Exploring Factors Influencing Problem Behavior of Rural Secondary Students in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Addressing student problem behavior is a leading concern for educators as behavioral issues interfere with school engagement, academic achievement, and social relationships. This study aims to explore the factors of problem behavior. It includes 24 teachers and 20 students as study participants purposively selected from five conveniently selected non-government secondary schools in rural Kushtia. Focus Group Discussion and interviews were used to collect data. The data was analyzed following the inductive content analysis technique, and the findings were presented under key themes explored. The findings show that heterogeneous factors, including parental supervision, peer influence, school environment and teachers' role and use of technology, have a significant influence on students' problem behavior.

Key Words: Problem behavior, Secondary school, adolescent, Rural Schooling

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Introduction

Problem behaviour among students is one of the major concerns in the school setting as it can potentially disrupt school engagement, academic achievement, and social relationships (Khan et al., 2017). It can also lead to clinical depression, suicidal ideation, delinquency, and dropping out of school (Khan et al., 2017; Sun & Shek, 2012). According to Simonsen and Meyers (2015), problem behaviour is observable action caused by an uncomfortable environment. Antecedents involve hints, cues, signals, comments, or demands from others or any situation around him; they are what happens shortly before the behaviour occurs (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015). Problem behaviour may be in many forms, for example, Emotional problem behaviour (Daydreaming in class). Some other examples are chatting in class, not doing assignments, and demonstrating disrespect to the teacher are all examples of poor conduct in the classroom.

Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that influence students' problem behaviors. However, despite the substantial impact of students' problem behavior on their optimal adjustment to school and holistic development, there exists hardly any endeavor to address them effectively in the current school practice. Given that problem behavior is a complex phenomenon, it can be influenced by multiple psychosocial, environmental, and demographical factors that increase the likelihood of an individual's problem behavior. Without a holistic understanding of multiple and multilevel factors of problem behavior, it is difficult to plan appropriate interventions to address this issue and support the students. In this regard, the present study aims to explore the factors influencing students' problem behavior through the lens of Bronfenbrenner ecological system theory which encircled all the risk and protective factors of a children's circumstance. According to the system theory, the ecological environment is a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next so he suggests perceiving a child rather than individual.

The drop-out rate is higher among secondary-level students who are 35.75% (BANBEIS Report, 2020) and most of them are from the rural area. Government initiatives have primarily focused on addressing students' apparent needs. However, mental health issues must be considered in interventions to reduce drop-out rates and transfers to an alternative school (Wilson, Goottferdson, & Najaka, 2001). Research shows that dropouts are more likely to engage in criminal activities, emphasizing the need for policymakers to prioritize the mental and emotional well-being of students in educational policies. Supportive environments and practical teaching approaches can help prevent dropouts. School-wide positive interventions and supports can lead to less problem behavior and improved academic performance (Nelson et.al, 2002), but there is limited research on effective interventions. The study aims to address the reason for student's problem behavior which could lead to effective interventions and appropriate actions.

There were some research works had been found in Bangladesh on problem behavior which addressed its' prevalence (Khan et al., 2009) and association with academic achievement

(Morshed & Ahsan, 2010). In 1999, Rabbani conducted a study to explore the prevalence of behavioral disorders among primary school children in urban areas of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Although problem behavior is more prevalent in rural areas of Bangladesh, there has been a lack of research on the factors that contribute to problem behavior in this context.

Research question

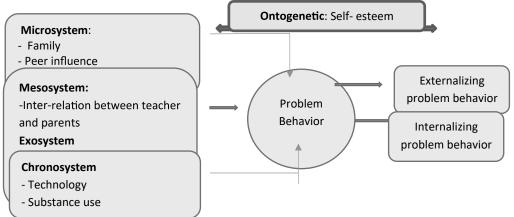
The study was guided by the following research questions

- 1. What are students' perceptions about the factors influencing their problem behavior?
- 2. What are teachers' perceptions about the factors influencing students' problem behavior?

Literature review

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory posits that individual development occurs in stages and is greatly influenced by the environment. The theory includes five systems: ontogenetic indicates biological and hereditary factors that interact with other environmental factors; microsystem implies the factor that directly affects their role, relationships, and activities; mesosystem involves the interrelations among microsystems, and optimal development occurs when there is a secure connection between them; exosystem includes the broader cultural context in which children develop, and macrosystem affects all other systems and reflects social and cultural views, as well as the chronosystem, which refers to the shifts in development over time in response to changing contexts. Optimal development occurs when secure connections exist between microsystems and the broader cultural and societal context that shapes development (Rappleyea, 2009).

Theoretical Framework of the study



Self-esteem is defined as a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self that leads to problem behavior like social avoidance anxiety and other internalizing problems (Wang et al., 2014). Research showed that Parenting practices have a direct impact on a child's behavioral

development, with parental support leading to increased confidence and improved school adjustment (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). Again, parent's socioeconomic status is associated with social inequality where Relative poverty, or feeling poor compared to others, can lead to psychological distress such as anxiety (Martin et al., 2010).

During adolescence, peers hold a significant influence on behavior, as adolescents seek attention and may spontaneously follow peers, potentially leading to delinquent behavior and substance use (Solomon, 2007). Peer rejection can lead to socialization problems, inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and aggressiveness (Tseng et al., 2012). Teachers are the most vital factor in the classroom, serving as role models for students (Ulug et al., 2011), and their positive attitudes and behavior play a decisive role in students' personality development and build self-confidence (Frymier, 1993), while negative behavior and comments can have unavoidable negative effects on student traits (Gecer, as cited in Ulug et al., 2011). Indeed, a better school experience for children is associated with parents' good relationship with the teacher. (Pirchio et al., 2013).

The current generation is largely dependent on technology, but over-reliance on technology often serves as a risk factor for behavioral problems. The research found that those who are excessive internet users when they are not able to use the internet feel irritated, anxiety, restless, and in a low mood (Suhail & Bargees, 2006). Additionally, availability and accessibility of drugs, extreme anxiety, social pressure, changing the norm in the peer group, and academic failure are the leading causes of substance use (Nalwa & Anand, 2003).

Methodology

The research employed a qualitative methodology to uncover in-depth information concerning the behavior problems that students confront. Five schools were conveniently selected and granted permission to conduct the SDQ in the classroom. The researchers purposively selected students from rural co-educational secondary schools who obtained higher scores and crossed the borderline score of the Total Difficulty Score (TDS) on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This allowed the researchers to gather data from a specific group of students who were likely to have clinically significant problems.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which measures emotional and behavioral problems. The questionnaire consists of 25 items on psychological characteristics. The items are divided into five domains, including four problem behavior domains (emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity-inattention symptoms, and peer problems) and one prosocial behavior domain. The study only considered the 20 items related to psychological characteristics and summed the first four sub-scales to generate a Total Difficulties Score (TDS). The questionnaire uses a 3-point Likert scale where "Sometimes" is always scored as "1", while "Always" and "Never" are scored between "0" and "2" depending on the item. The scores are used to place individuals into one of three categories based on their Total Difficulty

Score (TDS) out of 40: normal (TDS 15 or less), borderline (TDS 16-19), and abnormal (TDS 20 or above), indicating the risk of clinically significant problems. The SDQ has been perceiving acceptable reliable and valid with a specificity of 95% and sensitivity of 63% (Goodman et al, 2000).

In this diagnosis test, 28 students were identified out of a total of 320 students. Additionally, 24 teachers (11 male and 13 female) from the five schools were selected to provide their perceptions about the students' behavioral problems. To gather data, a well-developed semi-structured questionnaire was prepared based on a literature review, which was utilized during individual interviews with the students. A focused group discussion with teachers was also conducted using an open-ended questionnaire. The data collected from the interviews and focus group discussion were analyzed using the inductive content analysis technique. The findings were presented under key themes that were explored during the data analysis process. This method allowed the researchers to identify and explore patterns and themes within the data that were relevant to the research objectives.

Findings Influence of family Poor paranting style

Poor parenting style

Qualitative findings indicated that a lack of parents' awareness in terms of poor parenting style had a major influence on students' behavior. Several parents remain indifferent to their children's education whether their children complete their homework every day or not. They think that only school is responsible to teach their child. Students are often seen to disorient in class if homework is not complete One of the teachers said that

The parents assume that the children have enrolled in the school, so their responsibility has finished. They have no further responsibility for whether their children are properly studying at home or not. The ignorance of the parents influences children's behavior and failure in submitting homework, inactivity in the classroom, as well as passive engagement, which were seen most among these children.

This condition also affects students' mental health as they could not get suitable advice as well as available facilitation when needed at home. Consequently, they became frustrated and expressed unexpected behavior. According to a student, "There is no one to look after me. I am struggling hard enough to continue my studies. Sometimes, I become depressed."

On the other hand, some parents have overly governed their children without taking into account their child's difficulties. This indicated that they were only bothered with the result except for considering the causes behind the undesired result. A student told that "Nobody wants to understand my intention. If the results of the Examination are poor, then the parents would scold. when no one wants to listen to my words at home, I get very angry and disgusted."

Parents' education

Qualitative data reflected parents' education is highly responsible for their children's behavioral patterns. According to the teachers' opinion, there are differences in behavior among children of educated parents and children of uneducated parents. Children of educated parents are relatively obedient. On the other hand, children whose parents are less literate such as working-class, drivers, and helpers are often quarreling. Consequently, children adopt those behaviors naturally. One teacher said that

Due to a lack of parents' education children do not get proper guidance. Children stay away from socially accepted behaviors from early childhood as parents themselves are not aware of this. In consequence, empathy skills as well as social skills do not develop among the children.

In addition, poor relationship with children facilitated by lower parental education is another responsible factor for problem behavior. Parents do not understand what thoughts would go on their children's minds, what their children feel, and the expression of the feeling of the children was also neglected because of the poor relationship between parents and children. Another teacher stated that "The relationship between educated parents and their children is friendly as parents are spending more time with their children so that they (children) remain on the right track."

Family economic background

Participants considered that family economic condition is another significant factor that is highly responsible for problem behavior in rural areas. Most of the people in the village are dependent on agriculture and in most cases family economic conditions are deplorable. To save labor costs, parents engage their children in agricultural as well as expenditure-saving work. So, most often students have to remain absent from classes. Students cannot be attentive because they cannot connect to current content as they were absent in the previous class. According to a teacher

We have many students who have to weave loom and do household work after school. students often seem very upset as they think about those workloads and cannot pay attention to the classes properly. This distraction may lead students to inattentive problem behavior in the classroom.

The ambiance is a significant factor in behavioral change or learning behavior. Children who grow up in a chaotic environment, are naturally accustomed to that type of behavior. Due to economic insolvency, the environment of the family always remains troublesome. Parents remain very worried and restless because of economic hardship as they cannot afford to satisfy their children's basic needs. Consequently, family turmoil, as well as lack of facilities, affects child's emotions and they become worried and go through anxiety. For instance, one of the teachers said

The lifestyle of a student living in an economically solvent family is always

systematic. They have a transportation facility and carry tiffin to the school. On the other hand, students who come from low socioeconomic status are deprived of various basic needs like shortage of food, lack of proper treatment, and lack of educational accessories which makes them unhappy and depressed.

Influence of School

Teacher's limited supportive behavior

Respondent described the teacher's supportive behavior in terms of a nonjudgmental, helpful, companionate, friendly, and motivating attitude. They expressed a lack of supportive behavior from the teacher such as discouraged questioning, and less motivation when facing trouble with a lesson

Some teachers are often seen expressing resentment in the classroom. Sometimes they seem reluctant to answer students' questions. This type of unsupportive behavior from teachers causes aggressive, withdrawn, and inattentive behavior among the students.

Most of the participants perceived that all students do not get equal support from their teachers. Such biases are responsible for students' adverse attitudes toward their teachers. Such unsupportive behavior makes a student not only inferior but also aggressive. Another student added that "Some teachers do not treat everyone alike. Suppose when X went to Sir with a problem, He used to explain it eagerly but when other students go to him for a solution, he shows less interest."

Monotonous teaching-learning approach

Students perceived that the teaching-learning approach is a significant aspect that made them attentive in class. According to them, most of the teachers conduct classes with lecture methods where students' participation was absent. A long-time lecture made them sleepy and inattentive towards the lesson. According to a student, "Teachers carry on the one-hour class by reading and speaking solely. I cannot concentrate throughout the whole time only listening to him. Sometimes I feel sleepy listening to his monotony voice."

Students perceived that inattentive students also pay attention in class when a teacher makes the lesson interesting. Other students added that "I always feel inattentive in class. But when teachers make classes interesting then I pay attention."

Inconsistent teacher-student ratio

Participants perceived that inconsistent teacher-student ratios and big class sizes play major barriers for teachers to manage classes efficiently. Teachers often cannot able to contact the last rows of students and students do so. Teachers perceived due to the excessive number of students it is hard to understand if the students understand the content or not. In this context one of a teacher said,

If there are more than 50 students in a class, it is not possible to put concentration on all the students together. As consequence, misbehaviors like harassing classmates,

disruptive talking, and daydreaming are very common scenarios in the classrooms. Then the major issue becomes only classroom control.

The teacher also finds it difficult to evaluate everyone. Moreover, students become inattentive when they cannot connect with content properly. Therefore, an inconsistent teacher-student ratio draws an opportunity to become a student inattentive.

Influence of peer group

Peer unsupportive behavior

Participants considered that peer supportive behavior is a responsible factor for the problem behavior which is absent in most of the peers. Respondents indicated peer support in terms of peer tutoring, peer acceptance, and collaborative attitude. Findings revealed that roll number creates a class difference among the students where academically poor students perceive that they were not accepted by others. No one would show a supportive attitude toward them. In consequence, they showed withdrawn behavior as they suffer from an inferiority complex. A student stated that

There are various groups of students in our class. Nobody wants to mix up with students of another group. Specially, those who are better students do not want to help academically weak students. Sometimes I became frustrated when no one help me. I think no one like me.

Peer victimization

Qualitative data-informed peer victimization is a very common scenario among peer groups at the secondary level. It is very often to see student experiences intentional hurt from their peers. Participant's description indicates that escape from school, absenteeism, inattentiveness in class, and staying out during class time are the consequences of peer victimization. According to a teacher

The adolescent age is sensitive. At this age, emotional and hyperactive problem behavior probably reveal among them. At this time, behavior like teasing, bullying, and irritation such as calling unusual names, and laughing at their peer when anyone failed to answer the teacher's question made them more hyperactive and as a result, students get inattentiveness, restlessness and such type of problems arises.

Contemporary issues of problem behavior *Availability of addictive resources*

With the progress of the communication system, addictive resources became highly accessible everywhere. In consequence, the addiction trend is more visible among secondary school students. Students who showed unexpected behavior in school either could not take the drug or excessive use of the drug. Daydreaming, absent-minded, and withdrawn behavior are the result of addiction to various kinds of drugs. A teacher stated

This addiction leads a student to become irregular (leaving school with peers for smoking) and as students have to stay in school for a long time, they cannot take the drug at that time in

consequence they become impulsive and aggressive.

Misuse of technology

Misuses of information technology add an adverse aspect to the current generation. Almost all students have access to mobile phones and the internet nowadays and they use the internet in many forms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, etc. According to a respondent. Cyber addiction is another considerable factor of problem behavior that is the result of the misuse of technology. The student passed more time using technology even in their reading time and could not complete the home task regularly. Consequently, daydreaming, inattentiveness, and hyperactivity are experienced by the teacher and the student nowadays. A teacher mentioned "Students spent most of their time using the phone and most of the time they come to school without any preparation to attain a class. In consequence, they are remaining inattentive in the class."

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the factors that contribute to student's behavioral problems, which can negatively impact their social and academic development. The present finding shows that children's problem behavior is much related to their surroundings. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979), to attain optimal child development, it should be seen children in a holistic manner than individual characteristics. In the present study, it is found that child behavioral development much depends on their surrounding rather than their characteristics. The surrounding included family, peers, school, and social issues. All components represent different systems that are embedded in system theory.

The present study explicates that the family (microsystem) plays a significant role as it is the most immediate setting for the children. The role of parents, as well as parenting style is a significant factor in a child's mental health (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2014). According to Hosokawa and Katsura (2018), both authoritarian and uninvolved parenting styles predict externalizing problem behavior. On the other hand, with parents who follow an authoritative style their children are more self-confident and show an exploring attitude. In this study, it is found that parents who overly governed their children which indicates authoritarian parenting causes aggression and hyperactivity. Besides, according to Terry (2004), uninvolved parenting practices disrupt students' social skills and experience school problems. Further, according to Bronfenbrenner, if the family of the children (microsystem) is favorable, friendly, and comforting, then the environment and the child's interaction are well-regulated and compatible. This enables a child to perceive cognitive, emotional, and social skills which leads him/her to learn congenial behavior to adapt to the environment (Haq & Hossain, 2015).

However, parental supervision is highly influenced by parents' education. Because lower education is associated with a low-quality home environment, more serious behavioral problem and poor parenting practice as parenting practice relate to parenting information (Neitzel & Stright, 2004). The present study asserted that parents who are educated, spend more time with their children and create a better environment within their relationship. In consequence,

children are less likely to have a sudden deviation. Similarly, parents who spent maximum time with their children reduce problem behavior (Sarwar, 2016). According to Bangladesh sample vital statistics (2017), the literacy rate in the rural area of Bangladesh is 65.4% which indicate that a good number of parents in rural area are not as literate as they nurture their children properly. Therefore, parents' education highly dominated the family's economic condition. Research unfolded that family's financial situation generates psychological distress (Ponnet et al., 2016). These findings were very compatible with the present study, where it was found that economic hardship leads to children's emotional distress. Furthermore, due to family economic insolvency, children become worried and often seem troublesome. As consequence, their behavior is not anticipative in the school context. Moreover, family socioeconomic condition determines the socioeconomic status (Exosystem). Child behavioral and cognitive development is highly facilitated by SES. The present study is compatible with the previous study that children who come from an economically solvent family are always systematic and are well guided by their parents. Conversely, children who are from low SES are deprived of various basic needs that made them unhappy and depressed. Direct influences such as the unequal distribution of basic needs and the indirect psychological impact such as differences in the quality of the home environment adversely affected the child who belongs to low SES (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018). Again, the indirect psychological path involves not only being poor but also feeling poor in comparison to other elicit forms of psychological distress such as anxiety (Martin et al., 2010).

Although the child's social, cognitive, and behavioral development starts with the family, the most active area of change and enhancement of development, is the school (microsystem) along various factors in the classroom (O'Brennan et al., 2014). According to Bronfenbrenner, as the surrounding where a child resides will be more favorable, comfortable, affectionate, loving, and caring, the children's development will be spontaneous and vibrant (Haq & Hossain, 2015. Brekelmans, Mainhard, Brok, and Wubbels (2011) have emphasized teachers students' interaction in terms of student development, especially behavioral change. The present study deducted that a lack of teachers' supportive behavior such as biased and noncooperative attitude fails a student to feel relatedness towards class and causes aggressiveness, withdrawal, and regardless behavior. A teacher's positive attitude serves as a reinforcement for the student to build self-confidence (Frymier, 1993) and personality development (Ulug et al., 2011). In contrast, the negative behavior of a teacher impacts many negative changes in the student trait as a teacher engages in disparaging comments towards a student about his failure, the negative effect of this will be unavoidable (Gecer, as cited in Ulug et al., 2011). Likewise, Teachers' biased attitudes make students demotivated toward learning. Students' motivational level depends on teachers motivating behavior (Frymier, 1993). In fact, due to a lack of intrinsic motivation, students exhibit more behavioral problems in an academic context (Mbatha, 2015).

Again, disordered classroom management plays a vital role in provoking behavioral problems alongside students' academic performance. Moreover, misconduct, aggression, and

hyperactivity are the result of classroom mismanagement (Voight et al., 2015). Along with this, a neglected school environment increases the risk of problem behavior (Kumar et al., 2008). Excessive students hamper the classroom environment. The present study unfolds that excessive students in the classroom are a barrier to effective classroom interaction processes and create scope for students' problem behavior.

Peer groups (microsystems) and their role is another contributing factor to problem behavior. According to Kuperminc, Allen & Arthur (1996), if students feel relatedness towards peers and school, problems are less likely to occur in their behavior. In the adolescent period, children love to be with their peers. According to Wentzel (1998), parental support is significant in primary school-aged children, on the contrary, peer support is more significant in adolescents age. Similarly, unsupportive peer behavior such as bullying affects children's mental health as they continually have bad relationships with their peers (Nansel et al., 2004). Children who are victimized by their peers have an adjustment problem in the school social environment (Kochel et al., 2012). The present study completely supports the prior studies that escaping from school, absence in school, and restlessness are the result of peer victimization as victimized children cannot adapt to the school environment.

This present study addressed some concurrent issues which indicate the chronosystem that influences the whole system over time and affects students' development as well as mental health issues. The first vital issue is the misuse of technology. In the present decade, cyber addiction is a pervasive problem in the world. In Bangladesh, internet addiction among adolescents is 2.51%, and the moderate addiction rate is 64.87% (Al Mamun & Griffiths, 2019). The findings of the present study indicate students are paying more attention to using mobile phones or technology than their studies, as a result, they cannot prepare their homework regularly and become inattentive and restless in class. puzzling and annoying behavior is pervasive among adolescents to have cyber addiction. Getting available internet access, yelling and annoying problem behavior is increasing day by day (Thakur et al., 2017). Therefore, nowadays behavioral problems among students are evident due to the increased accessibility of the internet which is not seen before.

The availability of addictive resources is another contributing factor that is found in this present study. It unfolds that because of the improvement in the communication system, addictive resources are available and more comfortable to access in comparison with earlier. The earlier study also found that the availability of a drug is one of the primary reasons for drug addiction (Newcomb et al., 1989). But accessibility alone cannot be a single aspect of drug addiction. Anxiety, changing norms in the peer group, being disliked by their peer and solitariness may lead a student for talking drugs or other substances (Arthur et al., 2002). However, drug addiction also results from Low socioeconomic status (macrosystem), lack of religious commitment, unsupportive family (microsystems), low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Newcomb et al., 1989).

Implications of the study

This study has important implications for school-based mental health practitioners, educators, criminologists, social reformers, and families. It helps understand the reasons for dropout and prevents the problem, guides teacher training, and supports the development of emotional management. It also allows for the creation of a Mental Health Policy based on risk and protective factors and provides practical suggestions for mental health practitioners in treating aggressive and violent behavior in adolescents.

Conclusion

It appears that the problem behavior of a student depends on one or more factors either directly or indirectly. Due to alleviate the problems, these factors need to be addressed and prevent accordingly. Through this study, major contributing factors have been investigated. A model to explain the relationship among the factors of problem behaviors of the secondary students of Bangladesh has been suggested concerning the study findings.

The issue of problem behavior among students, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh, is a major concern. While various factors such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and superstition contribute to this problem, the issue is complex and involves an ecological process where all components of the ecological system are responsible for students' problem behavior. To minimize issues, prevention and intervention efforts should adopt a multiline approach that considers all factors of the ecological system concurrently to develop the child positively.

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