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The Role of Pediatric Nurses in the Effectiveness of School-Based Emotion Regulation Programs on Anxiety, Depression, and Well-Being

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Abstract

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by intense emotional fluctuations and heightened psychological sensitivity. Acquiring effective emotion regulation skills during this period plays a critical role in preventing internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression. This systematic review examines the impact of school-based emotion regulation interventions on adolescents' psychological well-being, anxiety, and depression levels, and discusses the role of pediatric nurses in these programs. The findings indicate that structured intervention programs are effective in reducing psychological symptoms and promoting positive attributes. These interventions include cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based approaches, psychoeducation, and physical activities. Pediatric nurses contribute significantly in this process through their roles as educators, counselors, caregivers, protectors, and innovators. Particularly in school-based interventions, they can guide students in developing emotional awareness, enhancing coping skills, and fostering healthy social relationships. In conclusion, increasing the visibility and functionality of pediatric nurses in school-based mental health services presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen the community's overall psychological well-being.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a developmentally complex and sensitive stage during which individuals undergo multidimensional changes as they transition from childhood to adulthood. In this process, they are confronted with developmental tasks such as forming their identity, gaining independence, and defining their social roles (McLaughlin et al., 2015). Increasing social awareness, environmental expectations, academic responsibilities, and the transformation of peer relationships bring both supportive and challenging conditions for psychological adjustment. Developmentally, this period is marked by intensified questioning of both the external world and internal experiences; young individuals become more sensitive to life events and more open to the search for meaning (Huttunen et al., 2025; Long et al., 2020).

During this period, emotions become more intense, variable, and difficult to manage. Especially in this phase where social interactions increase and self-awareness develops, the individual is responsible not only for understanding their own emotions but also for recognizing and appropriately responding to the emotions of others (Selcuk & Aslan, 2022; Silvers, 2022). Developing emotion regulation skills can have a protective effect against mental health problems. This skill significantly ensures adolescents' psychosocial well-being (Verzeletti et al., 2016; Young et al., 2019). Furthermore, promoting positive emotions strengthens an individual's psychological and emotional well-being (Rana & Nandinee, 2016).

Findings in the literature indicate that adolescents with effective emotion regulation skills exhibit higher psychological adjustment and are less affected by

internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety (Aldao et al., 2010; Kokonyei et al., 2024). Emotion regulation skills support individuals in making healthier decisions across various areas of life, engaging in more adaptive social interactions, and forming a stronger sense of self during personal development (Compas et al., 2017; Silvers, 2022). Therefore, equipping adolescents with effective emotion regulation strategies at an early age should be considered not only a mental health intervention but also a developmental necessity.

In this context, school-based emotion regulation programs have become effective tools to enhance emotional resilience, prevent psychological problems, and support social adjustment in young individuals. Evaluating the effects of these programs, which aim to strengthen emotion regulation skills, on depression, anxiety, and well-being is crucial for both health and education professionals. This systematic review aims to examine the effects of school-based emotion regulation interventions for adolescents on anxiety, depression, and well-being, and to highlight the role of pediatric nurses in these interventions. Accordingly, the article addresses the topic under the following subheadings: school-based interventions designed to protect adolescents' psychosocial health, the importance of emotion regulation in adolescence and emotion regulation programs, the impact of these programs on anxiety, well-being, and depression, and the relationship between emotion regulation and pediatric nursing.

2. School-Based Interventions Aimed at Protecting the Psychosocial Health of Adolescents

The World Health Organization (2020) states that school-based psychosocial interventions targeting adolescents can help detect emotional or behavioral disorders at an early stage and prevent high-risk behaviors (The World Health Organization, 2020). These interventions are structured, multifaceted programs designed to support the mental well-being of children and adolescents, enhance their emotional resilience, and reduce psychological risks. They aim to positively influence not only students' individual development but also their social and academic progress. Interventions typically include cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based practices, psychoeducation, physical exercise, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques (Caldwell et al., 2019; van Loon et al., 2020).

One such approach, cognitive behavioral interventions, helps students recognize negative thought patterns, develop healthy coping mechanisms, and manage their emotions more functionally. This, in turn, strengthens their self-confidence and improves their ability to cope with psychological symptoms (de la Torre-Luque et al., 2020; Essau et al., 2019). Mindfulness and relaxation-based interventions focus on enhancing attention, increasing bodily awareness, and promoting relaxation through breathing exercises. These practices contribute to stress reduction, inner calm, and regulation of emotional responses (Areskoug Sandberg et al., 2024; Monsillion et al., 2023).

Psychoeducation programs equip students with fundamental psychological knowledge and skills such as recognizing and expressing emotions and seeking appropriate help. These programs also raise mental health awareness and support adolescents in making sense of the challenges they experience (Jordans et al., 2013; Stjernswärd & Hansson, 2014). Physical interventions, including exercise, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, body movements, and increasingly common school-based yoga practices, aim to support stress management and enhance students' psychological well-being. In addition to improving physical flexibility and awareness, yoga offers a holistic approach that promotes mental calmness, concentration, and emotional balance, thereby supporting students' overall mental health (Khunti et al., 2023; Sanchez et al., 2023). Among these school-based interventions, another important category includes emotion regulation programs for adolescents (Pedrini et al., 2022).

3. The Importance of Emotion Regulation in Adolescents and Emotion Regulation Programs

Emotion regulation is a fundamental process that enables individuals to manage their emotional experiences healthily. This skill lies at the core of both social relationships and personal development, and it becomes particularly pronounced during adolescence (Mulyati et al., 2020; Young et al., 2019). Managing emotions appropriately encompasses multilayered skills such as increasing self-awareness of internal states, coping with emotional challenges, and maintaining behavioral control to achieve personal goals (Gross et al., 2015). Acquiring emotional regulation skills enhances individuals' flexibility and

psychological resilience in both positive and negative life experiences, thereby supporting overall well-being as a critical component of socio-emotional capacity (Morrish et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019). Unlike childhood, adolescents may face greater difficulties in coping with stress due to increased personal responsibilities and the pursuit of independence, which in turn amplifies their need for emotion regulation skills (Mulyati et al., 2020; Young et al., 2019). Therefore, it is recommended that structured intervention programs aimed at improving adolescents' emotion regulation skills be implemented during this developmental stage (Cracco et al., 2017; Eadeh et al., 2021; Pedrini et al., 2022; Theurel & Gentaz, 2018).

School-based emotion regulation intervention programs help adolescents manage and express their emotions, use positive coping strategies, show empathy, and maintain anger control (Carissoli & Villani, 2019; Claro, Boulanger, & Shaw, 2015; Daly et al., 2015; Frank et al., 2017; Houck et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Ledo et al., 2018). These programs may also contribute to reducing risky behaviors (such as smoking, alcohol, and substance use), aggressive tendencies, depressive symptoms, cyberbullying, attention problems, and stress levels among adolescents (Akdemir & Gunduz, 2022; Burckhardt et al., 2016; Fung et al., 2019; Iyer & Iyer, 2019; Lam & Seiden, 2020; Schoeps et al., 2018). This article will explore the effects of emotion regulation programs implemented among adolescents on anxiety, well-being, and depression.

3.1. The Effects of Emotion Regulation Programs on Anxiety, Well-being, and Depression

Emotion regulation has become a key focus of school-based interventions, leading to the development of numerous structured programs. The primary aim of these programs is not only to enhance emotion regulation skills in adolescents but also to reduce anxiety and depression levels and to improve psychological well-being. Programs based on Emotion Regulation (ER) and Behavioral Activation (BA), as evaluated by Johnstone et al. (2020), were found to be effective in reducing students' anxiety levels and contributed to the development of resilience skills (Johnstone et al., 2020). Similarly, the FRIENDS and My FRIENDS programs yielded successful results in decreasing general anxiety levels and particularly components such as worry (Kozina, 2020; Maalouf et al., 2020). Klim Conforti et al. (2021) noted that a Harry Potter-themed cognitive behavioral therapy training led to significant improvements in anxiety and social difficulties, especially among female students (Klim Conforti et al., 2021). The mindfulness-based L2B program implemented by Lam & Seiden (2020) also resulted in significant decreases in anxiety levels alongside improvements in emotional control and self-monitoring (Lam & Seiden, 2020). In another study, a mindfulness-based intervention conducted among adolescents with a history of addiction was shown to be effective in reducing impulsivity as well as managing anxiety. However, it was emphasized that longer-term interventions may be necessary for more complex skills such as emotion regulation and coping with stress (Russell et al., 2019).

In addition to reducing anxiety levels, supporting psychological well-being is also one of the key objectives of interventions. Brown et al. (2024) examined not only psychopathological symptoms in the DISCOVER program but also levels of well-being, stating that the program offers a comprehensive approach to enhancing adolescents' overall psychological health (Brown et al., 2024). James et al. (2024) demonstrated that the DISCOVER program facilitates coping with stress by improving emotion regulation skills, thereby contributing to psychological well-being (James et al., 2024). In another study, the D.N.A. program supported core psychological skills while addressing gaming addiction and enhanced psychological well-being (Cheng, Li, & Chen, 2024). A separate study on the Gaia program reported significant improvements in eudaimonic well-being components such as personal growth and life purpose; however, it was noted that the effects on areas like happiness and depression/anxiety were limited (Scafuto et al., 2024). Additionally, the MPPI program developed by Tejada-Gallardo et al. (2022) has the potential to reshape the complex relationship between well-being and psychological distress (Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2022). The DIALOG+S intervention also demonstrated positive effects on self-esteem, resilience, and quality of life (Gómez-Restrepo et al., 2023).

Significant findings have been reported among interventions directly targeting depression. Chen et al. (2024) emphasized that the M-SSL program was effective in reducing depressive symptoms and improving emotional challenges such as social anxiety (Chen et al., 2024).

In the Strong Minds program, the ACT-based intervention led to notable reductions in depression and stress levels (Burckhardt et al., 2016). The Harry Potter-themed intervention program also contributed to significant improvements in depression and self-evaluation (Klim Conforti, 2021). Online mindfulness- and ACT-based programs used in the studies of Lam and Seiden (2020) and Lappalainen et al. (2021) yielded promising results in reducing depressive symptoms and enhancing life satisfaction (Lam & Seiden, 2020; Lappalainen et al., 2021). The MindOut program, when implemented in disadvantaged schools, achieved short-term improvements in adolescents' mental health, including reductions in depressive symptoms (Dowling, 2019). Russell's research showed a decline in depression levels, particularly among youth with a history of substance use, where the intervention proved effective (Russell et al., 2019). On the other hand, the study conducted by Rice et al. (2024) did not identify any statistically significant differences between groups regarding depression, anxiety, or resilience levels (Rice et al., 2024).

However, not all interventions yielded the desired outcomes. Singh et al. (2019) observed no significant changes in social-emotional skills or depressive symptoms among students who participated in the Resilient Families program (Singh et al., 2019). The CERTIFY program developed by Claro and colleagues (2015) was found to be effective in enhancing emotion regulation skills but demonstrated limited impact on reducing risky behaviors (Claro, Boulanger, & Shaw, 2015).

4. Emotion Regulation and Pediatric Nursing

Pediatric nurses are responsible not only for the physical health of children and adolescents, but also for supporting their psychosocial development. In this context, especially in school-based interventions, pediatric nurses can guide students in areas such as emotional awareness, coping with stress, and developing social skills. These nurses, who are able to build trust with students and recognize their needs early to provide appropriate referrals, play a key role in protecting child and adolescent mental health (Lineberry & Ickes, 2015).

Pediatric nursing and school nursing are interrelated disciplines, and structured emotional support contributes to students feeling safe in learning environments, developing psychological resilience, and strengthening social connections (National Association of School Nurses, 2016). In this context, pediatric nurses in schools can undertake diverse roles such as individual counseling, group-based psychoeducational sessions, parent information activities, collaboration with teachers, and evaluation of intervention programs (Maughan et al., 2014).

The American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes that school nurses play a central role in supporting the biopsychosocial health of children within the school environment. These nurses assume multifaceted responsibilities, including not only physical health monitoring but also promoting mental well-being, ensuring emotional safety, and providing social support (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

Considering that emotion regulation skills, which develop especially during adolescence, are among the

key determinants of mental health, the roles of the nurse as educator, counselor, caregiver, protector, and innovator become increasingly significant. In the educator role, pediatric nurses can guide adolescents and their families in recognizing, expressing, and appropriately managing emotions. Through their counseling role, they support adolescents who struggle with emotions such as stress, anger, and anxiety, and direct them to appropriate resources. Within the scope of protection and health promotion, the nurse identifies emotional difficulties at an early stage, creates an environment that fosters emotional well-being, and undertakes preventive actions against psychosocial risks. As a caregiver, the nurse provides a safe and supportive relationship context where adolescents feel free to express their emotions. Finally, in the role of innovator, the nurse contributes actively to the design and development of emotion regulation programs, including planning implementation and structuring intervention components (Al Sharif et al., 2024; Cracco et al., 2017; Lytle et al., 2024) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Roles of Pediatric Nurses in Emotion Regulation Among Adolescents (Al Sharif et al., 2024; Cracco et al., 2017; Lytle et al., 2024)

Within this framework, pediatric nurses can take an active role in school-based or clinic-based intervention programs aimed at developing emotion regulation skills. In doing so, they contribute not only to individual-level preventive mental health services but also become key actors in community-based psychosocial support initiatives. In this respect, pediatric nurses are strategic contributors to mental health promotion not only at the individual level but also at school and community levels. Therefore, ensuring that pediatric nurses assume more visible, active, and competent roles in school-based emotion regulation programs is of critical importance for strengthening community mental health (Al Sharif et al., 2024; Lytle et al., 2024; Moen & Jacobsen, 2022).

Conclusion

Emotion regulation, which begins to develop in childhood and becomes more sophisticated during adolescence, plays a critical role in mental well-being. Supporting adolescents in developing healthy emotional regulation strategies through structured school-based interventions contributes not only to reducing symptoms such as anxiety and depression, but also to strengthening psychological resilience and well-being. Programs implemented in recent years, especially those based on mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral approaches, or psychoeducation, have shown promising results in improving adolescents' emotional skills.

In this context, the involvement of pediatric nurses in school-based emotional regulation programs is of great importance. Pediatric nurses, by supporting not only the physical but also the psychosocial development of children and adolescents, can assume

effective roles in the design, implementation, and evaluation of intervention programs. Therefore, encouraging the inclusion of pediatric nurses in psychosocial school health practices will make significant contributions to both individual and community-level mental health promotion.

Ethical Statement

There is no need to obtain ethics committee permission for this study due review. However, the study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

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Presentation Information

The findings of this study have not been presented at any conference or journal.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this study. Any institution or organization providing funding for this research did not have any role in the design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or publication to influence or distort the findings.

Author Contributions

The contributions of the authors are as follows: [Merve Oral, Ebru Kılıcarslan] participated in data collection and analysis; [Merve Oral] prepared the draft of the paper; [Merve Oral, Ebru Kılıcarslan] conducted the final revision of the manuscript.

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