



## Introduction

In 2019, the Government of Pakistan launched the President's initiative to promote and improve mental health in schools, with an emphasis on technology to improve access to mental health. This 5-year initiative focuses on training teachers in skills and strategies to promote mental health in their schools and recognize and manage mental health problems early on.

Learning about mental health of school children is not “one more thing to do”! Every 1 in 5 children is having a mental health problem. These mental health challenges are severe enough to impair academic functioning of children. Studies show that teachers play an important role in promoting optimal development of children.

Therefore, an online training course was designed for teachers to promote socio-emotional development of school going children. This course was adapted from the evidence-informed mental health in schools package, developed by WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Online training course for teachers**

This course aims to equip teachers with knowledge and essential skills to manage children with socio-emotional problems. Through this course, teachers are not only able to help children but also help themselves by taking care of their own well-being.

This course is being offered in collaboration with the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination in Islamabad, Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Education Development in Lahore, Institute of Psychiatry, Benazir Bhutto Hospital in Rawalpindi, Rawalpindi Medical University in Rawalpindi, and King Edward Medical University in Lahore.

### **Pilot phase and results**

In 2020, the online training course for teachers was piloted in the sub-district of Gujar Khan in Rawalpindi. In this pilot phase, 320 teachers from 80 public schools were trained. The results of this training included:

improving the knowledge and skills of teachers to promote mental health in schools.

improving the ability of teachers to identify at risk groups, whereby 27% of children and adolescents who were at risk of developing mental health problems were identified.

training 10 school counsellors to provide continuous psychosocial support to adolescents who

are at risk of developing mental health problems.

## **Way forward**

The pilot phase of the President's initiative to promote and improve mental health in schools in Pakistan was completed in March 2021 and is being used to guide the next phase of this initiative, which will be rolled out across four other provinces in Pakistan. The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination signed an agreement with the Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Education Development and the Government of Punjab to step up action to promote and improve mental health in schools as part of the Universal Health Coverage agenda. Moreover, a cluster randomized control trial is being conducted to evaluate the impact of the President's initiative to better understand and address issues relating to implementation and policy, as well as the challenges of the ongoing COVID19 pandemic.

## **Related links**

[School mental health program: a brighter future for our children](#)

[Mental health in schools training package](#)

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