





School-based mental health interventions for adolescents: supporting typically developing students and students with neurodevelopmental disorders

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ABSTRACT

Mental health interventions in schools are essential for supporting adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs). Schools offer a unique setting for early intervention due to their accessibility and continuity, promoting regular monitoring and engagement. This review explores a multi-tiered mental health framework that includes universal, targeted, and intensive strategies such as social-emotional learning (SEL), cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), peer-support programs, and culturally responsive practices. Evidence suggests that these interventions improve mental health outcomes, enhancing academic performance, social skills, and resilience. SEL programs build competencies like emotional regulation, while CBT reduces symptoms of anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues. Peer-support initiatives offer accessible support, reducing stigma within the school community. For students with NDDs, specialized interventions such as social skills training and applied behavior analysis (ABA) demonstrate positive impacts on social functioning and school engagement. The review also examines implementation barriers, including limited resources and the lack of culturally adaptable approaches. Teacher training and community involvement emerge as vital for bridging gaps in mental health support. Advocacy for policy and funding is essential to sustain these programs, ensuring they meet the diverse needs of all students. Through an inclusive, collaborative approach, school-based interventions significantly contribute to adolescent development and well-being.

KEYWORDS

school-based mental health, adolescent well-being, inclusive education, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), social-emotional learning (SEL)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interventions in mental health for adolescents in school settings play a fundamental role in promoting emotional well-being and addressing emerging psychological issues during a critical developmental stage. Schools provide a unique environment for delivering mental health services, as they offer accessibility and continuity of care. Adolescents spend a significant portion of their time in schools, making these institutions an ideal platform for early identification and intervention of mental health problems [1]. These interventions are important for adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs), who often face unique challenges in social, academic, and emotional domains. Providing support within schools allows for early intervention that can mitigate long-term mental health issues and improve overall developmental outcomes [2].

Research suggests that school-based mental health programs improve students' psychological well-being and enhance academic performance, attendance, and overall school engagement [3]. Common interventions include social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and peer-support initiatives, all of which have been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and disruptive behavior among adolescents [4]. These interventions, when integrated within the broader school framework, also help reduce stigma around mental health, encouraging students to seek help when needed [5].

Inclusive practices in school-based mental health interventions ensure accessibility for all

students, especially those from diverse backgrounds and those with disabilities. Research highlights the effectiveness of such approaches in creating an inclusive school culture where varied student needs are addressed through responsive educational strategies [6]. For instance, studies emphasize that implementing inclusive practices, such as differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), has enabled middle and secondary schools to create more collaborative and responsive environments [7]. These methods make curriculum and instruction accessible for students with disabilities and various learning styles, promoting inclusivity across the board [8]. By promoting such inclusive environments, schools can reduce educational disparities and ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, receive the support needed to thrive both academically and socially [9].

Policy approaches within OECD countries also reflect the need for inclusive practices for students with special education needs and disorders (SEND). These policies emphasize mainstreaming students with learning disabilities and mental health challenges into regular classrooms while also providing systematic support structures and cultural responsiveness [10]. Such inclusive environments address the educational disparities that students with SEND face, ensuring they feel supported and valued within the school community [11]. Additionally, creating culturally responsive school cultures has proven beneficial for the well-being of marginalized students, including those from varied ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds [12]. Inclusive school environments that respect and incorporate diverse cultural backgrounds reduce discrimination and strengthen students' sense of belonging [13]. This is critical for students with NDDs, who may face heightened risks of social exclusion and stigmatization in less inclusive settings [14]. This inclusivity allows students to access culturally relevant support, addressing both their social and psychological needs [15].

To support mental health inclusivity, differentiated instructional approaches are also critical. For example, cooperative learning models tailored to students with mild disabilities enable them to develop both academic and social skills, creating a supportive, inclusive classroom environment [16]. These strategies support students' individual growth, facilitating positive peer interactions and helping students gain social competence [17]. For students with mental health disorders, integrating school-based interventions can reduce symptoms and promote social inclusion by countering stigma and encouraging supportive peer relationships

[18]. Interventions such as these ensure that students with psychiatric challenges are supported holistically within the school setting, reducing the risk of social exclusion [19].

Despite the positive impact, there are challenges related to the implementation of mental health interventions in school settings. Limited resources, lack of trained personnel, and varying levels of engagement from school staff can affect the efficacy of these programs [20]. The sustainability of these interventions also relies on consistent policy support and funding to ensure their long-term impact [21]. Training school staff in mental health intervention techniques and inclusive education practices is essential to creating accessible and effective mental health support within schools [22]. Current research consistently demonstrates that well-trained educators and health providers are better equipped to address diverse mental health needs, promoting a more inclusive and supportive school environment [23].

This review aligns with the scope of a pharmacological journal by addressing the crossroads of mental health interventions and pharmacotherapy in neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs). Effective school-based interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and social-emotional learning (SEL), play a critical role in reducing symptom severity and improving emotional regulation, which can limit the need for pharmacological treatments in some cases [24]. For example, early and sustained psychosocial interventions have been shown to decrease the reliance on medications for managing conditions like anxiety, depression, and ADHD [25]. Furthermore, by targeting mental health issues early in life, these interventions may reduce the risk of comorbid conditions that often require pharmacological management in adulthood [26]. This highlights the potential for school-based programs to complement and, in some cases, minimize the need for pharmacotherapy, thereby supporting holistic and sustainable mental health care [27].

The primary aim of this review is to examine the effectiveness of school-based mental health interventions, focusing on social-emotional learning (SEL), cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), peer-support initiatives, and frameworks such as the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). By exploring their role in addressing the mental health needs of adolescents with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs), this review aims to highlight best practices and identify gaps that require further research [28]. Additionally, this review discusses the implications of these interventions in reducing long-term reliance on pharmacological treatments [29].

2. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have garnered widespread attention as a key intervention for promoting mental health and well-being among adolescents in school settings. SEL focuses on the development of core competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making [30]. These competencies address immediate social and emotional challenges and serve as protective factors against long-term mental health issues. They are directly linked to both mental health outcomes and academic success [31].

SEL programs have been shown to have a significant positive effect on students' mental health. Research indicates that students who participate in SEL programs demonstrate lower levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems compared to their peers who do not receive such interventions [32]. For example, SEL curricula such as the Second Step program have been effective in reducing aggression and disruptive behaviors in schools, contributing to an overall healthier school climate [33]. Moreover, SEL interventions enhance students' coping mechanisms, promoting resilience and adaptability to stress, which is critical during adolescence, a period of heightened vulnerability to mental health issues [34].

SEL programs are linked to improved mental health outcomes and enhanced academic performance. A meta-analysis found that students who participated in SEL programs showed an 11-percentile point increase in academic achievement [35]. This can be attributed to the fact that social-emotional skills are foundational for learning; students with better emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills are more likely to engage positively with peers and teachers, leading to a better learning environment [36]. Additionally, SEL helps students develop a growth mindset and intrinsic motivation, both of which contribute to sustained academic engagement and success [37]. The benefits of SEL extend beyond immediate academic or mental health improvements. Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that SEL can have lasting effects well into adulthood [38]. For example, research found that students who participated in SEL programs were more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and have better mental health in adulthood [39].

2.1. Cognitive-behavioural therapy

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) has been in-

creasingly recognized as one of the most effective mental health interventions for adolescents, particularly within school settings. As a structured, evidence-based approach, CBT aims to help individuals identify and challenge distorted thinking patterns and replace them with healthier, more adaptive ways of thinking and behaving [40]. This makes CBT valuable in addressing the mental health challenges that often emerge during adolescence, such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders, which can significantly impact academic performance and social relationships if left untreated [41].

CBT has demonstrated efficacy in treating a wide range of mental health issues in adolescents, including anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders [42]. In school settings, where mental health services can be delivered in a low-stigma environment, CBT-based programs have been effective in addressing both internalizing and externalizing problems [43]. For instance, studies show that adolescents with anxiety who undergo CBT experience a significant reduction in symptoms, with many maintaining improvements over time [44]. Similarly, CBT has proven to be highly effective in treating adolescent depression by helping students reframe negative thought patterns and engage in more positive, goal-oriented activities [45]. These improvements in mental health also translate to better classroom engagement, attendance, and overall academic outcomes, highlighting the dual benefits of CBT in schools.

In cases of disruptive behaviour and conduct disorders, CBT also plays a crucial role in helping adolescents manage anger, improve impulse control, and develop better interpersonal skills. Programs such as “Coping Power”, which combines CBT techniques with social skills training, have shown reductions in aggressive behaviours and improvements in social competence among adolescents [46]. The adaptability of CBT to target multiple mental health concerns makes it an ideal intervention for school-based settings where students present a range of emotional and behavioural needs. This flexibility ensures that CBT can be tailored to individual students or delivered as part of group interventions, depending on the school’s resources and student needs [47].

The effectiveness of CBT lies in its focus on two core mechanisms: cognitive restructuring and behavioural activation. Cognitive restructuring helps adolescents challenge unhelpful or irrational thoughts, which are often a major contributor to conditions like anxiety and depression [48]. For instance, a student may struggle with social anxiety due to the belief that their peers will judge them negatively. Through cognitive restructuring, they

learn to challenge this automatic thought and consider more balanced alternatives, such as the idea that not everyone is focused on judging them. This cognitive flexibility is particularly beneficial during adolescence, a period marked by heightened sensitivity to social feedback.

Behavioural activation, another key component of CBT, encourages adolescents to engage in activities that provide a sense of accomplishment or pleasure, even when they feel unmotivated or sad [49]. This approach is particularly effective for students dealing with depression, as it counteracts the tendency toward social withdrawal and inactivity, which often perpetuate depressive symptoms. By gradually increasing participation in enjoyable or meaningful activities, students experience an improvement in mood and an increase in self-efficacy.

CBT’s flexibility in delivery methods is one of its strengths. It can be delivered in both individual and group formats, depending on the needs of the student and the resources available within the school. Group CBT interventions are particularly useful in schools as they allow more students to be reached while promoting peer support, which can be beneficial for adolescents dealing with social or emotional issues [50]. Group-based CBT has shown positive outcomes for reducing symptoms of social anxiety, generalized anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among students. In contrast, individualized CBT is more suitable for students with complex mental health issues, such as major depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), where tailored approaches yield better outcomes.

The benefits of CBT for adolescents are immediate and long-term. Studies have found that adolescents who receive CBT in school settings tend to maintain their mental health improvements over extended periods, particularly when booster sessions are included to reinforce the skills they learned during therapy [51]. This preventive capacity highlights the importance of integrating CBT into school-based mental health initiatives to address issues early and reduce their persistence into adulthood. For example, a study by Gladstone *et al.* demonstrated that adolescents who participated in a school-based CBT program for depression were less likely to develop recurrent depressive episodes later in life [52].

CBT is often integrated into broader mental health initiatives within schools, complementing other approaches such as social-emotional learning (SEL) programs or positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS) [53]. While CBT focuses primarily on changing cognitive and behavioural patterns, SEL programs emphasize broader

emotional competencies and relationship skills. This integration creates a synergistic framework where students benefit from both targeted therapeutic interventions and universal prevention programs that enhance overall school climate and mental health awareness.

Despite its proven efficacy, there are challenges to implementing CBT in school settings. One major issue is the lack of trained mental health professionals within schools. While school counsellors and psychologists can deliver CBT, many schools lack the resources or staffing to provide ongoing therapy to students who need it. Additionally, while CBT is effective for many adolescents, it may not work for all. Some students may require more intensive interventions, or they may struggle to engage in the cognitive demands of the therapy, particularly if they have learning difficulties or cognitive impairments [54]. To address this, schools should prioritize professional development for staff, ensuring that counsellors and teachers are equipped with the skills to deliver or support CBT effectively.

Another challenge is ensuring that CBT is culturally relevant and accessible to diverse student populations. Research has shown that adaptations to CBT are necessary to address the unique needs of students from different cultural backgrounds, as traditional CBT may not fully account for cultural variations in how emotions are expressed or processed [55]. Schools need to consider these factors when implementing CBT to ensure it is effective and inclusive for all students. Collaboration with culturally diverse communities can aid in designing CBT programs that reflect students' lived experiences and values.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy is a powerful intervention for addressing the mental health needs of adolescents in school settings. Its focus on cognitive restructuring and behavioural activation makes it highly effective for treating a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders. Moreover, CBT provides adolescents with lifelong skills to manage stress and emotional challenges. However, successful implementation in schools requires adequate training, resources, and cultural sensitivity. When integrated with other school-based mental health programs, CBT can be part of a comprehensive strategy that promotes both individual and community-wide mental health [56].

2.2 Peer support initiatives

Peer-support initiatives in schools have emerged as valuable mental health interventions for adolescents, leveraging the power of social relationships

to promote well-being. These programs involve students helping each other through structured support mechanisms, underpinned by the idea that adolescents may feel more comfortable and understood when discussing their problems with peers rather than with adults [57]. By tapping into existing peer relationships, these initiatives can reach students who might otherwise avoid traditional mental health services, creating an accessible and relatable form of support. Peer-support initiatives often focus on providing emotional support, improving mental health literacy, and promoting resilience, making them a low-cost and scalable addition to school mental health services.

Peer-support initiatives have demonstrated positive outcomes for improving adolescents' mental health, particularly in addressing issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress. One reason is that peer support capitalizes on the natural peer relationships that adolescents highly value during this developmental stage. The presence of empathetic peers who can relate to their experiences reduces feelings of isolation and stigma that often prevent students from seeking help from adults or mental health professionals. Studies show that students who participate in peer-support programs report lower levels of anxiety and depression, as well as improved self-esteem and emotional resilience [58]. These improvements benefit the mental health of recipients and contribute to a healthier school environment by promoting trust and openness.

For example, a study on peer-support programs in Australian schools found that students involved in peer-led mental health initiatives demonstrated improved coping strategies and better emotional regulation. Additionally, peer supporters often experience positive mental health outcomes themselves, such as increased self-confidence, leadership skills, and a stronger sense of community. The dual benefits of peer-support initiatives, for both the recipients and the peer supporters, make these programs particularly effective and sustainable in promoting school-wide mental well-being [59].

The success of peer-support initiatives can be attributed to several psychological mechanisms, one of which is normalization. Adolescents often feel more comfortable discussing personal issues with peers because peers can normalize their experiences, helping them realize they are not alone in their struggles. This process can reduce the feelings of shame or embarrassment often associated with mental health problems, thereby lowering the barriers to seeking help. Moreover, peer-support programs create a space where students can express their emotions freely without fear of

judgment, promoting a culture of openness and understanding. This openness is crucial in breaking the cycle of stigma and encouraging help-seeking behaviors among students [60].

Social connectedness is another crucial mechanism. Adolescents who feel socially connected to their peers are less likely to experience mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Peer-support programs promote this connectedness by encouraging supportive, trusting relationships, which buffer against the negative effects of stress. Adolescents who participate in these programs are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, which is essential for their emotional and psychological well-being [61].

Peer-support initiatives take various forms, ranging from informal peer mentoring to structured programs like peer-led counseling or peer education. One common model is the peer mentoring program, where older students are trained to provide guidance and support to younger students. This model has been effective in reducing bullying and improving the school climate by promoting positive peer relationships. Mentoring relationships offer both social and emotional support, with younger students benefiting from the advice and reassurance of more experienced peers, while mentors gain a sense of responsibility and leadership [62].

Another successful model is the peer counseling program, where students receive training in basic counseling skills and provide one-on-one or group support to their peers. In these programs, students are taught active listening, empathy, and problem-solving techniques to help their peers work through emotional challenges. For instance, a study of peer counseling programs in high schools found that students who received peer counseling reported significant reductions in feelings of loneliness and improvements in coping strategies. Peer-led mental health education programs, which train students to deliver mental health information and resources to their classmates, are another effective approach. These programs increase mental health awareness and reduce stigma by encouraging open conversations about topics like anxiety, depression, and coping strategies [63].

In addition to benefiting the recipients of peer support, these initiatives also have a positive impact on the peer supporters themselves. Peer supporters often experience personal growth, enhanced social skills, and an increased sense of purpose. Research indicates that students who serve as peer supporters gain leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and a heightened sense of empathy [63]. These experiences equip peer sup-

porters with valuable interpersonal skills that prepare them for future roles in both personal and professional contexts. Additionally, peer supporters often develop a stronger sense of belonging and connectedness to their school community, which has been linked to lower levels of school disengagement and dropout rates. This dual impact stresses the value of investing in peer-support training and infrastructure as a means of promoting long-term benefits for the entire school community.

Despite their benefits, peer-support initiatives also face several challenges. One of the main concerns is ensuring that peer supporters are adequately trained and supported. Peer supporters, though well-intentioned, are not professional counsellors, and without proper training, they may struggle to handle complex mental health issues or emotional crises [64]. Ensuring that peer supporters receive ongoing supervision and guidance from trained mental health professionals is critical to the success of these programs. Additionally, structured debriefing sessions for peer supporters can help them process their experiences and prevent burnout. Another challenge is maintaining confidentiality and managing boundaries. Adolescents may feel comfortable sharing personal issues with peers, but there is a risk that sensitive information could be mishandled if clear guidelines are not established [64]. Schools need to implement robust policies around confidentiality, and peer supporters must be educated on ethical considerations to avoid potential harm.

Cultural sensitivity is also an important factor to consider. Peer support programs may not resonate equally across different cultural groups, particularly if they are not adapted to the specific needs of diverse populations. Research suggests that peer-support programs must be culturally responsive to be effective in schools with ethnically diverse students [65]. Programs need to be designed with input from the student body and tailored to reflect the cultural values and norms of the participants.

To maximize their effectiveness, peer-support initiatives should be integrated into a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being. Rather than functioning as standalone programs, peer-support initiatives can complement other mental health services, such as social-emotional learning (SEL) programs or cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions. A whole-school approach ensures that peer-support programs are part of a comprehensive mental health strategy that addresses the diverse needs of students [65]. This integration helps create a seamless support network, where teachers, counsellors, and peer sup-

porters collaborate to promote student well-being. Peer-support initiatives are a powerful tool for promoting adolescent mental health, offering a low-cost, accessible intervention that leverages the natural relationships between students. These programs promote social connectedness, reduce stigma, and provide emotional support, all of which contribute to improved mental health outcomes for both supporters and recipients [66]. However, their success depends on careful planning, adequate training, and integration with other school-based mental health initiatives. When implemented effectively, peer-support initiatives can significantly enhance students' mental health and well-being in school settings.

3. MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS IN NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

Mental health interventions in school settings for children with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs), such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and learning disabilities, are critical for promoting academic success, social integration, and emotional well-being. With an estimated 1 in 6 children worldwide being diagnosed with NDDs, schools have become pivotal environments for delivering timely and effective mental health interventions. Effective interventions can significantly improve academic performance, social skills, and mental health outcomes for children with NDDs, particularly when implemented early and tailored to the individual needs of students [67].

Early identification and intervention are paramount for addressing NDDs. Schools play a central role in screening for potential NDDs through teacher observations, standardized assessments, and referrals to mental health professionals. Comprehensive assessments that include input from parents, teachers, and specialists are vital for understanding each child's unique needs and strengths. The use of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) helps schools identify students requiring additional interventions and ensures prompt support [68].

3.1 Universal interventions

The MTSS framework begins with universal interventions, which aim to benefit all students by creating a positive school climate and promoting social-emotional learning (SEL). These interventions teach essential skills such as coping strategies, emotional regulation, and problem-solving. SEL programs, when implemented universally, have

been shown to improve social skills and reduce behavioral problems, including for students with NDDs. Furthermore, these interventions promote inclusivity by promoting understanding and acceptance of neurodiversity among peers, thereby reducing stigma [69].

3.2 Targeted interventions

For students identified as at risk or needing additional support, targeted interventions provide small-group or focused support. These interventions often draw on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) principles to teach coping strategies, enhance social skills, and address challenging behaviors. Small-group CBT interventions have demonstrated efficacy in reducing anxiety and improving social competence in students with ADHD and ASD. Targeted interventions also frequently include social skills training (SST), enabling students to develop meaningful relationships with peers and navigate social situations effectively [69].

3.3 Intensive interventions

Intensive interventions are designed for students with more severe or complex needs. These individualized supports typically involve close collaboration among special education professionals, mental health specialists, and families. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) play a crucial role in this tier by incorporating therapeutic support, behavioral intervention plans, and specific goals for social and emotional development. Specialized therapies, such as applied behavior analysis (ABA), are particularly effective for students with ASD. ABA employs structured techniques to improve communication, social interactions, and academic performance [70]. Collaboration among educators, mental health professionals, and families is essential for the success of interventions across all tiers. Regular meetings, shared decision-making, and family involvement ensure that interventions are consistent, comprehensive, and tailored to each child. This collaborative approach strengthens the support network around the child, enhancing their overall well-being [71].

3.4 Challenges in implementation

Despite the proven benefits of these interventions, schools face several challenges in implementing them effectively. A major barrier is the shortage of trained personnel, such as school psychologists and special education teachers, capable of deliv-

ering specialized interventions. Limited funding and resources further exacerbate disparities in access to quality mental health services. Additionally, stigma surrounding mental health can prevent families from seeking necessary support for their children. Schools must actively work to reduce stigma by promoting a culture of openness and understanding, supported by mental health education campaigns [72].

4. DISCUSSION

Mental health interventions in school settings for children with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) are critical to their overall development and well-being. These initiatives are critical in promoting resilience, academic success, and overall well-being. Schools serve as fundamental environments for early identification, intervention, and support, enabling children to traverse the complexities of their mental health challenges in a nurturing context. With the increasing prevalence of mental health issues among youth, the urgency to enhance and expand these interventions is apparent.

4.1 A multi-tiered approach to mental health interventions

Adopting a comprehensive, multi-tiered approach is essential for addressing the diverse needs of students. Evidence-based frameworks, such as the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), integrate interventions like social-emotional learning (SEL), cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), and peer-support initiatives, ensuring that both universal and targeted support systems are in place. Research consistently shows that MTSS enhances academic performance, social-emotional development, and mental health outcomes for children with NDDs [73]. By implementing MTSS, schools can offer proactive and tiered interventions that address challenges at various levels of severity.

4.2 Encouraging educators through training and support

Teachers play a critical role in identifying and supporting students with mental health challenges. Equipping educators with mental health literacy and behavioural management strategies is vital for creating inclusive and nurturing classroom environments. Ongoing professional development should emphasize culturally responsive practices and strategies for promoting social-emotional learning. When educators are empowered with the right skills, they become effective first responders, capable of promoting positive outcomes for all

students [74].

4.3 Leveraging technology for greater access

Technological advancements have opened new avenues for mental health interventions. Digital platforms, telehealth services, and mobile applications can enhance accessibility, particularly in underserved areas. Tools for mindfulness, mental health tracking, and coping strategies empower students to take an active role in managing their mental health [75]. Virtual peer-support groups also offer safe spaces for adolescents to connect and share experiences, promoting social connectedness [76]. Integrating these tools into school-based mental health programs ensures that interventions remain relevant and accessible in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

4.4 Advocating for policy and funding

Sustaining and expanding mental health interventions in schools requires robust policy support and increased funding at local, state, and federal levels. Policymakers must acknowledge the role of mental health in educational success and prioritize resources accordingly. Collaboration among schools, mental health agencies, and community organizations can strengthen support networks and ensure that interventions are widely accessible [78]. Advocacy efforts should highlight the economic and social benefits of investing in mental health initiatives, emphasizing their long-term impact on students' lives.

4.5 Promoting equity and cultural responsiveness

Equity and inclusion are fundamental to effective mental health interventions. Programs must be culturally competent, ensuring they address the unique needs of diverse student populations. Schools should actively engage families and communities in designing and implementing interventions that reflect their cultural values and contexts [79]. Research shows that culturally responsive programs promote a sense of belonging and improve outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds [80]. Tailored approaches that prioritize inclusivity are more likely to yield sustainable and impactful results.

5. CONCLUSION

Mental health interventions in school settings could change the educational and emotional

experiences for children with neurodevelopmental disorders. By implementing comprehensive, multi-tiered frameworks, such as MTSS, and integrating evidence-based practices like CBT, SEL, and peer-support initiatives, schools can address the diverse needs of their students in inclusive and supportive environments. To ensure the sustainability and impact of these programs, collaboration among educators, families, mental health professionals, and policymakers is essential. Policymakers must prioritize funding and policy reforms that make mental health support accessible to all, specifically for marginalized and underserved populations. Educators and mental health professionals should continue to innovate, leveraging technology and culturally responsive approaches to reach students effectively. The potential of school-based mental health interventions extends beyond individual well-being. These initiatives can create a ripple effect, strengthening communities, reducing societal stigma around mental health, and equipping future generations with the skills to traverse life's challenges.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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