

Mental Health-Friendly School Strategies: Psychological Intervention Approaches for Adolescent Mental Health in Educational Settings

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Abstract. Adolescents' face increasing mental health challenges that affect their academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. Schools, as primary educational and socialization environments, play a critical role in supporting students' psychological health. This paper explores strategies for developing mental health-friendly schools through targeted psychological intervention approaches. Drawing on recent research in educational psychology and adolescent development, the study highlights three key strategies: (1) fostering a supportive school climate through teacher training and peer mentoring, (2) integrating evidence-based mental health programs into curricula, and (3) strengthening collaboration between schools, families, and community mental health services. These strategies aim to promote resilience, early detection of emotional difficulties, and access to appropriate care. By analyzing case studies and best practices from various educational contexts, the paper demonstrates how proactive interventions can reduce stigma, enhance coping skills, and create inclusive learning environments. The findings suggest that adopting a holistic framework—combining prevention, intervention, and post-crisis support—significantly improves students' mental health outcomes. This study provides practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals to collaboratively design interventions that address the unique needs of adolescents. Ultimately, mental health-friendly schools are essential to fostering flourishing, resilient, and academically successful young people.

Keywords: Adolescent mental health, Mental health-friendly schools, Psychology interventions.

1 Introduction

Adolescent mental health has become an urgent global concern, with increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders reported among young people (Xu, 2024). The World Health Organization notes that half of all mental health conditions begin before the age of 14, yet many cases remain undiagnosed or untreated (Kuehn, 2021). The school environment, where adolescents spend a significant portion

of their time, represents both a potential risk factor and a critical opportunity for intervention (Lavrič et al., 2022).

Schools are not only places for academic learning but also crucial social ecosystems where students develop identity, self-esteem, and emotional regulation skills (Greenberg, 2023). However, pressures such as academic competition, bullying, and rapidly changing social expectations can exacerbate emotional difficulties. When schools fail to provide adequate psychological support, students may experience declining academic performance, social withdrawal, or even drop out.

Mental health-friendly schools emphasize proactive measures to create a supportive climate (Department of Pharmacognosy Kampala International University Uganda & Evelyn, 2025). Such strategies go beyond crisis response and aim to prevent psychological distress through inclusive policies, teacher awareness, and accessible counseling services. By embedding mental health support within the educational framework, schools can normalize discussions about emotional well-being and reduce stigma (Atifa Nazeer et al., 2024).

Psychological intervention approaches within educational settings are diverse (Uyok Hanson et al., 2024). They may include cognitive-behavioral techniques integrated into classroom activities, peer mentoring programs to enhance social connectedness, or mindfulness-based practices that cultivate emotional regulation. These interventions, when systematically implemented, can promote resilience and equip adolescents with coping mechanisms to handle life stressors effectively.

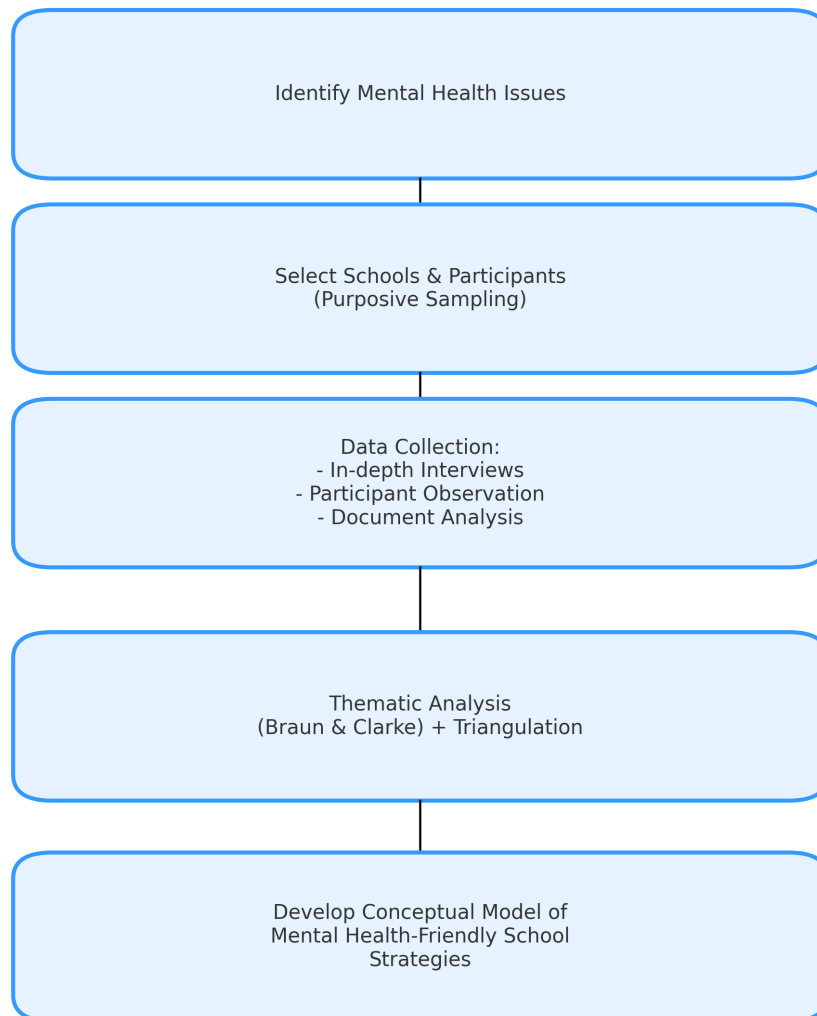
Collaboration between schools, families, and community mental health services is another essential component (Saadati, 2023). Parents and caregivers play a key role in reinforcing positive coping behaviors at home, while external professionals can provide specialized expertise and resources. A coordinated approach ensures that adolescents receive comprehensive care tailored to their developmental needs.

Research across various educational contexts demonstrates that mental health-friendly initiatives can significantly improve both psychological outcomes and academic performance. For instance, schools that adopt peer support networks often report reductions in bullying incidents and increased feelings of belonging among students (Van Der Meulen et al., 2021). These positive changes contribute to a safer and more productive learning environment.

Despite these benefits, many schools face barriers such as limited funding, lack of trained personnel, and cultural stigmas surrounding mental health (Burns & Rapee, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires policy support, professional development for educators, and community engagement. Without such measures, well-intentioned programs may fail to achieve meaningful and sustainable impact.

This paper aims to explore effective strategies for building mental health-friendly schools through psychological intervention approaches. By analyzing best practices and case studies, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Ultimately, creating supportive educational environments is vital to fostering resilient, flourishing adolescents prepared to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

2 Method



This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. This design was chosen to investigate in depth the psychological intervention strategies implemented in mental health-friendly schools (Robertson et al., 2023). The focus is on identifying practices, challenges, and supporting factors in the implementation of intervention programs within educational settings. The case studies were conducted in

three secondary schools that have been recognized for their well-established mental health policies and programs.

The research participants included guidance and counseling teachers, school psychologists, and students aged 13–17 years. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were relevant and had direct experience with the implementation of mental health strategies (Edgelow et al., 2022). A total of 15 teachers, 3 school psychologists, and 30 students were interviewed. Ethical approval was obtained from the university’s ethics committee, along with written consent from the schools and the students’ parents or guardians.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of school policy documents. The interviews were conducted using a question guide based on adolescent mental health indicators from the WHO and the American Psychological Association (Alumdal et al., 2024). Observations were carried out over a four-week period to monitor the implementation of intervention activities in classrooms and extracurricular programs. Documents such as curricula, teacher training modules, and program evaluation reports were also analyzed to strengthen data triangulation.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis technique through six stages (Campbell et al., 2021): data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme naming, and report writing. Validity was reinforced through source triangulation (teachers, psychologists, students), method triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), and member checking with several participants. The final results are presented as a conceptual model of mental health-friendly school strategies that can be adapted to various educational contexts.

3 Findings and Discussion

3.1 Identification of Key Psychological Intervention Strategies

The study revealed three core strategies consistently applied across the three selected schools: (a) the integration of social–emotional learning (SEL) modules into the curriculum, (b) peer-support groups facilitated by trained student leaders, and (c) collaboration between school counselors and external mental health professionals. SEL modules improved students’ emotional regulation and communication skills, aligning with WHO’s adolescent mental health indicators. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that SEL integration significantly reduces emotional distress among adolescents (Cosgrove et al., 2024).

3.2 Challenges in Implementation and Institutional Support

Despite these strategies, several challenges emerged. Teachers reported limited time allocation within the academic schedule, while school psychologists highlighted insufficient funding for professional development. Students noted stigma associated with seeking psychological help, which

sometimes discouraged participation in peer-support groups. These findings echo previous literature indicating that institutional constraints and cultural stigma remain significant barriers to school-based mental health programs (Day et al., 2025). Addressing these barriers requires systemic policy adjustments and sustained administrative commitment.

3.3 Supporting Factors for Program Sustainability

The success of mental health-friendly strategies was strongly linked to supportive leadership and an inclusive school culture. Principals who actively promoted mental well-being created an environment where teachers and students felt empowered to engage in intervention activities. Parental involvement also enhanced the continuity of care outside school hours. These findings reinforce Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, emphasizing that adolescent well-being is shaped by interconnected systems—school, family, and community (Stanley & Kuo, 2022).

3.4 Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings suggest that schools aiming to become mental health-friendly must adopt a holistic approach combining curriculum innovation, peer involvement, professional collaboration, and community engagement. Educational policymakers should provide clear guidelines and allocate resources for mental health interventions to ensure equitable implementation. Furthermore, incorporating culturally sensitive practices can mitigate stigma and enhance program acceptance among students and parents. The conceptual model derived from this study illustrates how these elements interact to foster sustainable psychological support in educational settings.

4 Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of comprehensive psychological intervention strategies in creating mental health-friendly schools. The findings show that integrating social–emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum, establishing peer-support groups, and fostering collaboration with external mental health professionals significantly enhance adolescent well-being in educational settings. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as limited resources, time constraints, and persistent stigma remain barriers to effective implementation.

Supportive school leadership, inclusive culture, and parental involvement emerged as key factors in sustaining mental health programs. These elements work synergistically within the broader ecological systems influencing adolescent development. For schools aiming to strengthen their mental health initiatives, a holistic approach that combines curriculum innovation, stakeholder collaboration, and community engagement is essential.

Policymakers and educational leaders should provide clear guidelines, adequate funding, and culturally responsive practices to ensure equitable access to psychological support for all students. By addressing both structural and cultural barriers, mental health-friendly schools can serve as protective environments that foster resilience, academic success, and overall well-being among adolescents.

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