The impact of mental health promotion on coping mechanism among Grade 11 physical sciences learners in Nkandla Circuit

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of mental health promotion on coping mechanisms among grade 11 physical sciences learners. A poor coping mechanism is associated with poor mental health and poor academic performance due to inadequate mental health resources and services. Participants selected using a purposive sampling technique from the accessible population, 08 physical sciences educators and 109 Grade 11 learners from eight targeted schools in the Nkandla Circuit of the Empangeni district made up the sample. The study used a mixed approach and a triangulation research design. The questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. Quantitative data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and thematic analysis was used for interviews. The findings revealed that physical sciences learners with mental health issues underperform because their coping mechanisms are compromised by inadequate mental health resources and services. The findings of this study are diagnostic, and they assist the Department of Education in improving learner support provided by school social workers in schools. Most participants indicated that school social workers visit the school less frequently, making it difficult to monitor the coping mechanisms of learners with mental health issues. Since most schools lack school social workers, the Department of Basic Education should assign more school social workers to assist learners with mental health issues. Further study is required to determine more academic coping mechanisms used by learners who have mental health issues under the supervision of school social workers. This suggests that if the inadequate supply of mental health support services and medical care were addressed seriously, the high proportion of poor coping mechanisms among grade 11 physical sciences learners with mental health would decrease.

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Introduction

There is a care gap for learners that are in need of mental health services globally (Cruz, Lamb, Giri, Vanderburg, Ferrarone, Bhattarai, & Matergia, 2021). The huge challenge is trained mental health personnel that can increase access to learners with mental health problems. Teachers may be suitable to be counsellors, who provide the necessary child mental health care. Even though teachers are relevant, having more experience in child development and behaviour, but they are not trained on how to determine and address learners with mental health issues through the academic journey.

Teachers can provide care generally, because of insufficient experience to educate and work with learners with mental health problem (Cruz et al., 2021). Teachers are overloaded with their educational duties, and to take counselling tasks may lead to a lack on their duties. Notably, there are some teachers with experience who have received the proper training and supervision in mental health promotion, but there are no published studies examining teachers’ opinions of acting as lay counsellors. As this is a health issue, the health department should be leading. There is no proper training for teachers, and the people that are trained are Learner Support Assistants (LSA) who are employed by the department of education. They are very few and most schools do not have LSA. There is a shortage of resources to assist learners with MHP. The department of basic education and school programmes of helping the learners with MHP in few schools are partially implemented, and other schools it is not implemented at all.

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There is a lack of communication between the parents of learners with MHP and the schools. Due to these contributing factors, learners with mental health problems are not coping in their school work, that lead to depression and anxiety. Some learners are repeating the grades due to the lack of coping mechanism, some they drop out of school and others they have suicidal thoughts, whereas some they commit suicide. Mental health issues have been identified as one of the biggest contributors of high school dropouts (Mudzielwana, Mbulaheni, & Kutame, 2017). There should be a future research on track and trace learners with MHP, to check their coping mechanism of academic performance and take precautionary measures on mental health problems among learners. It is difficult to apply mental health interventions in real-world settings (Regan, Lau, Barnett, Stadnick, Hamilton, Pesanti, & Brookman-Frazee, 2017).

The department of basic education, if they provided all with schools’ full service that include Learner support assistance (LSA) or school social worker being stationed in schools, we would not be in this situation of poor coping mechanism of learners with poor mental health that lead to poor academic achievements. The findings revealed that out of eight targeted school, only one school provided full service, the coping mechanism was far better than those that are not. The schools with the counsellors (LSA) can immediately identify the mental problems and psychological problems with the learners, because they are trained. The (LSA) help learners with mental health problems to do and finish their schoolwork, which is formal and informal tasks. The school counsellors (LSA) provide counselling to learners with poor mental health to uplift their emotions, person needs and self-esteem (Harbola, 2021). Furthermore, a school counsellor assists in the early identification of problem behaviours and takes appropriate efforts to prevent psychosocial problems from developing. If psychosocial difficulties are discovered after they have begun, the school counsellor attempts to find appropriate treatments, or, owing to time limits in school, looks for alternatives. The majority of studies, however, are silent regarding the coping mechanisms used by learners of physical sciences who have mental health issues and how much this affects their academic performance. This study therefore aims to fill this gap by examining how mental health promotion affects learners of physical sciences in grade 11 in order to better understand how these learners’ coping mechanisms affect their academic performance.

Literature review

The biggest challenge is lack of support services in secondary schools for learners with mental health problems that results in learners not coping in their academic achievements. Educators are faced with a huge problem of learners with mental health problems. Most secondary schools do not have appropriate school policies in place for learners with mental health problems. Educators and staff have insufficient training and the lack of understanding of their role in supporting learners with mental health problems. There is a grey area in identifying, assessing, monitoring and addressing barriers to learning with learners who have mental health needs. Few schools do have learner support assistant (LSA) or school social worker that are deployed by the basic department of education but there is not effectively output, because they are not regularly visiting to schools to check and monitor the copying mechanism of learners with poor mental health.

Previous studies indicated that, this issue of resource for learners with poor mental health is a problem (Lange, 2021). Failing to put mental health and wellbeing first, is a global problem that encompasses both domestic investment and international development assistance (Iemmi, 2021). There is a lack of precise data on expenditure and resource allocation and the national budgeting requires accurate data capturing. The UN’s mental health and psychosocial support agencies are utterly unable to meet the demands due to a worldwide financial investment crisis. (Iemmi, 2021); furthermore, the shortage of mental health specialists, together with chronic underinvestment in mental health services is the main reason for poor access to care globally, but there is a significant need for people to access mental health and mental health support services. Lack of support resources for learners with mental health issues causes these learners to drop out of school because they cannot cope. This suggests that if learners with mental health issues receive adequate support, learner dropout would be a concern. Lack of or inadequate support services from the department of education, school communities, and families for students struggling with mental health result in students quitting school (Wang, Cramer, Cheng, & Do, 2019), furthermore, common obstacles to receiving mental health care include stigmatization, inadequate mental health care policies, limited access to and affordability of mental health care services. The lack of access to necessary medications, which is particularly common in underdeveloped nations, severely limits the ability to treat psychological problems (Yoshi, Akazawa, & Saito, 2016), nearly 20% of nations, according to the World Health Organization, lack access to at least one common antidepressant, one antipsychotic, and one antiepileptic drug in primary care settings. The dearth of mental health care specialists in low- and middle-income nations, where there are typically 0.05 psychiatrists and 0.16 psychiatric nurses per 100,000 people, exacerbates this issue (Thorncroft & Henderson, 2016).

Even fewer resources are available for children and adolescents; according to the WHO, in 2005, there was only one child psychiatrist per one to four million people in the majority of low- and middle-income countries. Community-based mental health initiatives are especially uncommon in low-income countries, which only offer roughly 52% of them compared to 97% of high-income nations (Thorncroft, 2012). The high cost of psychiatric care, frequently resulting from high drug costs, creates significant financial barriers for patient care in many low- and middle-income nations (Kim, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2015), additionally, many insurance plans do not cover psychiatric disorders, making mental health care pricey for many people worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation WHO (2014), one-third of the world’s population lives in nations that spend less than 1% of their health budget on
mental health, and 25% of all countries do not offer disability compensation to those with mental diseases. Moreover, 31% of nations don't allocate any funds to mental health specifically in their public budgets.

Health and wellness programs for learners are chronically understaffed and underfunded in schools across the country. Over the previous five years, demand for services has climbed by 40%, yet overall enrolment has only increased by 5%. (Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2011. There have been appeals for greater financing and resources to meet both the acute needs posed by the pandemic and the pre-existing needs that have been made apparent by difficulties over the previous year. In light of the fact that 40% of undergraduate students have a mental health condition, a recent study of college and university presidents revealed that student mental health is their "top concern" (Dieleman, 2014).

According to the qualitative research, there is a connection between inadequate mental health services for learners with poor mental health and a lack of coping mechanisms, both of which have a detrimental effect on learners' academic performance and may even cause some of them to drop out. This suggests that the rate of learners dropping out would reduce if the lack of mental health services and support were taken seriously.

Theoretical framework

There is a number of mental health theories under psychology review, this study integrated two theories which is: Behavioral theory by Watson (2003) and Cognitive development theory by Piaget (1964) are focuses on coping mechanism of learners. The scientifically definition of coping mechanism is the sum of cognitive and behavioral efforts, which are constantly changing, that aim to handle particular demands, whether internal or external that are viewed as demanding (Busscher & Spinhoven, 2016), furthermore, simply put coping is an activity we do to seek and apply solutions to stressful situations or problems that emerge because of our stressors. The main focus is on the coping mechanism of grade 11 Physical sciences learners with mental health issues, are they coping or not? how is their mental and emotional state. Coping is a response or feedback on the particular event or incident (Day-Calder, 2017)

The study revealed that Physical sciences learners that have good mental health, they produce better academic achievement, because they do manage their coping mechanism, whereas those that have poor mental health, they produce poor academic achievement that led to maladaptive coping mechanism and behavior. Cognitive theory states that disordered beliefs produce excessive emotions that are associated with discordance behaviors of the individuals (Prawat, Piaget, & Inhelder, 1972).

Research and Methodology

Research design

The triangulation research design is a well-known and common approach used in mixed methods (Hirose & Creswell, 2018). This study followed triangulation design. A one-phase design that combines the quantitative and qualitative methods is used by researchers between the dates and with equal weight (Barton, 2020). Data from both the qualitative and quantitative fields were gathered concurrently. Both qualitative and quantitative data were equally weighted in this design. The purpose of this design is to use different data collection methods and integrate their data analysis to compliment each other on the same topic in order to best understand the research problem (Whiting, Petty, Littlechild, & Rogers, 2021).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in this investigation. It is predicated on the researcher's personal assessment (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). Homogeneous sampling procedure was utilized in this study because only learners in Grade 11 and teachers teaching Physical sciences, males and females were considered for inclusion in the sample. While only eight (n=8) Physical sciences teachers from eight targeted schools and (n=109) learners in Grade 11 who are talking Physical sciences at the eight target schools were chosen. These participants have a lot in common because both teachers and learners are involved in the teaching and learning of Physical sciences. Physical sciences educators' data were acquired using a qualitative method in the form of semi-structured interviews, whereas data for grade 11 Physical sciences learners were collected using a quantitative method in the form of questionnaire.

Data collection

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to probe an in-depth analysis of mental health promotion on learners academic understanding. According to Creswell (2018) interviews allow the researcher to pursue specific issues of concern that could lead to constructive suggestions. This study opted for semi-structured interviews because the interview method involves the use of open and closed questions. To ensure consistency across all participants, the researcher used a set of pre-planned questions. Whiting, Petty, Littlechild, and Rogers (2021) suggested that paper-and-pencil pre-tests and post-tests have limitations because they are not sufficiently open-ended and do not establish a friendly dialogue that permits probing for clarification.
Questionnaires

One set of questionnaires was distributed to eight targeted schools. The questionnaires comprised of twenty close-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale. The questions were coordinated with research objectives on the impact of mental health promotion on coping mechanism among grade 11 physical sciences learners. The questionnaires consisted of sections (A & B) that were completed by the participants. Section A was for biographical information. Section B was on the impact of mental health promotion on coping mechanism among grade 11 physical science learners. The questionnaires were completed anonymously. The cover letter that was part of the questionnaires explained the purpose of the study and assured confidentiality. The researcher gave a brief introduction to the participants and went through the questionnaire's instructions and some of the terms used in them.

Methods of data analysis

The completed questionnaires were submitted to a statistician for data to be captured and coded. Quantitative results were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 27 (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data from interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. All the recorded audio files were transcribed verbatim. Qualitative results were analysed using thematic analysis. Triangulation was then achieved by matching interview transcript responses with pre- and post-test written responses. Whiting, Petty, Littlechild, and Rogers (2021) suggested that interview transcript shed light on the sequencing and evolution of educators’ ideas.

Ethical and safety issues

Ethical and safety issues are critical issues in research in order to collect credible data. The ethical commitment involves doing what is right and appropriate in engaging with participants, observes (DP, 2022). This study was conducted in public schools and thus all the necessary ethical considerations were adhered to. The following considerations and permission were sought: A letter requesting permission to conduct research was submitted to the KwaZulu-Natal provincial Head of Department of Basic Education seeking permission to conduct research in the selected schools in Nkandla circuit under Empangeni District. A letter was also sent to the director of Nkandla district requesting permission to conduct research in high schools within the FET band in the district. A letter was also sent to the principals of the target schools seeking permission to conduct the research.

Limitations of the study

This study was carried out at eight schools in Nkandla circuit under Empangeni District. The targeted results cannot be applied broadly to all schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study only applied to learners studying Physical sciences in Grade 11; and Grade 11 Physical sciences educators. Owing to time constraints and the scope of the study only 109 Grade 11 Physical Science learners took part in quantitative and 8 Grade 11 Physical science educators for qualitative method research study about the impact of mental health promotion on coping mechanism among grade 11 physical sciences learners.

Presentation and discussion of the research data

Lack of support services in secondary schools

The problem is that the education department has programmes in place to help learners with mental health problem, but the majority of the schools do not implement them at all but they are there in black and white, whereas in some schools they are partially implemented. Physical science educators reported that, there were no programmes in their schools to help learners with mental health problems. They do not have proper plan of dealing with the learners with mental health problems even if they do identify them. The school social worker that are employed by the department of education are not in schools regularly and that makes learners with mental health not able to cope academically.

Here are some concerns:

“No, there is no special programme for the learners with mental health issues. Except the visit of the social worker that occasionally come to school during the term to attend to them” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educators interview school A, August, 2021).

“There is need for more visits of the social workers. The school needs more social workers who will provide regular support to the learners with mental health issues. The department can also assist some learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds with educational materials”. (Grade 11 Physical sciences educators interview school F, August, 2021).

“As teachers we do talk or counsel the learners with poor mental health, but I think they need professional who can support them well. The school has one social worker who visit, but the visit is not regular. The learners need to be regularly attended to, and also more social workers are needed in schools” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educators interview school G, August, 2021).

Poor mental health influences coping mechanism of learners’ academic performance

The majority (82%) of the respondents indicated that learners with poor mental health tended to perform poorer in Physical sciences compared to those that had good mental health. The factors that have been mentioned, resulted in the poor academic outcome of the learners. The level of absenteeism among learners with poor mental health, is very high. Even during the catch-up time when
educators ask learners to come on weekends, these learners do not come. They are always left behind and that contributes to their poor performance. One of the respondents indicated other reasons why most of the time they were absent from school, as follows:

“Yeah, as I’ve said, the school is in a rural area. So their homes are far away from where they are studying as they are here. So the problem is here, we don’t have such things like Tuck shops, ATM and other. Where are they going to find money? At the end. If the parents send them money, the learners have to go into town to go and collect that money. And that will stress the learner because the learners have to borrow money to go and collect that money. For example, if a parent has deposited maybe R1000 for the groceries, then the learner has to borrow maybe R100 to go there. At the end, the money is going to be the reduced. Because the learner has to now come back and pay that amount he or she had borrowed. Now at the end that is going to limit the amount of groceries that he or she is going to buy. And again, he or she has to go to the town during the school days. So that will stress the learner because as he or she is not around in school. The teaching and learning are continuing why he or she is absent at school” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educator interview school A, August 2021).

Other respondent said that

“As the school is in rural areas, most of the learners we teach here are not from here, they from other areas who are better than we are here. We are having the problem of water in the places where they live. And some of the learners are not used to going to the river and collect water. And maybe that’s one only, it stresses the learners a lot. And in terms of the electricity, we are having the problem of electricity in the rural areas, once it is raining and start storm, or once there is wind, the electricity will go off. And maybe that will affect the mental health of the learners who are not used to that environment, based on where they are coming from, maybe the urban areas. And they are new in terms of coming to the rural areas. Those are the other problems that contribute into their coping skills” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educator interview school C, August 2021).

The findings reveal that there is a direct link between the absenteeism of the learners’ mental health problem and academic performance. This finding compliments the previous findings by Ball (2016), who says that mental health is associated with learning challenges, low academic performance, student absenteeism, and behavioural issues. If the learners with mental health problems are at school, they are disrupting the classes, not finishing school tasks, not concentrating on what they are doing and they easily lose interest. This is confirmed by the previous study, which says that the behaviour of youngsters with mental health issues is described in various ways. Some become defiant, obstinate, wet their beds, talk while they sleep, and some even start stealing. Others become irrationally angry, lose control of their emotions, disregard teachers’ directions, fail to complete their schoolwork, change their entire way of life, and become constantly ill (Yoder et al., 2016). Most participants indicated that most learners were renting and they were not from the community. The majority of the learners are those who come from different provinces and are looking to enhance their performance after failing grade 12. This is due to the other causes that are discussed above for the renting learners as all of the targeted secondary schools that provide physical science. Because they are unfamiliar with rural living, these elements make it difficult for them to cope. They were left alone without the supervision of the parents and they stayed at their cottages drinking alcohol and smoking dagga.

Another participant responded as follows:

“Learners with mental health issues are struggling to cope academically. Their addiction to substance make them to be onerous in class. They sneak out of the class to drink or smoke. This habit does not give them concentration to their study. So, it is very easy to identify them based on their behaviour or performance in school” (Grade 11Physica science educator interview school B, August, 2021).

Another participant explained that:

“Especially in the Grade 10 and Grade 11. And it also affects grade 12. Because as a result, we want the learners to achieve good marks but due to mental health, they end up not coping, for example, some of the learners are not from here, nearby school, they live, they rent where they live. So sometimes we’ll find that they are having difficulties in terms of money from their parents, in terms of food, they don’t have food. At the end, this affects them in terms of studying, and at the end affects them in terms of the results, because this lead to the poor performance due to the mental health” (Grade 11 Physical science educator interview school D, August, 2021).

Some secondary school learners with poor mental health do not cope at school because of the challenges they are facing, for example there are no proper programs to help these learners, lack of health care services for them and there is no track record to assist them in their performance. Some learners do drop out permanently from school because they are not coping at all. They end up being drug addicts and some return to school later. During the interview they revealed that their performance is much better compared to the previous one. Previous studies show that some learners with mental health do commit suicide. The bad consequences about poor mental health are that, some learners between the age of 10-24, commit suicide and others drop out of school (Wang, 2015).

The problem of coping mechanism of learners with mental health problem escalates even further when they are in the tertiary level. Most university students are not completing their studies because during their secondary or higher education, they suffered from mental health problems (Kirsh et al., 2016). The concern about the mental health issues of the university students has grown over the past years. There is a need for university students who have experienced post-secondary mental health problems to come forward to

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seek help so that they will be able to fulfill their career and have a productive future. To become a university student is such a huge change where students have to stand on their feet without a parent supervision. One of the challenges is to adjust to the university life since it is difficult for the university student with mental health issues.

![Figure 1: poor mental health learners are not coping with their school work](image)

Most of the respondents (82%) agree that learners with poor mental health are not coping with their school work, 11% is not sure and 7.4% disagrees. This finding indicates that there is a huge negative impact for the learners with poor mental health in their school work. Learners with mental health problems have poor attendance, have difficulty in completing tasks and show negative attitude towards peers and teachers and that affects their academic performance (Hjorth, Bilgrav, & Frandsen, 2016). Young people's mental health issues are an international challenge. (Patel, 2007). There is a continuation of secondary school poor mental health at the tertiary level by learners because those learners are not coping at the higher institution. Some of them did not finish their degrees because they experienced mental health issues during their secondary or higher schooling. (Kirsh et al., 2016). Over the past few years, concern for the mental health of university students has increased. Learners with mental health concerns frequently require a variety of services in order to improve their coping skills because, if they do not, they will repeat grades and eventually drop out of school.

Table 1: Demographic information on years in phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in phase</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Years</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Years+</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings suggested that learners do repeat grades. Learners who repeated twice are predominant in percentage terms, followed by those who repeated four times and more.

Table 2: Learners with mental health problems do repeat the grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents (57%) agreed that learners with mental health issues did repeat the grades, 17% not sure and 27% disagree. The result that showed the years in a phase indicated that, 25% repeated twice and 31% repeated more than three times. This result means that learners with mental health problems do repeat the grades, because of their poor coping skills. Mental health is linked to
difficulties in schools with poor academic performance that leads to absenteeism and disciplinary concerns of the learners (Ball, 2016).

One of the respondents said:

“In that case, like I say we have two learners of that kind, leading to some repeaters. You find out that you’re going to class the following year and they are repeaters. They will have the like a negative attitude, even towards you as a teacher, we find out that the learner is not behaving in class. You see, he or she thinks she knows everything in class, and some others repeating a grade, it becomes a wake up call for them attitude” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educator interview school F, August, 2021).

The dearth of supports for kids with mental health concerns has an impact on a learner's potential to repeat a grade. As a result, a lack of services adds to kids' poor mental health, making it challenging for them to perform in class and forcing them to repeat grades frequently (Moran, Baruch, Azaiza, & Lachman, 2015). Both the quantitative (57%) and qualitative findings indicate that repeating classes is common among learners with poor mental health, sometimes even more than once. The reason why learners repeat classes is because they are struggling to cope, which has an impact on their academic performance. If the learners’ poor mental health is adequately managed by monitoring their coping mechanisms, there won’t be any repetition of grades by the learners.

![Image](Figure 2: learners’ drop out because of mental health problem)

The majority (75%) of the respondents agrees that learners drop out because of their mental health issues that lead to poor coping mechanism on their academic achievement and only 12% of the respondents disagrees. About 20% of the study learners, owing to mental health issues, leave school (Keh, Yong, & Chong, 2022). The findings show that between 20% to 40% of learners who entered secondary school, but did not complete it when they reached the age of 25 (OECD, 2014). The outcomes of dropping out of learners do not affect only education by losing a lot of money, but it also leads to crime and poverty because of the high rate of unemployment and low income that affects the economy (De Ridder, 2012). The bad consequences about poor mental health is that some learners between the ages of 10-24, commit suicide and others drop out of school (Wang, 2015).

Here are some concerns:

“you see some even drop out of school, but others they just change the school or just change to other subjects to leave science. You see” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educators interview school D, August, 2021).

“The outcome will be drop out. And then the other ones will be more into gangsters even while in high school, you see. And then some learners now tend to find refuge in substance abuse as I said earlier. You see, just because of his depression, they have, this distress they have because of their performance, and then they go and find refuge in drugs” (Grade 11 Physical sciences educators interview school C, August, 2021).

Dropout rates among secondary learners were highly correlated with poor mental health. Compared to high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, suffer from bad health, live in poverty, receive public assistance, and become single parents of kids who also drop out of school (Kwangsoo Kim, 2016). Only 3% of Americans who are actively involved in society are dropouts, who are also more than eight times more likely to be in jail or prison than high school graduates, as well as four times less likely to volunteer in their communities and half as likely to vote (Legters & Balfanz, 2010)

Academic achievement and adolescent mental illness are directly correlated. Some learners may perform poorly in class or leave school as a result of mental illness. High school dropouts are more prone to suffer from persistent mental health conditions like depression (Wang, Cramer, Cheng, & Do, 2019) Inability to keep decent grades can lead to mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These disorders are likely to interfere with a learner’s capacity to cope when they start to manifest, which can lead to even worse academic performance (Wang et al.,2019), furthermore there is a spiralling downward trend where both performance and mental health continue to deteriorate. To determine whether the high school dropout rate is directly related to mental health issues, however, little study has been done. Numerous variables that influence the choice to drop out are listed in a
report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These include things like a low level of respect for authority, a low socioeconomic status, and subpar academic performance (Benders, 2011). There is no mention of mental disease in the report. According to Canadian experts, older kids who are depressed are twice as likely to drop out of high school than their classmates who are not depressed. In the year preceding dropout, this was the first study of its sort to examine depression symptoms in high school pupils.

Conclusions

The findings of this study revealed that learners learning physical sciences who have poor mental health also perform poorly academically because they are unable to cope with their academic, emotional, and psychological needs, in addition to consuming drugs or other substances. Furthermore, some learners repeat grades, and some of them drop out school altogether as a result of anxiety and stress. Physical sciences is a challenging subject in general, but it is even more difficult for the learners who have mental health issues and lack access to effective interventions to help them develop better coping mechanisms. Between the fields of health and education, there is a discrepancy in communication that may make it difficult to execute persistent therapies for mental health programs. By utilizing suitable techniques for coping, the two professions should be combined to find a way to narrow the academic achievement gap between the learners with issues with mental health and those without. Lack of mental health resources and healthcare services, such as the issue of school social workers who do not regularly visit the school to assist, monitor, and provide counselling to the learners with poor mental health concerns, are the main contributors to the learners’ coping mechanisms. Due to mental health issues at the secondary schools in rural locations where the researcher was conducting the study, the Physical sciences the learners were particularly vulnerable

Recommendations

This study therefore recommends the department of basic education station more school social workers at all schools to screen, identify, and assess learners with mental health problem (MHP). The school social worker will communicate with resource people from various departments and organizations. In order to establish and uphold a supportive learning environment, they will encourage parental and community involvement, as well as offer counselling and support for the learners with MHP and their families by organizing support groups. They will offer pertinent information, such as sending representatives from FAMSA, Health, the police, rehab centres, and other organizations to schools once a term to discuss various topics that will help learners maintain and enhance their coping skills, which will help them do better in class. The schools should create an efficient tool to track and monitor the coping mechanisms of students with MHP, report to the DoE: schools should provide various activities to accommodate all learners, such as meditation sessions before the start of classes and after school before learners hastily rush to their respective homes, to improve learners’ coping mechanisms.

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All the Authors read and agree to the published version of the manuscript.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, Methodology Mzobe N.P data analysis Dr T.W. Chinaka.

Informed Consent Statement: The parents/guardian grand the consent for their children since most of them were minors and the learners that are 18 years of age and above signed the consent form.

Conflicts of Interest: There was no conflict of interest.

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