

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN – A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To assess the psychosocial environment for improvement of child mental health services in Army Public Schools of Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

**Study Design:** Descriptive cross-sectional study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** Army Public School, Forte Road Rawalpindi, from Mar to Aug, 2018

**Material and Methods:** Following strict inclusion criteria, organizational stakeholders in education department i.e. school administrators (principals and vice principals), school staff and parents were given the questionnaire. This cross-sectional study involved assessing the Psycho-social school environment and various socio-demographic correlates in an Army Public School of Rawalpindi. Universal sampling approach was used to recruit the administrators while simple random lottery method was used to recruit teachers and parents. WHO psycho-social environment profile questionnaire was used and filled by each participant.

**Results:** A sample of 210 was obtained in which frequency of managers was 16 (8%), teachers 130 (62%) and parents 64 (30%). School scored higher average score in three quality areas, forbidding physical punishment violence, not tolerating bullying, harassment and discrimination and connecting school homelife involving parents.

**Conclusion:** There is a need to improve quality area of providing friendly, rewarding and supportive atmosphere in school, cooperative and active learning and valuing development of creative activities.

**Keywords:** Child mental health, mental health services, psychosocial environment of school, school mental health services

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### INTRODUCTION

The requirement for mental health care services is high. Global facts and figures on mental health (PEMH) are frightening and it has grown as a major challenge because of the drastic effect of mental illnesses on the economy of the country as well<sup>1</sup>. More than 13% of the universal burden of disease is due to neuropsychiatric ailments and almost 75% of this burden lies in low and middle income countries<sup>2,3</sup>, accounting for 15–30% of the disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) lost during first 30 years of life<sup>4,5</sup>. The load of these ailments is expected to grow

melodramatically in the next era, because of the demographic and epidemiological evolutions in LMICs<sup>6</sup> involving children and adolescents as they constitute major bulk of LMICs.

In developing countries like Pakistan, child and adolescent psychiatric problems are very often mistreated<sup>7</sup>. An estimated 1 in 5 people are suffering mental illness. There are only 300 to 400 skilled psychiatrists which is approximately one specialist available per 500,000 people. There is lack of specialized in-patient child psychiatric units<sup>8</sup> and awareness about mental illnesses at community as well as at the level of practitioners<sup>9</sup>. Initiation of promotional and preventive interventions require a thorough knowledge of exact burden of the issue.

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Children who don't have suitable socioemotional atmosphere may have hindered learning, augmented hazard for mental disease, poor academic presentation and physical health problems in maturity<sup>10</sup>. Socio-emotional problems among school going children are required to be prevented, if not should be prophesied and treated on priority, as they hamper student's educational, socio-emotional wellbeing and maturation<sup>11</sup>. Problems with Psychosocial environment can affect the mental health of school children<sup>12</sup> necessitating the need for provision of mental health services while provision of such services through capacity building of teachers leads to improvement in psychosocial environment of school<sup>13</sup>.

School with the environment of self-confidence and admiration among principals, school staff, students and parents offers an ideal podium to achieve mental health outcome in young children, effect the welfare of children, lessen the school anxiety and boost the school connectedness<sup>7,14</sup>. School-based interventions concerning teacher and/or child training have been shown to help teacher practices, prevent behavior problems and improve children's social, behavioral, emotional and academic functioning<sup>11,15</sup>.

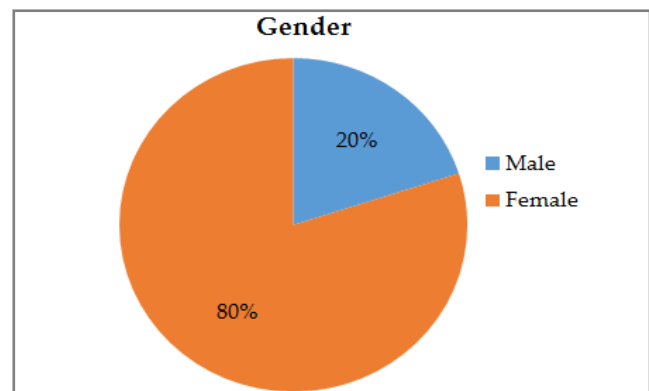
Assessment of psychosocial environment of schools is an important step as part of need assessment for integration of mental health services in APS schools and will apprise the policy makers and stakeholders regarding the magnitude of the problem.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

It was a descriptive cross-sectional study. Multi stage cluster sampling technique was used in the study. List of local APS school was obtained from APSACS directorate and schools were divided into 4 clusters according to location, taking into consideration the proportion of the different types of schools (single/mixed) to avoid bias. One cluster was selected through simple random sampling lottery method which consisted of 11 schools. APS Forte Road was further randomly selected (lottery method) from

that cluster. A sample of 210 respondents was obtained and divided into 3 categories/ strata i.e. school administration, teachers and parents. As no. of respondents who were in administration staff were less hence, they were selected through universal sampling technique while keeping in view large number of teachers and parents, further sampling was done through simple random sampling (lottery method) as sampling frame was available.

After reviewing the WHO PSE profile data collection tool, meeting was held with APSACS Directorate as well as with administration of the school about the research, its objectives, confidentiality/anonymity of data and the participants required to fill the questionnaire. Formal approval and consent were obtained. After collecting the information regarding demographic



**Figure-1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.**

variables and basic covariates such as gender, status of respondents (manager, teacher, parent) the WHO psychosocial environment profile questionnaire was administered. Descriptive Data on numerical variables (Friendly rewarding supportive atmosphere, supporting cooperation and active learning, forbidding physical punishment violence, not tolerating bullying harassment discrimination, valuing development of creative activity, connecting school homelife involving parents and Promoting equal opportunities participation decision making) and categorical variables (gender and category of school) was collected. Variables are on Likert scale ranging from

“not at all” to “very much “and scored on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 representing the lowest and 4 the highest rating of social and emotional support. Scores for mixed-sex schools can range from a minimum of 114 to a maximum of 456. After cleaning of data, it was analyzed by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-21 version). Data collection was done during the period from March to August 2018. Obtained data regarding summary score of quality areas is presented in the form of tables and pie charts

Scoring Profile of School: As per WHO PSE scoring system, the school has obtained an average score of 75.4 in quality area I categorized as providing a friendly, rewarding and supportive atmosphere to students and employees, which is just above the PSE mean of 69. In quality areas II of supporting, cooperation and active learning as an average of 30.3 is scored by school as compared to PSE mean of 25. In third quality area of forbidding physical punishment and violence school has obtained a higher average of

**Table: Summary score: school psychosocial profile.**

S. No.	Quality Area	Min PSE	Max PSE	Min Score	Max Score	Mean Current study	Mean WHO PSE Tool
		WHO PSE Tool		Current Study			
1.	Friendly rewarding supportive atmosphere	24	96	42	96	75.4	69
2.	Supporting cooperation active learning	10	40	14	40	30.3	25
3.	Forbidding physical punishment violence	20	80	38	78	65.9	50
4.	Not tolerating bullying harassment discrimination	18	72	28	72	54.6	45
5.	Valuing development of creative activity	12	48	21	48	36	30
6.	Connecting school home-life involving parents	13	52	24	52	40.8	32.5
7.	Promoting equal opportunities participation decision making	17	68	21	64	47.6	42.5
	Total	<b>114</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>450</b>		

represents demographic profile of the respondents.

Institutional consent from APSAC secretariat and school administration before the data collection was obtained. Individual informed consent was also taken from the study participants during data collection. The purpose of the study and questions was explained in clear and simple language.

**RESULTS**

Socio-demographic characteristics: Out of 210 respondents 42 (20%) were male and 168 (80%) were female. Frequencies and percentages are shown in fig-1.

66 as compared to PSE mean of 50. Similarly, the average score of 54.6 in quality area of not tolerating bullying harassment and discrimination in contrast to 45 by PSE. In fifth quality area of valuing development of creative activity school atmosphere an average score of 36 was obtained in contrast to 30 which is little above reference value. In sixth quality mean is 41 whereas PSE mean is calculated to be 32.5 in quality area of connecting school homelife involving parents. In last quality area of promoting equal opportunities participation in decision making PSE average score is 42.5 whereas school obtained with a mean of 47.6 as shown in table-I.

In this study 176 (84%) of the respondents agree that school atmosphere is friendly and welcoming to the visitors (fig-2a), 172 (82%)

that school has the policy to promote cooperative and active learning through group activities, class discussion, assignments and community work

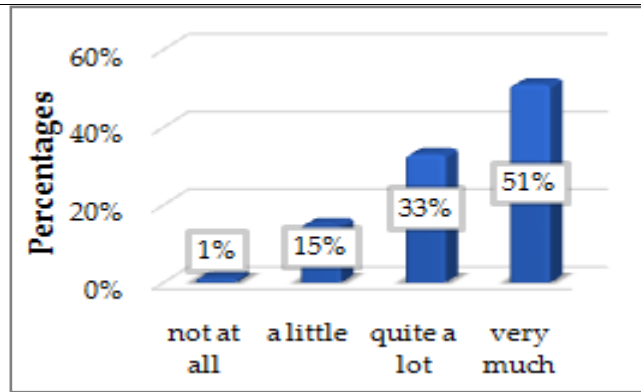


Figure-2(a): School friendly and welcoming to visitors.

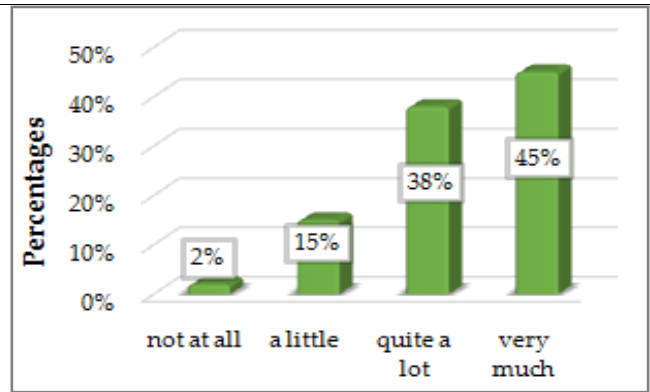


Figure-2(b): School policy on how to promote cooperative learning

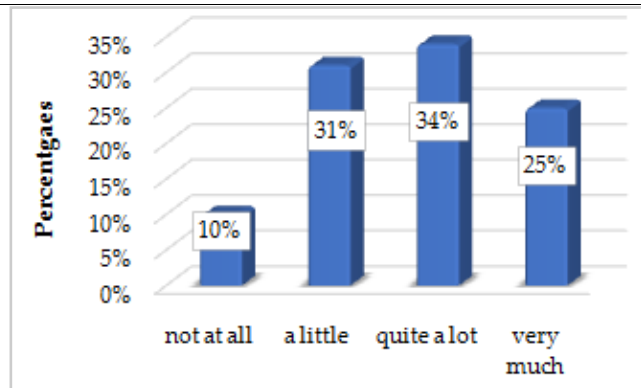


Figure-2(C): School discourages announcing the order of student.

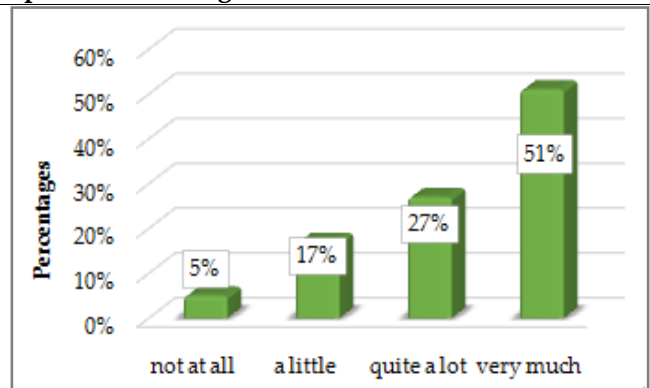


Figure-2(d): School has policy prohibiting physical punishment

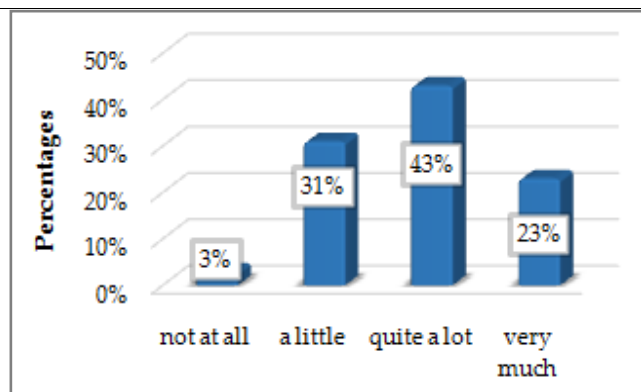


Figure-2E: Policy to Include 'Loners' / different in activities.

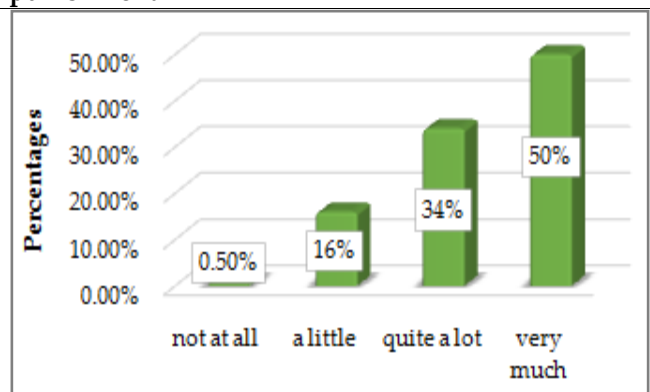


Figure-2(f): School invites parents to discuss the child's work.

respondents are of the opinion that school is an appealing place to work in as it provides support to teachers and provide chances to enhance their capabilities, 175 (83%) of the respondents said

(fig-2b) and 125 (59%) are of the opinion that school discourages to announce the order of the students (fig-2c). Regarding bullying, harassment and behavioral conduct of student, 163 (78%) are

of the opinion that school has the policy to prohibit physical punishment and 174 (83%) said that school discipline rules are clear to everyone and are enforced to be implemented at all level by all means (fig-2d). School has introduced a policy to include “loners” and “different” in their school activities which is supported by 138 (66%) of the respondents (fig-2e). 175 (84%) of the respondents said that school invites parents to discuss child’s work, any issues highlighted by staff and their home assignments (fig-2f)

## DISCUSSION

The PSE Profile is a series of questions related to the psychosocial environment of school, to generate awareness among teachers, administrators and parents about the importance of a healthy psychosocial setting at school and help to recognize the positive characteristics of school's environment. The current study was conducted to assess the current psychosocial environment of APS schools.

Positive student and teacher relationships can impact students’ motivation, academic achievement, attendance, successful adjustment and positive outcomes<sup>16-18</sup>. In our study the school is on the borderline average score of 75.4 which is just above the PSE average score of 69 in quality area of providing friendly, rewarding and supporting atmosphere to teachers, staff and students, indicating need to work on the area.

The average score of school in quality area of tolerating bullying and harassment is quite high which is in consistent with the result of the studies indicating that all children have the right to be protected from harm, violence and from cruel or humiliating punishments and communities, families and schools should communicate these rights in a way young people will understand<sup>17</sup>, to empower students so they may contribute to make schools and communities safer<sup>16,17,19</sup>.

Discipline that promotes socioemotional development is a key component of positive psychosocial environment of the school leading to healthier school climates, greater academic

success and lower mental health issues<sup>20,21</sup>. In APS schools discipline rules are clear to everyone and are enforced at each level by all means.

In this study half of the respondents are of the opinion that school discourages announcing the order of students in academic activities and support and promote cooperative and active learning with focus on group work, class discussion and community assignment which is supported by the fact that assigned reasonable school workloads, as excessive expectations on students and teachers can negatively affect stress and perseverance levels and school and home relationships<sup>22</sup>. Learning with a purpose beyond grades develops a more positive orientation to school and greater motivation to learn in a student when their studies are connected to broader purposes beyond just earning a grade<sup>16,23</sup>.

Inclusiveness and equity Issues include isolation, traditional racism, unequal disciplinary punishment, teacher and peer expectations of students of ethnic or racial minorities, influenced systematic discrimination in society and school<sup>24,25</sup>. In this study school has very much of the policy about the best way to include ‘loners’ and those who are recognized as ‘different’ in different school activities, to prevent the exclusion of student by peers and treated with respect and equality and all students are given equal chance of being successful.

## CONCLUSION

This study clearly shows that school needs to improve in quality area of providing friendly, rewarding and supportive atmosphere in school, cooperative and active learning and valuing development of creative activities. This research results will help school personnel to assess qualities of the school environment that support social and emotional well-being. It is a starting point leading to awareness, discussion and action by school personnel, students and parents. It will help them recognize and sustain those aspects of the school environment that support social and emotional well-being and improve aspects that help school to develop healthy policies, skills-

based health education and school health services. Pupils and teachers are likely to be the principle beneficiaries.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

This study has no conflict of interest to be declared by any author.

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