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## **Mental Health Status of Teacher Trainees: Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Mental health is a fundamental determinant of academic achievement, professional effectiveness, and personal well-being. Teacher trainees, also referred to as B.Ed. trainees or pre-service teachers, represent a particularly vulnerable population whose mental health bears critical implications for the quality of future education. The present paper undertakes a theoretical exploration and conceptual analysis of the mental health status of teacher trainees, drawing upon established psychological theories, models, and empirical literature. The study reviews key theoretical frameworks including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the Stress-Diathesis Model, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Seligman's PERMA Model of Well-being. The paper also examines socio-demographic, academic, and institutional factors influencing mental health, with specific reference to the context of urban India, including Ahmedabad city. Findings from the theoretical review suggest that academic pressure, teaching practice anxiety, identity formation challenges, inadequate social support, and financial stress are primary antecedents of poor mental health among teacher trainees. The paper concludes with recommendations for teacher education institutions to adopt a proactive, supportive, and wellness-oriented approach toward the psychological needs of trainees.

**Keywords: mental health, teacher trainees, B.Ed., pre-service teachers, stress, well-being, coping, theoretical framework**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Mental health has emerged as one of the most pressing concerns in education across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) defines mental health as a state of well-



being in which an individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community. This comprehensive understanding of mental health transcends the mere absence of mental illness and encompasses positive psychological functioning across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions.

Teacher trainees occupy a unique transitional space between being students and becoming professional educators. During the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme, they are simultaneously expected to master disciplinary content knowledge, acquire pedagogical skills, undergo teaching practice in schools, manage academic examinations, and navigate personal and social challenges. This multifaceted role demands considerable psychological resources and makes this population particularly susceptible to stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Chaplain, 2008; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007).

In the Indian context, and specifically in urban centres like Ahmedabad, the landscape of teacher education is shaped by a competitive academic environment, cultural expectations, gender roles, and socio-economic pressures. Despite growing awareness of student mental health in higher education, teacher trainees remain a largely underserved and under-researched group within the mental health discourse. The present paper attempts to bridge this gap by offering a rigorous theoretical and conceptual analysis of the mental health status of teacher trainees, situating the discussion within relevant psychological models and examining the multidimensional factors that shape their psychological well-being.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF MENTAL HEALTH**

The concept of mental health has evolved considerably over the past century. Early definitions were primarily deficit-oriented, focusing on the absence of mental disorders. However, contemporary scholarship has shifted toward a positive and holistic conceptualization. Jahoda (1958) identified six dimensions of positive mental health: positive self-attitudes, growth and self-actualization, integration of personality, autonomy, accurate perception of reality, and environmental mastery. This seminal framework laid the groundwork for understanding mental health as a multidimensional construct.

The two-continua model proposed by Keyes (2002) further distinguishes between mental illness and mental health as two related but distinct dimensions. According to this model, the absence of mental illness does not automatically imply the presence of mental health. A person



may be free from diagnosable psychiatric conditions and yet experience low levels of psychological, emotional, or social well-being. This conceptualization is particularly relevant for teacher trainees, many of whom may not present clinical pathology but nevertheless experience subclinical distress that impairs their academic and professional functioning.

In the educational context, mental health encompasses academic-related well-being, interpersonal functioning, emotional regulation, and sense of purpose and meaning. Duckworth and Seligman (2005) argued that psychological capital — encompassing self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience — is a more powerful predictor of academic success than intelligence alone, emphasizing the central role of positive mental health in educational outcomes.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS UNDERPINNING MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHER TRAINEES**

#### **3.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchical theory of human motivation provides a foundational lens through which to understand the psychological needs of teacher trainees. The pyramid of needs — comprising physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization — suggests that higher-order needs cannot be effectively pursued unless lower-order needs are adequately met. For teacher trainees, unmet safety needs (e.g., financial insecurity, lack of stable housing), deficits in belongingness (e.g., social isolation, poor peer relations), or low esteem (e.g., academic failure, negative feedback during teaching practice) can severely compromise their mental health and obstruct their path toward professional self-actualization.

#### **3.2 Stress-Diathesis Model**

The Stress-Diathesis Model, originally developed in the context of psychopathology (Monroe & Simons, 1991), posits that mental disorders arise from the interaction between pre-existing biological or psychological vulnerabilities (diatheses) and environmental stressors. Applied to teacher trainees, this model suggests that individuals with pre-existing vulnerabilities — such as a history of anxiety, low self-esteem, or insecure attachment styles — are at higher risk of developing mental health difficulties when confronted with the stressors inherent in teacher education



programmes. The model has important implications for identifying at-risk trainees early and providing targeted psychological support.

### **3.3 Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)**

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model conceptualizes stress not as an objective environmental event but as a product of the dynamic transaction between person and environment. Stress is experienced when an individual perceives that environmental demands exceed their available coping resources. Primary appraisal involves evaluating whether a situation is benign, irrelevant, or threatening; secondary appraisal involves assessing one's ability to cope with the perceived threat. For teacher trainees, the teaching practice component, examination pressure, and role ambiguity are commonly appraised as threatening when self-efficacy is low, resulting in heightened psychological distress. Coping strategies — whether problem-focused (addressing the stressor directly) or emotion-focused (regulating emotional response) — mediate the relationship between stress appraisal and mental health outcomes.

### **3.4 Seligman's PERMA Model of Well-being**

Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model identifies five pillars of psychological well-being: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This framework offers a constructive lens for evaluating the well-being of teacher trainees beyond symptom reduction. Teacher training programmes that foster positive emotions through encouraging feedback, promote deep engagement through meaningful pedagogical tasks, nurture healthy relationships among peers and mentors, connect trainees to the larger purpose of education as a social mission, and celebrate academic and professional accomplishments are more likely to cultivate psychologically flourishing future teachers. The PERMA model has been increasingly applied to educational settings as a framework for institutional well-being promotion (Kern et al., 2015).

### **3.5 Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that human beings have three innate psychological needs: autonomy (sense of volition and self-authorship), competence (sense of effectiveness in interactions with the environment), and relatedness (sense of



connection with significant others). When teacher training environments satisfy these needs, trainees experience intrinsic motivation, positive affect, and greater psychological well-being. Conversely, controlling, non-supportive, or competitively structured training environments that frustrate these basic needs contribute to amotivation, anxiety, and burnout. SDT has been widely applied in teacher education research to understand motivation, satisfaction, and well-being (Roth et al., 2007).

#### **4. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHER TRAINEES**

##### **4.1 Academic Pressure and Examination Anxiety**

The B.Ed. curriculum is academically demanding, requiring trainees to demonstrate competence across theory papers, practical assignments, and teaching internships. Examination anxiety — defined as apprehension and worry about performance evaluation — has been consistently linked to poor academic outcomes and psychological distress among teacher trainees (Ergene, 2003). In the competitive academic environment of Gujarat's teacher education institutions, fear of failure and pressure to secure high marks can exacerbate anxiety and reduce self-efficacy.

##### **4.2 Teaching Practice Stress**

The teaching practice or internship component is a defining and often stressful experience for teacher trainees. Trainees are expected to plan lessons, deliver instruction to real students, manage classroom behaviour, and simultaneously be assessed by supervising teachers and college faculty. Research by Capel (1997) identifies role overload, lack of adequate support, and fear of negative evaluation as primary stressors during teaching practice. Anxiety related to student discipline, parent expectations, and supervisor feedback can significantly undermine the mental well-being of trainees during this phase.

##### **4.3 Identity and Role Transition**

The transition from student to teacher-in-training involves a complex process of professional identity formation. Trainees must negotiate their emerging teacher identity while still inhabiting the role of learner, often experiencing tension, uncertainty, and role conflict (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This identity ambiguity can be a significant source of psychological distress, particularly for those who have limited



prior exposure to teaching and who hold idealized or unrealistic expectations about the profession.

#### **4.4 Socio-demographic Variables**

Gender, caste, socio-economic background, and locality are important determinants of mental health among teacher trainees. Studies conducted in the Indian context have found that female trainees report higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to male trainees, potentially due to dual role expectations and social pressures (Sharma & Sharma, 2019). Trainees from lower socio-economic backgrounds may experience additional financial stress and limited access to support resources. First-generation learners and trainees from rural areas transitioning to urban training environments may also face cultural dislocation, contributing to reduced psychological well-being.

#### **4.5 Social Support and Peer Relationships**

Social support is consistently identified as a significant protective factor for mental health. Cohen and Wills (1985) demonstrated that perceived social support buffers the impact of stressors on psychological well-being through both direct and stress-buffering effects. For teacher trainees, supportive relationships with peers, faculty, and family members serve as crucial psychological resources. Institutional cultures that are competitive, indifferent, or interpersonally hostile can erode social support networks and amplify psychological vulnerability.

#### **4.6 Institutional and Organizational Factors**

The culture, leadership, and resources of teacher education institutions significantly shape the mental health of their students. Institutions that prioritize academic performance over holistic development, lack formal counselling services, and fail to create safe spaces for dialogue about emotional well-being are likely to produce higher rates of psychological distress among their trainees. Conversely, institutions that adopt a student-centred philosophy, provide accessible mental health services, and integrate well-being into the curriculum promote positive psychological outcomes (Larcombe et al., 2016).



## 5. MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHER TRAINEES: THE INDIAN AND AHMEDABAD CONTEXT

India's higher education system, including teacher education, is undergoing rapid transformation. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) explicitly recognizes the importance of teacher well-being and emotional intelligence as prerequisites for quality education. Despite this policy recognition, the implementation of mental health support in teacher education institutions across India, including Gujarat, remains fragmented and inadequate.

Studies conducted in Gujarat and across urban India have revealed significant levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among B.Ed. trainees (Patel & Trivedi, 2018). Ahmedabad, as a rapidly growing metropolitan city, presents a unique confluence of urban stressors — including competitive academic environments, rapid socio-cultural change, nuclear family structures, and economic pressures — alongside traditional collectivistic social norms that may stigmatize help-seeking behaviour.

Stigma associated with mental health remains a formidable barrier to help-seeking in the Indian context. Trainees experiencing psychological distress may be reluctant to seek professional support due to fear of judgment, lack of awareness about available services, or cultural beliefs that frame mental health problems as signs of personal weakness. This underscores the need for both destigmatization efforts within teacher education institutions and the development of culturally sensitive mental health interventions.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

The theoretical analysis presented in this paper has several important implications for the design and delivery of teacher education programmes:

First, teacher education institutions should integrate mental health literacy into their curricula, ensuring that trainees develop not only pedagogical competence but also awareness of their own psychological needs and the psychological needs of their future students. Second, institutional counselling services should be made accessible, non-stigmatizing, and responsive to the specific stressors of the teacher training environment. Third, mentoring programmes that pair experienced teachers or senior trainees with new B.Ed. students can provide crucial emotional and professional support during vulnerable periods such as teaching practice. Fourth,



assessment practices within teacher education should be reformed to reduce unnecessary evaluation-related anxiety and to recognize diverse forms of competence beyond written examinations. Finally, policymakers and university administrators should prioritize the creation of emotionally safe, inclusive, and supportive institutional environments as a systemic investment in the quality of future education.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The mental health of teacher trainees is not merely a personal concern but a matter of profound educational and social significance. Future teachers who enter classrooms burdened by unresolved psychological distress are less likely to be effective, empathetic, and resilient educators. The theoretical frameworks reviewed in this paper — from Maslow's hierarchy and the stress-diathesis model to Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory, Seligman's PERMA model, and self-determination theory — collectively illuminate the multidimensional nature of mental health and the diverse pathways through which psychological well-being can be promoted or undermined during teacher training.

A conceptual understanding of these frameworks is indispensable for researchers, educators, and policymakers who seek to address the mental health needs of teacher trainees in Ahmedabad and beyond. Theoretical clarity must, however, be complemented by empirical investigation to capture the lived experiences and contextual realities of this population. Future empirical studies should employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the prevalence, determinants, and consequences of mental health challenges among B.Ed. trainees, with particular attention to gender, caste, locality, and institutional context.

Ultimately, investing in the mental health of teacher trainees is investing in the future of education itself. A generation of psychologically well, motivated, and resilient teachers is the most powerful resource for building an equitable and flourishing educational system.

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