

Mental Health Promotion in School Environments: Actions Focused on Children and Adolescents

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21838144

Received: Jul 29, 2026

Approved: Aug 06, 2026

Lancciane Nilian Celino Reis

Doutoranda em Saúde Pública

Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales

Marcelo Messias Lopes

Sheila Érika Ferro Ramalho Nobre

Doutoranda em Saúde Pública

Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales

Jéssica Prazeres Ballesteros Moura

Psicóloga

Universidade Estadual de Ciências da Saúde de Alagoas

Kelly Lene Lopes Calderaro

Doutoranda em Saúde Pública

Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales

Sérgio Raimundo Ernesto Machado

Doutorando em Saúde Pública

Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales

Oldair Donizete Galeni

Doutorando em Saúde Pública

Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales

Márcio Josué Nunes Shuassb

Mestrado em História

Secretaria Estadual de Educação/RO

marciojosue.ns@gmail.com

Bruno Ramos Brum

Doutorado em Ciências Ambientais

UNINASSAU - Vilhena

ramosbrum@hotmail.com

Victor Segatto Stewart

Mestrando em Análise do Comportamento Aplicada (ABA)

Greenfort University (GFU), EUA

Cristiane de Castro Barcelos

Doutoranda em Saúde Pública

Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales

Abstract

Mental health promotion among children and adolescents has become a major public health priority due to the increasing recognition of emotional, behavioral, and social challenges experienced during childhood and adolescence. Schools represent strategic environments for mental health promotion because they reach large populations during critical stages of human development and provide opportunities for prevention, early identification, and supportive interventions. This academic essay discusses mental health promotion in educational settings, emphasizing actions directed toward children and adolescents. The discussion analyzes theoretical perspectives regarding school-based mental health approaches, examines challenges related to implementation, and explores institutional strategies involving students, families, educators, and health professionals. The essay argues that promoting mental health in schools requires integrated actions based on emotional education, supportive environments, prevention of violence and bullying, professional training, and collaboration between education and healthcare systems. Strengthening school-based mental health initiatives contributes to healthier development, social inclusion, and improved quality of life.

Keywords: Adolescent Health; Child Health; Health Education; Mental Health; Schools.

1. Introduction

Mental health during childhood and adolescence represents a fundamental component of human development and public health. Experiences during these stages influence emotional regulation, social relationships, learning processes, and future health outcomes. Increasing evidence demonstrates that psychological difficulties emerging early in life may persist into adulthood when adequate support and preventive interventions are unavailable.

Children and adolescents face multiple challenges that may affect their mental well-being, including academic pressure, social conflicts, family difficulties, exposure to violence, discrimination, and the effects of digital environments. Although emotional changes are part of normal development, persistent distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, behavioral problems, and social withdrawal require attention from families, educational institutions, and health systems.

Schools occupy a privileged position for mental health promotion because they are environments where children and adolescents spend significant portions of their lives. Educational settings provide opportunities to develop social skills, emotional competencies, resilience, and healthy relationships. Furthermore, schools can facilitate early identification of psychological difficulties and connect students with appropriate support services.

Mental health promotion in schools represents an approach that goes beyond identifying disorders or providing treatment. It involves creating environments that support emotional well-being, strengthen protective factors, reduce risk factors, and promote inclusion. This perspective recognizes that mental health is influenced by relationships, educational experiences, school climate, and broader social contexts.

The integration between education and healthcare systems is essential for developing effective school-based mental health strategies. Intersectoral collaboration allows professionals to combine educational knowledge, health expertise, and community resources. In contexts such as Brazil, initiatives involving schools and primary healthcare services are particularly relevant for expanding access to preventive mental health actions.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of school-based mental health promotion, significant challenges remain. Limited resources, insufficient training of educators, stigma, lack of institutional planning, and weak articulation between sectors may restrict the implementation of comprehensive actions. Overcoming these barriers requires policies that recognize mental health as an essential component of child and adolescent development.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified concerns regarding youth mental health by increasing experiences of isolation, uncertainty, grief, educational disruption, and social difficulties. This scenario highlighted the importance of strengthening school environments as spaces capable of supporting emotional recovery and promoting resilience among students.

Considering these challenges, this academic essay aims to critically discuss mental health promotion in school environments, focusing on actions directed toward children and adolescents. The manuscript analyzes theoretical foundations of school-based mental health promotion, examines implementation challenges, and discusses institutional strategies capable of strengthening preventive and supportive approaches within educational settings.

2. Methodology

This manuscript is characterized as a theoretical academic essay developed through critical-reflective analysis of scientific knowledge regarding mental health promotion, school environments, child and adolescent development, and preventive public health strategies. Academic essays allow conceptual discussion and theoretical integration of complex phenomena by combining scientific evidence with critical interpretation.

The discussion was constructed through the articulation of contemporary scientific literature, international recommendations, educational health frameworks, and public health perspectives related to mental well-being among children and adolescents. The analysis considers psychological, educational, social, and institutional dimensions involved in implementing school-based mental health actions.

The methodological approach emphasizes theoretical coherence, critical synthesis, and argumentative development rather than empirical data collection. According to the structure established for

this academic essay, all references supporting the arguments presented throughout the manuscript are included exclusively in the final section, formatted according to the standards of the American Psychological Association (APA, 7th edition).

3. Development

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Mental Health Promotion in School Environments

Mental health promotion in schools is based on the understanding that emotional well-being is developed through interactions between individuals and their environments. Childhood and adolescence are periods of intense biological, cognitive, and social transformation, making supportive environments essential for healthy psychological development.

The ecological perspective of human development provides an important theoretical framework for understanding school-based mental health. According to this approach, children and adolescents are influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including family, school, community, and society. Therefore, effective interventions must consider the broader contexts in which young people live.

Mental health promotion in educational settings is strongly connected to the concept of social and emotional learning. This approach emphasizes the development of competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, communication, cooperation, and responsible decision-making. These skills contribute to healthier relationships, improved adaptation to challenges, and greater capacity to manage emotional experiences.

The concept of positive mental health expands the understanding of school interventions beyond the prevention of psychological disorders. Rather than focusing only on risks and symptoms, positive mental health emphasizes strengths, abilities, participation, belonging, and opportunities for personal development. Schools therefore become spaces where students can develop protective factors throughout their educational trajectories.

The school environment itself represents an important determinant of mental health. Factors such as teacher-student relationships, experiences of inclusion, academic expectations, safety, and peer interactions influence students' emotional well-being. A supportive school climate contributes to reducing stress, increasing engagement, and creating conditions favorable for psychological development.

Prevention is another fundamental element of school-based mental health promotion. Universal prevention strategies directed toward all students can reduce risk factors and strengthen protective resources before severe psychological difficulties emerge. These strategies are particularly relevant because they avoid labeling students and promote mental health as a collective responsibility.

The role of teachers is central in promoting mental well-being among children and adolescents. Educators are often among the first adults outside the family environment to observe behavioral changes, emotional difficulties, and social challenges. However, their role should not replace that of mental health professionals but rather involve recognition, support, and appropriate referral when necessary.

Family participation represents another essential theoretical component of school mental health promotion. Families influence children's emotional development, coping strategies, and social behaviors. Collaborative relationships between schools and families create more consistent support systems and increase the effectiveness of preventive interventions.

The involvement of healthcare professionals strengthens school-based mental health initiatives. Primary healthcare teams, psychologists, nurses, and other professionals can contribute through health education, preventive activities, professional support, and coordination of care pathways. This collaboration reinforces the intersectoral nature of mental health promotion.

The rights-based perspective is also fundamental when addressing child and adolescent mental health. Young people should be recognized as individuals with rights to protection, participation, education, and healthcare. Mental health initiatives must therefore promote dignity, respect, inclusion, and freedom from discrimination.

Therefore, the theoretical foundations of mental health promotion in schools demonstrate that effective approaches require integrated actions involving students, families, educators, healthcare professionals, and communities. Promoting emotional well-being in educational environments means creating conditions that support healthy development, strengthen resilience, and prevent psychological suffering throughout childhood and adolescence.

3.2 Challenges for Implementing Mental Health Actions among Children and Adolescents

Although school-based mental health promotion has gained international recognition, its implementation faces multiple challenges. Educational systems often prioritize academic performance and curriculum demands, while emotional and psychological aspects of student development may receive insufficient attention. This imbalance can limit the incorporation of mental health initiatives into everyday school practices.

One of the main challenges involves insufficient preparation of educational professionals. Teachers and school staff frequently encounter students experiencing anxiety, sadness, behavioral difficulties, bullying, or family-related problems but may lack adequate training to respond effectively. Professional development is therefore essential for creating supportive educational environments.

The stigma associated with mental health remains a significant barrier among children, adolescents, families, and school communities. Misconceptions about psychological difficulties may lead to discrimination, silence, or avoidance of support. Promoting mental health literacy within schools is necessary to normalize discussions about emotions and encourage help-seeking behaviors.

Bullying and other forms of interpersonal violence represent major challenges for youth mental health. Experiences of aggression, exclusion, harassment, and cyberbullying are associated with increased risks of anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and social isolation. Schools must develop prevention strategies that promote respect, diversity, and safe environments.

The increasing influence of digital environments represents another challenge for youth mental health. Although digital technologies provide opportunities for learning, communication, and social interaction, excessive use, online harassment, social comparison, and exposure to harmful content may negatively affect emotional well-being. Schools must develop digital literacy initiatives that promote healthier relationships with technology.

Socioeconomic inequalities also strongly influence children's and adolescents' mental health. Young people living in vulnerable conditions may experience greater exposure to poverty, family instability, violence, and limited access to supportive resources. These inequalities demonstrate the importance of school-based interventions that consider social contexts and avoid approaches focused only on individual responsibility.

The identification of mental health difficulties in schools requires careful balance. While early recognition is essential for prevention and timely support, schools must avoid excessive medicalization of normal emotional experiences. Actions should prioritize listening, support, and inclusion rather than labeling students according to psychological characteristics.

Another challenge involves the limited articulation between education and healthcare sectors. In many contexts, referral pathways are unclear, communication between professionals is insufficient, and specialized support services are difficult to access. Strengthening intersectoral networks is essential for ensuring continuity of care for students requiring additional support.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified existing challenges in youth mental health. Learning disruptions, social isolation, family stress, and emotional uncertainty increased the demand for psychological support within educational settings. Schools now face the challenge of responding to expanded mental health needs while adapting to new realities.

Finally, sustainability represents a major challenge for school-based mental health programs. Many initiatives are implemented temporarily without long-term institutional planning, stable funding, or

continuous evaluation. Effective mental health promotion requires permanent integration into educational policies rather than isolated projects.

3.3 Institutional Strategies for Promoting Mental Health in Educational Settings

Strengthening mental health promotion in schools requires institutional strategies that integrate emotional well-being into educational practices and policies. Schools should recognize mental health as an essential component of student development and create structured approaches that support prevention, early identification, and inclusion.

One important strategy involves implementing social and emotional learning programs throughout educational trajectories. These programs should be adapted to different developmental stages and integrated into school routines. By teaching emotional awareness, communication skills, conflict resolution, and empathy, schools contribute to developing protective factors among students.

Creating supportive school environments is another essential strategy. Institutional actions should promote respectful relationships, prevent discrimination, encourage student participation, and strengthen feelings of belonging. A positive school climate reduces emotional distress and creates conditions where students feel safe to express concerns.

Teacher training programs should be prioritized as part of institutional mental health strategies. Educators need knowledge about child and adolescent development, emotional support techniques, identification of warning signs, and appropriate referral mechanisms. Prepared teachers can contribute significantly to early support without assuming roles beyond their professional responsibilities.

Family engagement represents a key component of effective school mental health initiatives. Schools should develop communication strategies, educational activities, and collaborative partnerships with families. When families and educational institutions share responsibilities and information, students receive more consistent emotional support.

The development of interdisciplinary teams can strengthen responses to student mental health needs. Collaboration among teachers, school administrators, psychologists, healthcare professionals, and community workers allows different perspectives to contribute to prevention and intervention strategies.

Partnerships between schools and primary healthcare services are particularly relevant for establishing comprehensive support networks. Healthcare teams can contribute through health promotion activities, professional guidance, screening when appropriate, and referral pathways for students requiring specialized care.

Peer support initiatives represent another promising strategy. Programs that encourage cooperation among students, mentoring, and collective activities can strengthen social connections and reduce feelings of isolation. Young people often benefit from opportunities to participate actively in creating healthier school environments.

Preventing violence and bullying should be an institutional priority. Schools must establish clear policies, promote dialogue, and develop educational activities focused on respect, diversity, and peaceful conflict resolution. Prevention efforts should involve students, educators, families, and the broader community.

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for ensuring the effectiveness of school mental health programs. Institutions should assess participation, outcomes, student perceptions, and areas requiring improvement. Evidence-based evaluation allows strategies to be adjusted according to local needs.

Finally, promoting mental health in schools requires political and institutional commitment. Governments, educational systems, and communities must recognize child and adolescent mental health as a priority and provide adequate resources for sustainable initiatives. Integrated policies connecting education, health, and social protection are fundamental for creating environments that support healthy development.

4. Conclusion

Mental health promotion in school environments represents an essential public health strategy for supporting the emotional, social, and cognitive development of children and adolescents. Schools are privileged spaces for prevention, early identification of difficulties, and strengthening of protective factors because they are integrated into young people's daily lives. However, effective mental health promotion requires approaches that move beyond isolated interventions and incorporate educational, healthcare, family, and community perspectives.

Strengthening school-based mental health actions depends on institutional commitment, professional training, intersectoral collaboration, reduction of stigma, prevention of violence, and development of supportive educational environments. Mental health should be recognized as an integral component of quality education and human development. By implementing comprehensive and sustainable strategies, schools can contribute to healthier childhoods and adolescences, improve social inclusion, and promote long-term population well-being.

References

- Barry, M. M., Clarke, A. M., & Dowling, K. (2017). Promoting social and emotional well-being in schools. *Health Education, 117*(5), 434–451. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-11-2016-0057>
- Buchanan, R., Gueldner, B. A., Tran, O. K., & Merrell, K. W. (2019). Social and emotional learning in classrooms: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *School Psychology Review, 48*(4), 457–472. <https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0114.V48-4>
- Durlak, J. A., Mahoney, J. L., & Boyle, A. E. (2022). What we know, and what we need to find out about universal, school-based social and emotional learning programs. *Educational Psychology Review, 34*, 1143–1162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09677-w>
- Fazel, M., Hoagwood, K., Stephan, S., & Ford, T. (2014). Mental health interventions in schools in high-income countries. *The Lancet Psychiatry, 1*(5), 377–387. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(14\)70312-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(14)70312-8)
- Gijzen, M. W. M., Rasing, S. P. A., Creemers, D. H. M., Smit, F., Engels, R. C. M. E., & de Beurs, D. (2022). Effectiveness of school-based prevention programs for adolescent mental health: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 94*, 102162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2022.102162>
- Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Durlak, J. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning as a public health approach to education. *The Future of Children, 27*(1), 13–32.
- Hetrick, S. E., Bailey, A. P., Rice, S. M., Simmons, M. B., McKenzie, J. E., Montague, A. E., Parker, A. G., & Alvarez-Jimenez, M. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological interventions for adolescents with depression. *The Lancet Psychiatry, 6*(1), 1–14.
- Kieling, C., Baker-Henningham, H., Belfer, M., Conti, G., Ertem, I., Omigbodun, O., Rohde, L. A., Srinath, S., Ulkuer, N., & Rahman, A. (2011). Child and adolescent mental health worldwide: Evidence for action. *The Lancet, 378*(9801), 1515–1525. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)60827-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60827-1)
- Lund, C., Brooke-Sumner, C., Baingana, F., Baron, E. C., Breuer, E., Chandra, P., Haushofer, J., Herrman, H., Jordans, M., Kieling, C., Medina-Mora, M. E., Morgan, E., Omigbodun, O., Tol, W., Patel, V., & Saxena, S. (2020). Social determinants of mental disorders and the Sustainable Development Goals: A systematic review of reviews. *The Lancet Psychiatry, 7*(6), 484–494.
- Patel, V., Flisher, A. J., Hetrick, S., & McGorry, P. (2007). Mental health of young people: A global public-health challenge. *The Lancet, 369*(9569), 1302–1313.
- Patalay, P., & Fitzsimons, E. (2021). Mental ill-health among children of the new century: Trends across childhood with a focus on age and gender. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 56*, 1901–1913.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). *Promoting mental health and well-being in schools: A comprehensive approach*. UNESCO.
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Helping children and young people cope with stress: Mental health promotion in schools*. World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2023). *WHO guideline on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents*. World Health Organization.