher, when they do not hear them, are the risks that impact the Psychological Well-Being of the students. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 draws attention to the risks associated with mental harassment or mistreatment from parents, other adults, or Teacher, especially when students do not conform to expectations. This perspective highlights the power dynamics in educational settings and emphasises the need for educators to create a safe and supportive school culture.

**External Factors in Educational Environment**

- Peer groups, poor background of the parents of students, working without aim, and disinterested poor school infrastructure are the risks that impact the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 focuses on external factors within the educational environment that can impact students' Psychological Well-Being, such as peer groups, parental background, aimlessness, and poor school infrastructure. This perspective advocates for a comprehensive and supportive educational environment to address these risks and promote mental health.

**Multifaceted Risk Factors**

- Disturbed families, loneliness, poor social support, family demands, socio-economic status, and educational/ethical background are the risks that impact the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 identifies a range of risk factors, including disturbed families, loneliness, poor social support, family demands, socio-economic status, and educational background. Recognising the multifaceted nature of these risks highlights the need for a holistic approach to education that considers various factors influencing students' mental health.

**Special Care for Emotional Students**

- Emotional students should be given special care because when they are stressed, they need the support of Parents and Teachers. So, at risky times, they should be handled with proper care. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 emphasises the importance of providing special care for emotional students during stressful times, with a focus on collaboration between parents and Teachers. This perspective acknowledges the unique needs of emotional students and underscores the role of educators and parents in creating a supportive and empathetic environment.

**Theme 7: Role of Parents**

The Teacher' perceptions of the role of parents are expressed here:

**Table 7: Sub-themes of Role of Parents**

| Sub-themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Holistic Perspective on Education |
| 2. | Parental Influence on Ethical, Social and Emotional Development |
| 3. | Communication and Collaboration for Mental Well-Being |
| 4. | Parents as Role Models for Mental Well-Being |
| 5. | Parents as First Tutors and Influencers on Psychological Well-Being |
| 6. | Communication in Residential Schools |

**Holistic Perspective on Education**

- At the primary level, students are counselled at the school level. In some cases, parents are also involved for the better Well-Being of the students. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 emphasises a holistic perspective on education, recognising the interdependence of various elements impacting a student's development. This

perspective involves a commitment to addressing not only academic requirements, but also the emotional and social dimensions of a student's life.

**Parental Influence on Ethical, Social, and Emotional Development**

- Parents influence the Well-Being of their students in every aspect. A good percentage guide them ethically, socially, and emotionally. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 underscores the significant role parents play in shaping various aspects of their child's life, including ethical, social, and emotional dimensions. Positive parenting is seen as a lifelong influence on a child's character and overall Well- Being.

**Communication and Collaboration for Mental Well-Being**

- Parents and Teachers must be in touch with each other. So that they can discuss and do what is most needed for the child's mental Well-Being. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 highlights the importance of strong communication and collaboration between parents and Teachers, particularly for a child's mental Well-Being. Strategies mentioned include regular meetings, joint problem-solving, family engagement, and open communication to create a supportive environment.

**Parents as Role Models for Mental Well-Being**

- Parents are the first Teacher and role models of the children, so parents' mental status should be good. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 emphasises parents as the first Teacher and role models, emphasising the need for their positive mental Well-Being. Strategies include providing stress management techniques, fostering open communication, and creating a supportive school culture.

**Parents as First Tutors and Influencers on Psychological Well-Being**

- Parents are the first tutors, whom the child gets absorbed in mind. In every aspect, their influences are pre-dominating factors for the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 stresses the role of parents as the first tutors and primary influencers on a child's Psychological Well-Being. Strategies include early emotional bonding, positive reinforcement, and promoting Mental Health literacy.

**Communication in Residential Schools**

- If the school is a residential school, and the students are away from home, they need help adjusting. So, Teacher talked to parents and influenced them. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 6 focuses on the importance of communication with parents in residential schools, particularly during the adjustment period. Strategies include orientation sessions, maintaining open communication, and building teacher-parent partnerships to create a supportive environment for students away from home.

**Theme 8: Role of Peer Groups**

Teacher's perceptions about the role of the Peer Group in the Adolescent Psychological Well-Being are expressed here.

**Table 8: Sub-themes of Role of Peer Groups**

| Sub-themes |
|---|
| 1. Influence of Peer Group |
| 2. Cultivating Sound Minds in Peer Group |
| 3. Significance of Friendship |
| 4. Peer Interaction & Personality Development |
| 5. Positive vs. Opposing Peer Group |

**Influence of Peer Group**

- Peer groups influence the Well-Being of the students through their background, attitude, culture, habits, ethics, etc. They can have a good, positive, or negative impact on the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 1)

Teacher, especially Teacher 1, emphasise that peer groups influence students' Well-Being through various factors such as background, attitude, culture, habits, and ethics. The recognition of both positive and negative impacts suggests a need for educators to actively shape a positive peer culture.

**Cultivating Sound Minds in Peer Groups**

- Most students are in the same age group, & their mentality is similar, so the peer group should have sound minds. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 emphasises the importance of cultivating sound minds within peer groups by promoting positive dynamics, social-emotional learning, Mental Health education, & conflict resolution. The focus on sound Mental Health within peer groups contributes to creating a healthy and resilient student community.

**The Significance of Friendship**

- All students value friendship; they trust and share their issues with them more than their parents. So, friendship plays a significant role in the students' Psychological Well-Being. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 underscores the value of friendships in students' lives and their impact on Psychological Well-Being. Strategies include fostering positive friendships, creating a positive social environment, and implementing programs to build and support friendships.

**Peer Interaction and Personality Development**

- The peer group also plays a vital role. Friendship, interdependence, imitation, influence, and personality development are affected through interaction. Thus, these factors affect the Psychological Well-Being of the students. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 highlights the various ways in which peer interaction, including friendship, interdependence, imitation, and influence, can affect personality development and, consequently, Psychological Well-Being. Strategies involve promoting positive role models, managing peer influence, and facilitating group discussions to support students' Well-Being.

**Positive vs. Opposing Peer Groups**

- Peer groups play a role in the individual Well-Being of the students. When they are in the positive group, it is okay, but when they are in the opposing group, the problem arises such that in this way, the peer group influences the Psychological Well-Being of the students. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 5 draws attention to the distinction between positive and opposing peer

groups and their impact on students' Psychological Well-Being. Strategies include addressing negative influences, providing conflict resolution training, and empowering students to choose positive friendships.

### Theme 9: Voice of Students for Support of Teacher or Other Authority

Teacher' opinions on the voice of students in support of Teacher or other authorities are expressed here.

**Table 9: Sub-themes of Voice of Students for Support of Teacher or Other Authorities**

| Sub-themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment |
| 2. | Counsellor Involvement |
| 3. | Teacher's Limitation and Emotional Support |
| 4. | Residential School Dynamics |
| 5. | Gender-Specific Support in Residential Schools |

#### Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment

- Some students do, but others do not open up to the Teacher, which affects them Psychologically. (Teacher 1)

Building trust, fostering personalised interactions, promoting open communication, and recognising warning signs are crucial for creating an environment where students feel safe to express their concerns.

#### Counsellor Involvement

- Few students are willing to open up, but the counsellors should take care of the students' Psychological concerns. Other students do not voice their Psychological concerns to the Teacher. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 emphasises that making counselling services accessible, implementing anonymous reporting systems, conducting regular sessions, and involving counsellors in addressing Psychological concerns play a significant role in supporting students.

#### Teacher's Limitation and Emotional Support

- Students share their problems, expecting a promising and positive solution. However, the Teacher can only solve some of the concerns shared by the students. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 3 expressed that acknowledging the limitations of Teacher in solving all concerns, providing emotional support, and referring students to specialised services contributes to a holistic approach to student Well-Being.

#### Residential School Dynamics

- In residential schools, the students share their family history, difficulties, and shortcomings with empathetic officials seeking solace and solutions. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 4 mentioned that building trust, emphasising confidentiality, providing emotional support, organising group sessions, collaborating with parents, and integrating academic and Well-Being support are crucial in addressing the unique challenges of residential schools.

#### Gender-Specific Support in Residential Schools

- Counsellors should be appointed for the boys and girls separately in residential schools so that the students can tell their

problems to the counsellors individually. (Teacher 5)

Recognising the need for separate counsellors for boys and girls, tailoring support the gender-specific issues, conducting empowerment workshops, and implementing age-appropriate sexual education programs contribute to a more individualised and comprehensive approach.

### Theme 10: Suggestions to Strengthen the Distress in School Settings

Teacher's perceptions of strengthening the distress of Adolescent students in school settings are mentioned here.

**Table 10: Sub-themes of Suggestions to Strengthen the Distress in School Settings**

| Sub-themes | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Learning-Centric Educational System |
| 2. | Supportive Educational Environment |
| 3. | Amicable School Environment |
| 4. | Building Trust and Bonds |
| 5. | Early Identification and Equitable Education |

#### Learning-Centric Educational System

- Parents should spend more time with their children. Early identification of any emotional/psychological imbalance is much more required. The educational system should be learning-centric, not mark-achieving-centric. (Teacher 1)

Prioritising emotional Well-Being, individualised learning, reducing academic pressure, promoting curiosity and exploration, integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, implementing holistic assessment practices, and providing ongoing professional development for Teacher contribute to a learning-centric environment.

#### Supportive Educational Environment

- Providing good infrastructure, good Teacher, and counsellors to counsel the parents, offering good books, and counselling the peer group. (Teacher 2)

Investing in infrastructure, ensuring access to quality Teacher, addressing teacher burnout, offering counselling services for parents, providing quality books, and creating a conducive learning environment through technology integration and continuous improvement contribute to a supportive setting for student Well-Being and development.

#### Amicable School Environment

- Freedom of speech and patience listening is much needed from the Teacher' side; being empathetic rather than sympathetic in an amicable school environment is mandatory for students to be Psychologically free from all kinds of distress. (Teacher 3)

Encouraging freedom of speech, patient listening, empathy training for Teacher, conflict resolution programs, Mental Health awareness, student-centred teaching, flexible assessment methods, peer support programs, and regular check-in create an amicable school environment that fosters Psychological freedom for students.

#### Building Trust and Bonds

- Having a trustworthy bond between Students and Teacher, an empathetic

attitude, patience with compassion, seeing things from another's point of view, and a fear-free atmosphere can bring out what they are. It can help to mould the child's personality. (Teacher 4)

Building a trustworthy bond between students and Teachers, adopting an empathetic attitude, demonstrating patience with compassion, considering others' perspectives, and fostering a fear-free atmosphere through individualised guidance, character education programs, continuous professional development, and communication skills development contribute to a nurturing educational environment.

**Early Identification and Equitable Education**

- Psychological problems of the child must be identified in time. Parents should watch their children properly. Education should be given equally and adequately; students should be given motivation through proper guidance and counselling. (Teacher 5)

Emphasising early identification of Psychological problems, promoting attentive parenting, ensuring equitable education, providing motivation through guidance and counselling, teacher training on Mental Health awareness, regular Well-Being assessments, parent involvement, individualised learning plans, career counselling, and Mental Health awareness campaigns contribute to a holistic and supportive educational experience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted perceptions of higher secondary school teachers in Puducherry regarding the role of school social work in fostering adolescent psychological well-being. The thematic analysis revealed key areas of concern and opportunity: psychological well-being, the role and contributions of teachers, existing supportive systems, institutional challenges, and the critical involvement of parents and peer groups.

### Teachers' Conceptualisation of Psychological Well-Being

Teachers consistently viewed psychological well-being (PWB) as rooted in emotional balance, goal orientation, and a nurturing, fear-free environment. These interpretations echoed (Ryff, 1989) the multidimensional model of well-being, particularly dimensions such as self-acceptance, purpose in life, and positive relations. The study found that teachers emphasised environments that were peaceful, ethical, and conducive to growth, resonating with global findings that safe school climates reduce distress and improve student engagement (Loon et al., 2020; Svamberk Sauerová and Jirásková, 2023).

### Teachers' Roles as Moral Mentors and Emotional Guides

Teachers perceived their roles as extending beyond academic instruction, encompassing mentorship, emotional guidance, and behavioural management. This aligns with recent literature indicating that educators often serve as first responders to adolescent mental health challenges in school settings (O'Toole, 2023; Parveen et al., 2024). The recognition of moral responsibility and

the need for guidance suggests an urgent requirement for equipping teachers with training in mental health literacy (Manjubairavi and Kumar, 2024).

### Contribution to Early Identification and Intervention

Teachers indicated their capacity to observe and intervene in early signs of distress. However, they expressed limitations due to insufficient mental health training. These supports (Karim, 2024) observation that while teachers are uniquely placed to support students, institutional deficiencies hamper their effectiveness. Early identification remains a cornerstone of effective school mental health strategies, as also emphasised (Van Loon et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2023).

### Supportive Systems and School-Based Interventions

Teachers noted the value of multidisciplinary support, including trained counsellors, extracurricular activities, and holistic learning methods. They stressed the impact of structured moral education and co-curricular engagements in fostering resilience. Studies support these claims, showing that school-based interventions significantly enhance psychological outcomes and promote healthy coping mechanisms among adolescents (Cohen et al., 2023; Duggal and Bagasrawala, 2018).

The role of a positive school climate was also highlighted, with emphasis on respect, moral values, and integrated learning experiences. These findings underscore that school social work thrives in environments promoting student voice, belonging, and collaborative engagement.

### Risks and Challenges Affecting Student Well-Being

Teachers cited socio-economic status, family background, and mental harassment from authority figures as major contributors to psychological distress. This reflects broader Indian and global concerns, where social determinants and authoritarian school cultures often exacerbate adolescent vulnerabilities (Tyler, 2014; Venkataraman, Patil and Balasundaram, 2019). Additionally, teachers acknowledged the weight of external pressures such as poor infrastructure and peer dynamics areas often overlooked in policy discussions.

### Parental Involvement and Peer Influence

The data show a nuanced appreciation for parental roles as moral role models and co-facilitators of emotional development. The emphasis on communication between home and school aligns with global calls for stronger school-family partnerships (Duggal and Bagasrawala, 2018). Similarly, peer groups were recognised for their dual potential either as protective factors or sources of stress consistent with recent evidence on peer ecology in school mental health (Karim, 2024; Liu, 2023).

### Institutional Gaps and Policy Recommendations

A recurrent theme was the inadequacy of institutional structures, particularly the absence of structured mental health services and the stigma among teachers themselves.

This aligns with (Manjubairavi and Kumar, 2024) and (Venkataraman et al., 2019) who found that more than 70% of teachers in Puducherry exhibited personal stigma toward mental illness, impeding proactive support.

Teachers recommended comprehensive training programs, appointment of psychological experts, inclusion of value-based curricula, and expansion of activity-based learning to counteract distress. These recommendations align with best-practice models for school-based mental health services, which emphasise collaboration, inclusivity, and sustained capacity-building (Karim, 2024; Liu, 2023).

## SOCIAL WORK RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schools should implement comprehensive Mental Health programs that include regular assessments, individual and group counselling, and Mental Health education.
- Conduct regular Mental Health awareness campaigns and workshops for students, Teacher, and parents to destigmatise Mental Health issues and promote understanding.
- Provide specialised training for Teachers on adolescent development, Mental Health issues, and effective support strategies.
- Establish protocols for early identification and intervention of Mental Health issues, including screening tools and referral systems.
- Increase the number of school social workers and ensure they are easily accessible to students for both scheduled and walk-in sessions.
- Develop policies and practices that promote inclusivity, respect, and safety within the school environment, including anti-bullying initiatives and peer support programs.
- Incorporate SEL programs into the school curriculum to teach students skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, and healthy relationship building.
- Develop programs that engage families in the Mental Health support process, offering resources, workshops, and regular communication between social workers and parents.
- Implement digital tools and platforms for Mental Health education, counselling, and crisis intervention, making support more accessible to students.
- Perform regular assessments of students' Mental Health and gather feedback from students, teachers, and parents to inform and improve Mental Health programs.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was limited to a small sample of teachers from Puducherry and may not be generalisable to all regions.
- The qualitative nature of the research, while rich in depth, restricts statistical generalisation.
- Self-reported data may also be influenced by social desirability bias.
- Future studies may expand the scope to include students' and parents' perspectives for a more holistic understanding.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the vital role of School Social Work in enhancing adolescent

Psychological Well-Being through the perspectives of higher secondary school Teachers in Puducherry. The findings indicate that effective School Social Work practices significantly contribute to improving students' Mental Health by providing support, guidance, and interventions tailored to their needs. Teachers have highlighted the importance of integrating comprehensive social work services within schools to address various psychological challenges faced by adolescents. By fostering a supportive environment and promoting Mental Health awareness, School Social Workers can play a crucial role in nurturing the overall well-being of students. These insights underscore the need for continued investment in School Social Work programs and the development of targeted strategies to further support adolescent Mental Health in Puducherry.

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**How to cite this article:** Raghu, A. K., & Sultana, A. S. (2025). Relevance of School Social Work and Adolescent Psychological Well-Being: Perspectives of Higher Secondary School Teachers in Puducherry. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development, 17*(2), 120-142.