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## UNICEF Education - Adolescent Development and Participation

### Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Case Study

#### BANGLADESH

#### Improving students' mental health in Bangladesh

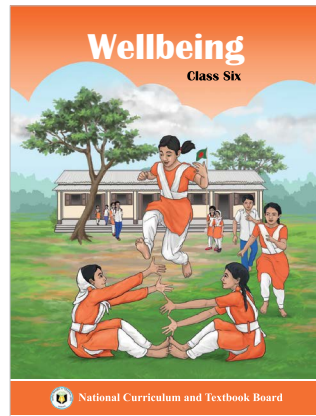
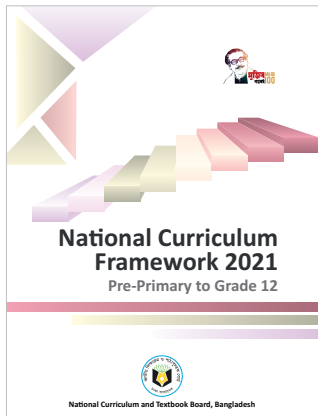
19 February 2024

In recent years, Bangladesh has made significant progress in addressing the mental health needs of its citizens. In 2018, the country approved a Mental Health Act and developed a mental health policy that prioritises community-based services and support. However, it was only during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all educational institutions were closed for long periods, that the urgency of addressing child and adolescent mental health in schools became more visible. The pandemic's impact on children's learning and overall well-being highlighted the need for immediate action to address mental health issues in schools.

To address the need for mental health support in schools, UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to introduce school-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programmes and integrate mental health and psychosocial well-being in the national curriculum transformation. The national curriculum framework has experiential learning at its core and covers pre-primary to grade 12. It includes ten learning areas that equip learners with the skills required to acquire core competencies. One of the learning areas covered is physical and mental health and well-being, which promotes the development of socio-emotional skills and teaches children to take care of their bodies and minds. Through learning experiences, students learn to understand their own and others' emotions and feelings, exchange and express opinions, participate effectively, introspect and evaluate, manage relationships, recognize and deal positively with successes and failures, and manage stress.

The new curriculum was introduced in all secondary schools in January 2023, benefiting over 5 million students in grades 6 and 7. In addition, with the support

of UNICEF, the Ministry of Education established a team of experts from different fields to develop textbooks and teacher guides on mental health and well-being. Children's books and instructional materials were tested in 62 schools, reaching 4,400 students and 600 teachers in 2022. To help incorporate additional support into their classroom instruction, teachers are given ongoing training and mentorship from experts in their respective subjects.



Moreover, the Ministry of Education has taken a proactive approach towards creating a learning environment that promotes positive mental health and well-being. The focus is to improve the capacity and well-being of teachers. For this reason, the MoE, with the support of UNICEF, has developed a five-day training manual for Psychological First Aid (PFA) and a three-hour online foundational training on mental health for teachers. It is mandatory for teachers to attend the online training before they can attend the in-person PFA training.

## RESULTS

- The National Curriculum Framework includes mental health literacy as one of the mandatory learning areas, with an average of 9 per cent of the total learning time.
- Since January 2023, over 30,000 secondary institutes have implemented the new curriculum. This curriculum includes various learning experiences, including assessing the school and home environment. Students develop contextual solutions and a plan to create a nurturing school environment.
- Over 30,000 teachers have gained knowledge and skills to integrate mental health and well-being into their

classrooms, while an additional 260,000 teachers have completed online PFA training.

- UNICEF is assisting the Ministry of Education in developing a framework that addresses teacher well-being, a crucial element in teachers' professional development.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Teachers are the main driving force behind the implementation of the new curricula; therefore, it was necessary to formulate and implement a teacher recruitment and development plan to improve the professional skills and attitudes of the existing teachers and prepare future teachers to implement the new curriculum.
- It is crucial to provide mental health education to students. However, it is equally important to involve the whole school community in creating a safe and supportive environment that promotes and protects the mental well-being of both students and teachers. This includes addressing their mental health needs in collaboration with other sectors.
- Forming a national multi-sectoral technical group to develop MHPSS content proved to be a successful strategy for creating teaching material for teachers and learners.
- Involving caregivers is crucial. The mental health and well-being learning area that was created encouraged learners to engage in learning experiences that facilitated interactions with parents and caregivers on topics such as self-care and emotional regulation.

## NEXT STEPS

UNICEF is providing technical support to the Ministry of Education in implementing the National Curriculum Framework. This includes developing and assessing textbooks, teacher training, and generating evidence on the effectiveness of interventions that promote mental health and well-being among learners and teachers. UNICEF is conducting implementation research to measure the effectiveness and impact of these interventions in 24 secondary schools across the country until December 2025. Additionally, UNICEF is advocating for an increase in mental health professionals in schools to provide targeted support.

**Cost effectiveness:** With a US\$ 300,000 investment in advocacy and technical support, UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Education in integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) into the national curriculum. As a result, a school-level support system was implemented in 30,000 secondary schools, benefiting over 5 million students. This programme has the potential to benefit all together more than 12 million learners by the year 2025. It is worth noting that the government covers most of the implementation costs.