RELEVANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH IN CHARACTER FORMATION AND STUDENT COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is not only related to the absence of mental disorders, but also includes emotional well- being, the ability to manage stress, establish positive social relationships, and be able to adapt to the pressures of life. Currently, students face various demands and challenges in their lives. Starting from demands in the family, demands at school, challenges in relationships, and challenges in living in society. Value demands from parents, challenges and dynamics of peer relationships, and community norms are factors that influence students' mental health. Therefore, mental health can also affect students' character and competence. This study aims to examine in depth the relevance between mental health and character formation and improving academic competence. Data were collected from various scientific references such as books, journals, and other documents that discuss related topics. The analysis techniques used are the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. The results of the study show that students with good mental health tend to be able to manage emotions, think critically, and demonstrate behavior that is in line with moral values such as responsibility, empathy, and discipline. This supports optimal academic achievement and the formation of a complete character. On the other hand, students who experience mental disorders such as stress or anxiety show decreased motivation, learning difficulties, and deviant behavior. Therefore, synergy is needed between schools, teachers, parents, and the community in creating a learning environment that supports mental health. This study concludes that the success of education is not only assessed from the cognitive aspect, but also the mental and emotional readiness of students. Ideal education is education that balances the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of students.

Keywords: mental health, character, academic, students

INTRODUCTION

Education is an ethical endeavor of humans, for humans and for society. Education can develop a person's talents to an optimal level within the limits of individual nature, with the aim that each human being can honorably participate in the development of humans and their society continuously achieving a higher dignity of life (Nasution, 2014). Education is an element that cannot be separated from humans. Starting from the womb to adulthood and then old age, humans experience the process of education. Education is a light that guides humans in determining the direction, purpose, and meaning of this life.

In the context of 21st century education, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills are three important domains that must be developed in a balanced manner. One aspect that greatly influences the success of the educational process, but is often overlooked, is the mental health of students. Mental health is not only related to the absence of mental disorders, but also includes emotional well-being, the ability to manage stress, establish positive social relationships, and be able to adapt to life's pressures. Mental health is crucial for the development of students, especially students in adolescence (Pertiwi & Sihotang, 2023). Mental well-being enables individuals to be more productive, able to make the right decisions, and build healthy communication and relationships.

Currently, students face various demands and challenges in their lives. Starting from demands in the family, demands at school, challenges in socializing, and challenges in living in society. Value demands from parents, challenges and dynamics of peer relationships, and community norms are factors that influence students' mental health. All of these can be triggers for the emergence of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems in students. Students' mental health can affect their respective education. Education related to mental health is not something that refers to the object of education intentionally, but to the circumstances, atmosphere, relationships between people, and attitudes shown (Setiawan et al., 2022). Therefore, a person with an integrated personality has several aspects including physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual.

The reasons for the need for character education include: (1) Many young people hurt each other because of their weak awareness of moral values, (2) Providing moral values to the young generation is one of the most important functions of civilization, (3) The role of schools as character educators becomes increasingly important when many children receive little moral teaching from their parents, society, or religious institutions, (4) There are still moral values that are universally accepted such as care, trust, respect, and responsibility, (5) Democracy has a special need for moral education because democracy is a rule of, for and by society, (6) There is no such thing as value-free education. Schools teach value-free education. Schools teach values every day through design or without design, (7) Commitment to character education is important if we want to and continue to be good teachers, and (8) Effective character education makes schools more civilized, cares about society, and refers to increased academic performance (Wahono, 2018).

In addition, the competency of students covering aspects of knowledge, skills, and attitudes is greatly influenced by their mental condition. In the learning process, concentration, memory, and critical thinking skills are highly dependent on a stable mental condition. When students feel anxious, depressed, or emotionally uncomfortable, the learning process will not run optimally. Therefore, character education and competency strengthening cannot be separated from attention to mental health.

Based on this background, this seeks to review in depth the relevance of mental health in the formation of character and competence of students. This study is important to provide an understanding that educational success is not only measured by academic achievement, but also by the mental and emotional readiness of

students in facing various life challenges. Through this understanding, it is hoped that educational institutions, teachers, and parents can work together in creating a learning environment that supports students' mental health in order to form a generation that is intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually intelligent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental Health Concept

Mental health has an important meaning in a person's life, with a healthy mind, a person can carry out activities as a living creature (UGM, 2021). A healthy mental condition will help a person's development towards a better direction in the future (Larissa, 2020). Mental health is a condition where a person is able to realize their own abilities, can cope with normal life pressures, can work productively and is able to contribute to their environment. Meanwhile, mental health problems are defined as a person's inability to adapt to the demands and conditions of the environment that result in certain disabilities. Mental health problems that are often experienced by adolescents are friendship problems. Mental health is harmony in life that is manifested between mental functions, the ability to face problems faced, and being able to feel happiness and their abilities positively (Daradjat, 1988). Furthermore, he emphasized that mental health is a condition where individuals are free from symptoms of mental disorders (neuroses) and from symptoms of mental illness (psychoses).

Mental Health Factors

Mental health is influenced by various interrelated factors, both internal and external. Three main factors related to mental health are lifestyle including bullying, emotional regulation, cyberbullying, discipline, and motivation (Aisyaroh et al., 2022). In addition, mental health is not only about the psychological and medical aspects, but also consists of several factors, including interpersonal, family, community, and social relationship factors (Mahardika, 2017). Various scientific methods are needed for preventive activities in schools including human resource mapping, valid and reliable evaluation, comprehensive mental health screening, and development of logic models, choosing a theory of change, monitoring, and the expected impact of mental health programs (Nurochim, 2020).

Character building

Character education as a process of transforming life values to grow and develop in a person's personality so that it becomes one in the behavior of that person's life (Kesuma et al., 2011). The relationship between students and teachers regarding mental health problems in children will be influenced by the relationship between students and teachers, because teachers provide character education supplies so that it will affect the development of children's mental health (Nurhafni et al., 2017). The relationship between students and teachers is said to be good if both teachers and student have an honest and open attitude, depend on each other, and are free to grow and develop their uniqueness and creativity (Idi, 2012). The results of this study are supported by research conducted by (Preeti, 2013) which states that the development of students' mental health is influenced by the relationship between teachers who provide motivation for students to be able to understand emotions in students' lives so that they can influence the use of emotions in everything that will be expressed in everyday life.

METHOD, DATA, AND ANALYSIS

This study uses a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is an approach used to understand phenomena in depth through a study of the context, meaning, and social processes that occur naturally. Qualitative research does not focus on numerical data, but on the interpretation of social reality based on information obtained from literature or field sources. The type of research used in this study is a literature study. Literature study is an analysis technique by reviewing literature, notes, reports related to the problems to be solved (Firmansyah & Masrun, 2021). This method is used to explore theories, previous findings, and concepts related to the topics of mental health, character education, and student competence. The data analysis techniques used are data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Factors That Affect Mental Health

A person's mental health is greatly influenced by various factors that are interrelated with each other. According to (Aisyaroh et al., 2022) according to the analysis of 14 articles referring to the framework influences on mental health adapted from *Social Determinants of Health,* the results showed that there are 3 main factors related to mental health, namely lifestyle which includes bullying, emotional regulation, cyberbullying, discipline, and motivation. Next are social and community relationships which include support from friends, social media, online games, and peer counseling. The third factor is socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions which include attachment to religious teachings, principles and practices. Mental health does not only talk about the psychological and medical aspects, but also consists of several factors, including interpersonal factors, family, society, and social relationships (Mahardika, 2017).

Furthermore, according to the factors that influence mental health include internal and external factors. Internal factors include physical condition and age, while external factors include social interaction and family support. So, it is important to know that mental health is influenced by 3 main factors, namely lifestyle, social and community relationships, and socio-economic factors and environmental conditions. These factors are interrelated with each other and can affect mental health through physical condition, age, social relationships, and family support. Awareness of these factors is important to provide an understanding and treatment of mental health.

The Relationship Between Mental Health and Character Formation of Students, Character education as a process of transforming life values to grow and develop in a person's personality so that it becomes one in the person's life behavior (Kesuma et al., 2011). This shows thatcharacter education does not merely teach values theoretically, but is a process of internalizing life values that takes place continuously. Values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and hard work are internalized and made part of the individual's personality, thus forming patterns of thought, attitude, and action in everyday life. In other words, character education aims to make individuals not only know about values, but also be able to practice them consistently in every aspect of their lives.

Mental Health as the Basis for Positive Character

Good mental health allows individuals to think clearly, control their emotions, and act rationally. When students feel emotionally calm and psychologically safe, they are more open to receiving guidance on character values from the educational environment. They tend to have high empathy, tolerance, a sense of responsibility,

and a collaborative spirit, all of which are key aspects of character education. A mentally healthy person is someone who feels calm, safe, and peaceful in their spirit or heart. This condition allows mental functions such as feelings, thoughts, and will to work harmoniously. This balance is an important foundation in character formation because someone who is anxious, easily anxious, or emotionally unstable will find it difficult to internalize moral values consistently.

The Role of School Environment and Interpersonal Relationships

The importance of a supportive school environment also cannot be ignored. The relationship between teachers and students greatly influences mental health and the character-building process. Teachers are not only as transmitters of lesson materials, but also as role models and moral guides. The relationship between students and teachers that is based on honesty, openness, and mutual trust can create a positive psychological climate for students' mental development (Nurhafni., et al, 2017). In line with that, it is emphasized that a healthy relationship between students and teachers is a relationship that supports mutual growth, provides space for freedom of expression, and encourages the development of students' potential and creativity (Idi, 2012). This is where mental health emerges as a mediator that determines whether students can respond to character values well or not.

Mental Health Supports Self-Regulation and Moral Values

The formation of a strong character cannot be separated from the students' ability to regulate themselves (self-*regulation)*. Effective self-regulation is highly dependent on mental stability. When students can manage emotions such as anger, disappointment, or fear, they are also able to make moral decisions, show respect for others, and be responsible for their actions. Motivation and emotional support from teachers influence how students understand their own emotions and those of others, and determine how they express those feelings in everyday life. In other words, mental health is the basis for emotional intelligence.

Mental Imbalance and Its Impact on Character

On the other hand, mental health disorders such as excessive stress, depression, or untreated anxiety can hinder the process of internalizing character values. Students who experience psychological stress tend to exhibit deviant behavior such as disobedience, cheating, getting angry easily, and even withdrawingThis shows that poor mental health not only impacts academic aspects, but also inhibits the growth of positive moral and social values. An unstable mental condition can cause interpersonal relationship disorders and inner conflicts that hinder the development. Therefore, character education will only be effective if supported by efforts to maintain and strengthen students' mental health on an ongoing basis.

Mental Health Supports Academic Competence
Cognitive Function

Mental health directly affects cognitive functions such as concentration, memory, logical thinking, and decision-making. Students who are in a stable mental state will be better able to understand the subject matter, focus on learning, and are not easily distracted by emotional disturbances. In contrast, students who experience mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, and depression tend to have difficulty absorbing lessons, often feel tired, and are less motivated to participate in academic activities. Mentally healthy individuals are able to cope with the pressures of everyday life and work productively in their communities. This statement shows that

mental health not only functions in a social context, but is also very important in academic performance.

The Influence of Emotions on Motivation and Achievement

Stable emotions support intrinsic motivation in learning. When students feel calm, safe, and valued in the school environment, they are more enthusiastic in participating in learning and are more resilient in facing difficulties. In this case, emotional regulation is a key element that brings together mental and academic aspects. Students who can manage negative emotions well have higher academic performance than those who often get caught up in anxiety or frustration. Positive emotions have also been shown to increase creativity and thinking skills which are important aspects in the learning process.

Academic Balancing

Academic competence in the modern curriculum not only includes cognitive aspects, but also includes social skills, communication, and teamwork. All these abilities can only develop optimally when students are in good mental condition. Therefore, there needs to be a limit imposed on academics so as not to cause effects on students, including stress about academic matters. Academic stress is a common condition experienced by students, especially when faced with exams, piling up assignments, or high expectations from parents and teachers. To a certain extent, stress can function as a motivator. However, if not managed properly, chronic stress will have a negative impact on students' mental health and hinder students' academic performance. Excessive academic pressure can cause mental fatigue, low self-esteem, and decreased interest in learning. Students with poor mental health often experience decreased attendance, low quality assignments, and an inability to solve problems effectively.

Efforts to Improve Students' Mental Health

Various scientific methods are needed for preventive activities in schools including human resource mapping, valid and reliable evaluation, comprehensive mental health screening, and development of logic models, choosing a theory of change, monitoring, and the expected impact of mental health programs (Nurochim, 2020). The methods used are as follows:

Strengthening Guidance and Counseling Services

Guidance and counseling services in schools play a central role in maintaining students' psychological balance. School counselors are not only tasked with dealing with students who have problems, but also as companions for all students in building adaptability, emotional control, and decision-making skills. Unfortunately, many schools still consider BK services as mere complements, whereas in fact this service should be one of the important pillars in the education system.

Strengthening BK services can be done by ensuring that each school has a sufficient number of professional counselors. Counseling services must also be active and reach all students through programs such as classical counseling, group discussions, adolescent psychology seminars, or outreach activities. In addition, counselors can work together with homeroom teachers to detect students who experience changes in behavior or early symptoms of stress, so that intervention can be given more quickly.

Emotional and Value Based Learning

Education that only focuses on cognitive achievement will not create a complete individual. Therefore, it is important for schools to integrate value education and emotion-based learning into teaching and learning activities. Any subject, whether science, language, or art, can be infused with material on emotional management, tolerance, empathy, and cooperation. Learning that develops emotional intelligence will help students recognize and manage their feelings in a healthy way.

In addition, humanistic and participatory teaching approaches, such as project-based learning or open discussions, can help students feel valued and involved. In this learning process, students will more easily develop self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and social awareness, all of which contribute to mental health.

Education about Mental Health from an Early Age

It is important for students to understand what mental health is, how to treat it, and where to seek help when facing problems. This education can be provided early on, for example through local content or thematic educational programs. When students have sufficient literacy about mental health, they will not be ashamed to speak up or seek help, and can develop healthy coping mechanisms when facing stress. This awareness will also reduce the negative stigma against individuals who experience psychological disorders. This is important because stigma is often the biggest barrier for students to open up and seek the help they need.

CONCLUSION

Mental health is an important component in educational success, because it greatly influences the formation of character and the development of students' academic competence. Mentally healthy students tend to have good emotional regulation skills, can behave positively, and are better prepared to face social and academic challenges. They more easily understand moral values such as responsibility, empathy, and discipline, which are the foundation of strong character. Stable mental health supports cognitive functions such as concentration, memory, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, efforts to improve students' mental health must be an integral part of the educational process. Schools need to create a safe and supportive environment, strengthen guidance and counseling services, and develop learning that focuses not only on academic aspects, but also on the development of emotions and life values. Collaboration between schools, families, and communities is essential to ensure that students grow into mentally healthy, intellectually intelligent, and strong in character.

IMPLICATIONS/LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion that has been outlined, it is recommended that schools actively integrate efforts to improve mental health into the education system by strengthening guidance and counseling services, implementing value-based and emotion-based learning, and creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Teachers are expected to be role models in fostering character and be sensitive to the psychological conditions of students. Parents need to build open communication with their children and collaborate closely with the school to support children's mental well-being and character formation. Students are also expected to increase awareness of the importance of maintaining mental health by learning to manage emotions, foster empathy, and dare to seek help when facing pressure. The government needs to formulate education policies that emphasize mental health literacy and character education comprehensively, including

through teacher and counselor training. In addition, further research at the field level is needed to explore concrete strategies that are relevant to the school context and the needs of today's students.

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