

Solutions for Mental Health Issues in Vietnamese Adolescents

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Abstract: In Vietnam, there is a growing concern about the mental health of adolescents experiencing various mental disorders. These challenges encompass common conditions like depression and anxiety, as well as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), no suicidal self-injury (NSSI), and even suicidal behavior. Several factors contribute to these issues, including academic pressure, family conflicts, excessive screen time, and the prevalence of school violence and cyber bullying. The insufficient availability of mental health services plays a significant role to worsen the situation, as only a small part of the population has access to mental health support. While the government has established the National Mental Health Program (NMHP), its coverage remains limited, leaving a substantial gap in the provision of mental health care. To address these pressing concerns, comprehensive solutions are needed. The research identifies several key strategies for addressing mental health challenges among Vietnamese adolescents, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between schools and families, raising awareness about bullying, reducing academic pressure, improving family communication, enhancing mental health literacy, and promoting outdoor activities and balanced screen time. Government policies and initiatives, including preventive measures against school violence and the integration of mental health education into teacher training, play a crucial role in improving the mental health landscape in Vietnamese schools. It is clear that solving these challenges requires a collective effort involving individuals, families, teachers, and government authorities. The research employed various methods, including data collection, analysis of literature, and case studies, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues and potential solutions. Ultimately, addressing these challenges is essential for the well-being and future prospects of Vietnam's youth.

Keywords: Mental health issues, Vietnamese adolescents

Introduction

In the context of comprehensive well-being, which encompasses both physical and psychological health, the importance of achieving mental equilibrium cannot be overstated. Optimal health is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond mere physical fitness and dietary habits; it necessitates the nurturing and preservation of mental well-being. In today's contemporary society, characterized by conspicuous consumerism and an emphasis on individualism within nuclear families, the significance of mental health is particularly pronounced.

Vietnam, a rapidly emerging nation situated in Southeast Asia, has experienced a remarkable trajectory of economic growth in recent decades. The socioeconomic landscape of Vietnam has undergone a profound transformation in the 21st century. Marked by an impressive growth rate, the emergence of a burgeoning middle class, and the expansion of urban environments, the nation has made significant strides in improving the material standards of living for its citizens. This socioeconomic surge has led to urbanization, improved access to modern amenities, and increased exposure to the complexities of contemporary life. However, it has also introduced a myriad of new challenges, particularly in the domain of mental health.

As Vietnam ascends onto the global stage, it must simultaneously grapple with the distinctive psychological challenges that its youth face. These challenges encompass the unrelenting pressures associated with academic achievement, soaring career aspirations, familial expectations, and the allure of an ever-evolving digital milieu.

In the pursuit of a nuanced understanding of this intricate subject matter, the research endeavors to achieve the following overarching objectives:

- To provide a comprehensive overview of the prevalent psychological disorders affecting Vietnamese youth.
- To dissect the multifaceted contributing factors, including societal expectations, academic pressures, and the impact of the digital age, that impinge upon the mental well-being of this demographic.
- To conduct a thorough evaluation of the existing mental health support systems within Vietnam.
- To offer recommendations for the formulation of policies and the implementation of interventions aimed at bolstering the mental resilience of the youth population.

This research seeks not only to illuminate the unique challenges and determinants affecting the mental well-being of Vietnamese youth but also to contribute to the broader discourse on mental health in a rapidly evolving society. Ultimately, the aim is to foster a generation that is not only physically robust but also mentally equipped to navigate the intricate challenges of the 21st century, thus contributing to Vietnam's continued economic growth and prosperity.

1. Prevalence and Impact of Common Mental Disorders

Common mental disorders are a group of distress states manifesting with anxiety, depressive and unexplained somatic symptoms and are the contemporary equivalent of neurotic disorders typically encountered in community and primary care settings. A mental disorder is characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior. It is usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas of functioning. There are many different types of mental disorders. Mental disorders may also be referred to as mental health conditions. The latter is a broader term covering mental disorders, psychosocial disabilities and other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. Many mental disorders and illnesses stem from normal human emotions and reactions, such as sadness, worry, fear, or affinity for particular experiences. When these emotions occur with greater frequency and intensify beyond typical levels, they undergo a transformation, manifesting as clinical illnesses in the individuals affected.

In Vietnam, recent data from the Department of Medical Service Administration (DMSA) has highlighted a significant public health concern. It is estimated that approximately 15% of the country's population, roughly equivalent to 14 million individuals, have been diagnosed with mental disorders (Le Hao, Thai Binh, 2023). Notably, a substantial subset of this demographic comprises children and adolescents, numbering over 3 million (Weiss, 2014). This revelation underscores the critical importance of addressing mental health challenges, especially among the younger generation, within the Vietnamese context. However, national agencies or hospitals have not yet provided annual reports or official statistics on the prevalence, numbers, or analysis of these psychological disorders. Consequently, the author faced considerable difficulties in data collection and analysis.

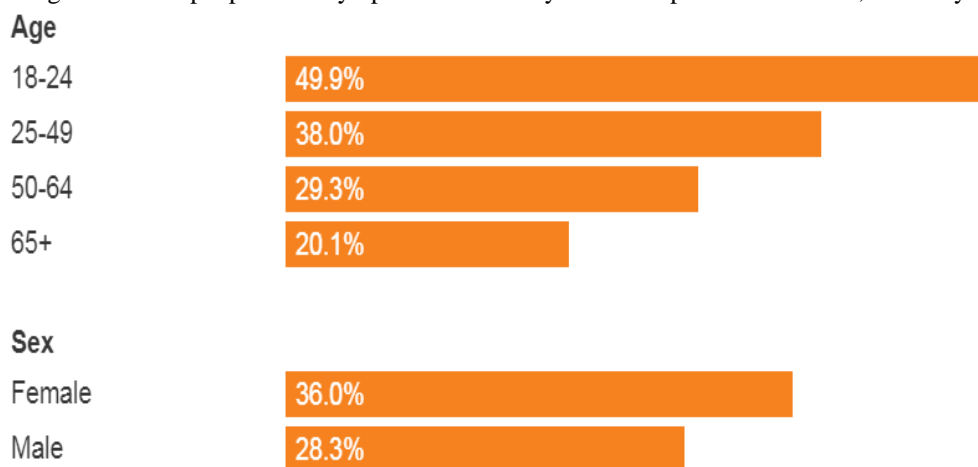
Depression is a prevalent global mental disorder, affecting an estimated 5% of adults worldwide. It is characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, often accompanied by a notable lack of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyable activities. Depression can also disrupt sleep patterns and appetite, leading to disturbances in these fundamental physiological processes. Additional common symptoms include fatigue and difficulties in maintaining concentration. In the specific context of Vietnam, data from the National Mental Hospital indicates that 2.45% of the Vietnamese population is diagnosed with depressive disorders (WHO). In 2016, Bach Mai Hospital provided care and treatment to nearly 19,000 depression patients (Thien Lam, 2017). While depression can affect individuals across various age groups, it is most commonly observed in the 18-45 age group. Gender also plays a substantial role in depression, with women facing a twofold higher risk than men. Factors contributing to this gender disparity include hormonal fluctuations during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, and menopause, all of which can increase susceptibility to depressive episodes. Additionally, individuals who have experienced separation, divorce, unemployment, or possess fragile personality traits susceptible to emotional injury are at elevated risk for depression.

Anxiety disorders represent the most prevalent category of mental disorders, affecting nearly 30% of adults at some point in their lives. These disorders are characterized by excessive fear and worry, often accompanied by associated behavioral disturbances. These symptoms go beyond everyday nervousness, causing significant distress and impairing an individual's ability to function effectively. Specific anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, and others. In Vietnam, it is estimated that approximately 5% of the population suffers from both depression and anxiety disorders (Duong Lieu, 2022).

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a childhood-onset mental disorder characterized by hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention. ADHD is classified into three subtypes: predominantly inattentive (ADHD-I), predominantly hyperactivity/impulsivity (ADHD-HI), and combined (ADHD-C) type, based on the primary symptomatology. Individuals with ADHD are at increased risk of comorbid psychiatric disorders, including depression and anxiety, and often experience difficulties in social relationships, educational attainment, and occupational performance due to impulsive behaviors, restlessness, and difficulty focusing. The prevalence of ADHD varies widely across countries and populations, with estimates ranging from 4% to 12% in school-age children worldwide. Furthermore, children aged 10 years and younger were found to be four times higher at risk of ADHD in a previous study (Wamulugwa, 2017). In Vietnam, the prevalence of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) among children ranges from 3.2% to 9.3%, with a co-occurrence of

other comorbid disorders in 67% of cases (VNCH, 2022). Annually, the Department of Psychiatry at the National Children's Hospital receives approximately 3,000 cases of children seeking treatment for ADHD, accounting for nearly 20% of the total number of psychiatric consultations (Vy Hieu, 2021). Typical characteristics of these children include difficulties in sustaining attention, selective attention, and challenges in completing tasks and schoolwork. Additionally, they tend to be overly active, lack impulse control, and display impulsive behavior, which can lead to interpersonal conflicts, inappropriate conduct, and potential harm to themselves and others. In recent years, research on ADHD in Vietnam has gained momentum. A 2021 study conducted in Hue with 525 children found a prevalence rate of 6.3% for ADHD among 6 to 7-year-olds (Hoang et al., 2021). Similarly, a study from 2009 in Vinh Long involving 600 children reported a prevalence of 7.7% (Pham, 2015). Another study conducted in Hanoi in 2012, focusing on 400 elementary school students, revealed an ADHD prevalence of 6.3% (Nguyen, 2012). However, it is important to note that these studies are limited in number and scope, and their findings are insufficient to draw a comprehensive national average picture of ADHD in Vietnam.

Fig.1. Share of people with Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder, February 2023



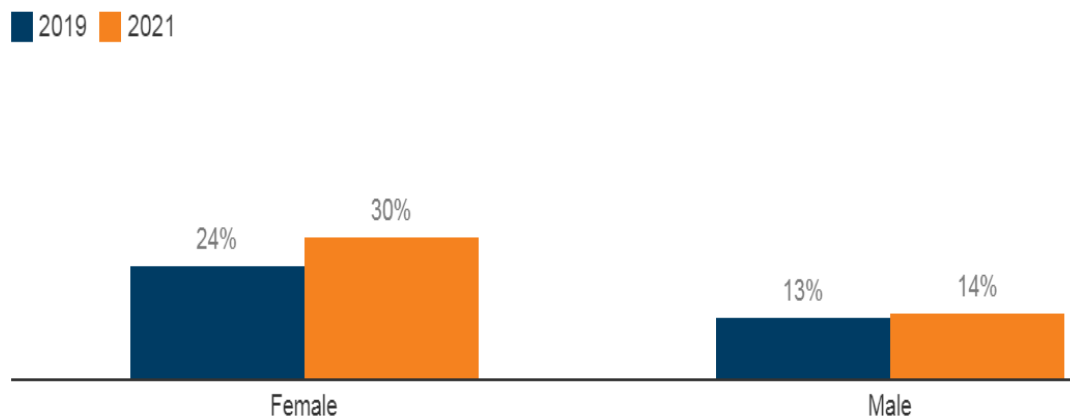
Source: kff.org

No suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is characterized by the deliberate and intentional self-infliction of bodily harm without any suicidal intent, and it serves purposes not socially accepted. NSSI has emerged as a growing concern in both clinical and public health contexts. This behavior is defined as the direct and purposeful harm to one's own body tissues, without any intention to cause death and for reasons not conforming to societal norms (Favazza, 1996). Common forms of NSSI include actions such as cutting, burning, scratching, and self-hitting, with many individuals who engage in NSSI reporting the use of multiple methods to harm themselves. NSSI is associated with various clinical and functional impairments, including substance use, depressive symptoms, infected wounds, and scarring. Importantly, it is a strong predictor of future suicide. Additionally, NSSI can persist into adulthood, and a significant proportion of adolescents who engage in NSSI do not seek medical treatment. Due to its high prevalence and the negative consequences associated with it, NSSI is recognized as a significant clinical and public health issue and is included in the current edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as a condition that requires further study. In Vietnam, there is currently no official data available regarding the prevalence of NSSI. To date, only a limited number of research studies have investigated NSSI among adolescents. A recent study conducted in 2021 revealed that nearly 44% of adolescents had engaged in at least one form of NSSI within the past 12 months, and more than a quarter (26.1%) had engaged in multiple forms of NSSI. Common behaviors included purposefully hitting oneself (23.1%), picking at wounds (17.0%), or biting oneself (16.7%). More severe forms of NSSI, such as scraping, burning, or erasing the skin, were reported by 17.2% of participants (Thai TT et al., 2021).

Suicide and suicidal behavior represent a significant public health challenge with far-reaching social, emotional, and economic consequences. It is estimated that there are over 700,000 suicides worldwide each year (WHO, 2023). Adolescents and young adults, particularly those in their teenage years, are among the most vulnerable to suicide. Globally, suicide remains a pressing issue, with suicide being the fourth leading cause of death among individuals aged 15 to 29 in 2019. Importantly, suicide is not confined to high-income countries but is a global phenomenon occurring in all regions of the world. In fact, over 77% of suicides worldwide occurred in low- and middle-income countries in 2019 (WHO, 2023). In Vietnam, the suicide mortality rate was 7.5 per 100,000 population in 2019 (World Bank). According to data from 2017, nearly 40,000 Vietnamese

individuals die by suicide each year, which is four times the number of deaths resulting from traffic accidents (Hoang Le, 2022). Another study conducted by the Psychological Crisis Prevention Center (PCP) reported that adolescents aged 15 to 24 in Vietnam are at a higher risk of having suicidal ideation, with females having a two-fold higher likelihood compared to males. A national survey on Vietnamese adolescents and youth conducted in 2010 with over 10,000 participants in this age group found that 4.1% had considered suicide, and 25% had attempted to end their lives.

Fig.2. Share of High School Students with Serious Thoughts of Suicide



Source: kff.org

2. Mental Health Issues among Vietnamese Adolescents

The increasing frequency of internet searches related to "mental health" in Vietnam, averaging nearly 35,000 searches per month from April 2022 to March 2023 (Tiago Bianchi, 2023), reflects a growing concern for mental well-being among the Vietnamese population, particularly among the youth. Adolescence is a period marked by profound physical and psychological changes as individuals transition into adulthood. The challenges posed by an unfavorable environment, which adolescents may struggle to adapt to, can lead to various emotional and behavioral responses leading to deteriorated mental health.

School violence, specifically the issue of **bullying**, has become a topic of significant concern in Vietnamese society. Over the past few decades, both domestic and international sources, as well as researchers, educational institutions, parents, and educators in Vietnam, have shown increasing interest in this issue. A study of students in Chile and South Africa found that bullying victimization was a significant predictor of children's wellbeing (Varela, Savahl, Adams & Reyes, 2019). Bullying behaviors are prevalent during childhood and adolescence, and the pervasive nature of violence among adolescents in schools raises profound concerns regarding its impact on public health and the mental well-being of adolescents. Studies conducted in various countries have consistently highlighted the association between school bullying and psychological distress, including suicidal behavior among adolescents. In Vietnam, recent data from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) reveals a troubling trend. In a single academic year, there were nearly 1,600 reported cases of students engaging in physical altercations both within and outside school premises. On average, approximately one physical altercation occurred for every 5,200 students, and one student was forced to discontinue their education due to violence for every 11,000 students. Moreover, approximately one in nine schools reported incidents of student violence. Alarming, according to statistics from the Ministry of Public Security, over 1,000 adolescents commit crimes each month. Notably, the age group previously associated with the highest rate of homicide was between 30 and 45 years old, but it has now declined to 34%, while the 18 to under 30 age group has increased to 41%. Importantly, more than 75% of these violent incidents involve students and young learners, reflecting a concerning trend of youth involvement in school violence (Huong Le, 2023). In recent years, the media has reported multiple instances of students and young individuals resorting to self-harm and suicide as a result of school-related violence. One notable case occurred at Vinh High School in April 2023. These incidents underscore the critical need to address school violence and bullying as major risk factors for mental health complications among adolescents.

In addition to facing bullying in physical, real-life settings, Vietnamese students are increasingly confronted with the scourge of cyberbullying, a phenomenon that profoundly affects their psychological well-being. Recent research conducted on a sample of nearly 1,500 students from eight secondary and high schools across Ho Chi Minh City sheds light on the prevalence and consequences of cyberbullying. An astonishing

92.4% of surveyed students reported using the internet daily, with nearly 40% spending more than four hours per day online. Within this context, cyber-victimization emerged as a major concern, affecting 36.5% of students. Alarming, a quarter of these students experienced multiple forms of cyber-victimization. As a result of cyberbullying experiences, nearly half of the students reported symptoms associated with depression (Truc Thanh Mai et al, 2022). To contextualize these findings, it is worth noting previous research conducted in different regions of Vietnam. A study conducted in Hue in 2020 reported a cyberbullying prevalence rate of 9%, highlighting regional variations in the incidence of cyberbullying. Similarly, research conducted in some northern provinces in 2017 identified a cyberbullying prevalence rate of 24% (Truc Thanh Mai et al, 2022). These regional disparities underscore the need for a comprehensive examination of cyberbullying across the country.

Academic pressure: In Vietnam, it is widely believed that education serves as the primary pathway for escaping poverty and achieving a better future in Vietnamese society. However, this emphasis on academic success can lead to significant mental health challenges among adolescents, primarily stemming from academic pressure originating from various sources, including parents, teachers, and peers (Nguyen, Dedding, Pham, Wright & Bunders, 2013). Such pressure is often driven by factors such as a demanding curriculum, extensive examination requirements, and a heavy workload. Global studies have consistently highlighted the substantial stress students experience in relation to their education. For instance, a survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) across 72 countries, involving over half a million 15-16-year-old students, unveiled that 66% of students frequently experience stress due to poor grades, with 59% worrying about the difficulty of tests even when adequately prepared. Furthermore, 55% of students express intense anxiety related to school testing. Notably, 37% of students report feeling very tense during their studies, with girls tending to report higher anxiety levels than boys concerning their schoolwork (OECD Report, 2017). Academic pressure resulting from self-expectations and peer comparisons can significantly contribute to students' anxiety about their grades and potentially hamper their academic performance (Kadir, Atmowasdoyo & Salija, 2018). It's worth noting that peer pressure does not always have a negative impact on academic performance; in some cases, students in high-achieving groups may inspire each other to strive for excellence. However, the prevalent culture of comparison among teachers and parents in Vietnam may have detrimental effects on students. Students often express anxiety about teacher reactions to poor performance, reporting that teachers can become "unhappy," "shout," or make unfavorable comparisons with higher-performing peers.

Parents, too, exert significant academic pressure on their children, with many students reporting that their parents place immense pressure on them to succeed and maintain high standards. This can lead to students feeling compelled to "study 24/7." Research on parental expectations among Asian and Caucasian individuals reveals distinct patterns, particularly concerning the academic aspirations of Asian parents (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2015). Asian parents, including Vietnamese parents, tend to set higher standards for their children's academic performance and prioritize education as a paramount goal for their children. In Vietnam, this mindset has been deeply ingrained across generations and remains prevalent today. Tragically, the academic pressure in Vietnam has had severe consequences, as evidenced by at least three cases of student suicides in March and April 2022 alone (VNews, 2022). One of these cases drew significant attention, involving a high school student who took his own life in the presence of his father in April 2022. In each of these tragic incidents, the students left behind suicide notes that highlighted the overwhelming academic pressure stemming from the expectations of their parents and teachers.

Family conflict: Family conflict can manifest in various forms due to the diverse nature of family relationships. It can occur between parents and affect their children or arise as disagreements between children and parents. These conflicts take various shapes, including frequent disagreements, fights, arguments, and expressions of anger. In more severe cases, family conflicts can escalate into domestic violence, significantly impacting the psychological well-being of young children. Conflict with parents has been shown to have repercussions on adolescents' mental health and well-being. For example, Yeh and Bedford (2004) found that non-compliance with parents' wishes, such as differences in career choices or selecting friends, was a common source of parent-child conflict among Chinese adolescents. Dotterer, Hoffman, Crouter, and McHale (2008) also revealed that conflicts between parents and adolescents were associated with lower academic achievement. According to sociological surveys conducted in 2015 in Vietnam, family violence has profound effects on the personality development of children, accounting for 91% of the impact, and causing psychological and emotional harm at 89.4%. The most severe consequences for children include mental distress (79.4%) and a decline in academic performance (73.5%). Alarming, 67.6% of children reported feeling more aggressive and inclined toward violence towards others as a result of these conflicts (Tran Thi Sau, 2015).

Excessive Screen Time: The proliferation of technology and the accessibility of the internet and digital devices have made them increasingly convenient for younger generations, potentially contributing to the rise in excessive internet use. Excessive internet use is recognized as a global public health concern, particularly in

Asian populations, where it is more prevalent than in Europe, America, or Africa (Baloglu et al., 2020). An epidemiological study conducted across six Asian countries involving 5,366 adolescents found that smartphone ownership was 62%, and internet addiction ranged from 6.2% to 21% in these countries. In Vietnam, the average age at which children own a smartphone is 9, in contrast to the global average of 13. Presently, Vietnam has 24.7 million children, constituting 25% of the population, and two-thirds of them use the internet. The age group with the highest internet usage is 14-15 years old (93%), followed by 12-13 years old (82%) (Thanh Hang, 2023). Concerns arise regarding both the exposure of adolescents to negative or unhealthy online content and the amount of time spent on technology at the expense of real-world interactions with peers and family. A cross-sectional study conducted in a northern Vietnamese high school from July to September 2019 involving 678 participants with an average age of 16.1 years found that nearly one-third of adolescents (30.7%) engaged in excessive internet use (more than 4 hours per day). Additionally, 19.6% exhibited depressive symptoms, 14.5% experienced anxiety symptoms, and 58.8% reported poor sleep quality. Excessive internet users had significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to non-excessive users. (Cai T. et al, 2022)

Insufficient Availability of Mental Health Services: The Vietnamese government has established the National Mental Health Program (NMHP). Nevertheless, the NMHP's reach currently extends to only approximately 30 percent of the country's geographic regions and includes a limited range of mental health conditions in its scope (Kyssha Mah, 2018). Although official government estimates suggest that around 15 percent of the population requires mental health care services, independent research indicates that this figure may be closer to 20 to 30 percent of the population (Mah, 2018). This glaring gap in the provision of mental health treatment services continues to be substantial, estimated at approximately 90%, imposing a considerable burden (Xuan Mai, 2023). At Ho Chi Minh City Psychiatric Hospital, there are presently 64 psychiatric doctors, 150 nurses, and 15 psychological specialists. However, the total number of patient visits in 2022 reached 234,060 visits (Yen Ngoc, 2023). There are several limitations in Vietnam's mental health care system, primarily the lack of integration into the overall healthcare system. Currently, only specialized psychiatric doctors are authorized to make precise diagnoses, with district-level healthcare facilities offering minimal mental health services. Moreover, individuals with mental health conditions predominantly receive treatment through medication, with limited access to psychotherapy and counseling services. Community-based mental health care also lacks a sustainable financial foundation. In a separate research endeavor led by Nguyen Trung Tan in 2012, which engaged 150 healthcare professionals, it was revealed that some of the most significant stress-inducing factors for healthcare workers at Tien Giang Psychiatric Hospital encompassed an excessive workload due to the care of a large number of patients, understaffing issues, and a lack of essential equipment necessary for patient care.

3. Comprehensive solutions for Enhancing Student Mental Health and Well-being in Vietnam

Firstly, fostering closer collaboration between schools and families is imperative. This collaboration can be achieved by promoting greater student engagement and strengthening their connection to the school environment. Furthermore, student well-being can be significantly enhanced through active participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities encompassing arts, sports, clubs, and more. These pursuits present valuable opportunities for the refinement of problem-solving capabilities, the cultivation of effective communication, the nurturing of interpersonal relationships, and the development of emotional resilience. By actively engaging in these activities, students gain confidence, leading to a noticeable improvement in their mental well-being. Consequently, this heightened sense of self-assuredness translates into increased motivation and overall engagement in both academic pursuits and broader aspects of life. Importantly, this comprehensive approach also imparts a deeper appreciation for the significance of health, relationships, and maintaining life balance—elements frequently underemphasized within the existing educational framework. It's important to foster collaboration between schools and families, as well as the benefits of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for student well-being. Collaboration between schools and families is essential for students' holistic development. When parents and caregivers are actively involved in their child's education, students tend to perform better academically and experience improved overall well-being. Schools can facilitate this collaboration by hosting regular parent-teacher meetings, workshops, and informational sessions. Building strong home-school partnerships helps ensure that students receive consistent support and encouragement. Families and schools should also actively engage students in their own education. When students feel a sense of ownership and involvement in their learning, they are more likely to be motivated and enthusiastic. Student engagement can be fostered through interactive teaching methods, hands-on learning experiences, and opportunities for students to explore their interests and passions. Co-curricular and extracurricular activities provide students with a well-rounded education. These activities go beyond the classroom and offer opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and social interaction. Participation in activities such as sports, arts, clubs, and community service allow students to explore their talents and interests, develop

leadership skills, and build lasting friendships. Co-curricular and extracurricular activities often require students to collaborate, solve problems, and communicate effectively. These skills are valuable not only in academic settings but also in life and future careers. Students who engage in activities like debate, drama, or team sports often develop strong critical thinking and communication abilities. Co-curricular and extracurricular activities provide opportunities for students to face challenges, overcome setbacks, and build emotional resilience. Success and recognition in these activities can boost students' self-esteem and confidence, positively impacting their mental well-being. Parents must frequently encourage children to participate in a variety of activities promotes a balanced and healthy lifestyle. It helps them learn how to manage their time effectively and prioritize their well-being. Understanding the importance of balance between academics, extracurriculars, and personal health can lead them to better mental and physical health outcomes. Active engagement in co-curricular and extracurricular activities can inspire students to set and work toward goals. This motivation often extends to their academic endeavors and future career aspirations. Achievement in these activities reinforces the idea that hard work and dedication lead to success. Incorporating these principles into the educational framework can contribute significantly to the overall well-being and success of students. By emphasizing not only academic achievement but also personal growth, interpersonal skills, and a balanced lifestyle, educational institutions can better prepare students for a fulfilling and resilient future.

Secondly, addressing the pressing issue of school violence requires a multi-faceted approach. It is essential to educate students about the harmful effects of physical and verbal bullying, as well as cyberbullying, implementing structured training programs within schools, and involving influential figures and influencers to make these programs engaging and widely recognized. For instance, drawing inspiration from the impactful speech delivered by the popular music group BTS at UNICEF in 2017, which garnered millions of views and comments on YouTube, could serve as a model for spreading knowledge and positive messages to young people. Education about the harmful effects of various forms of bullying, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, is essential. It helps students understand the impact of their actions and words on others. The structured training programs within schools can provide students with the tools and skills needed to prevent and address bullying. These programs can include workshops, role-playing exercises, and discussions on empathy, conflict resolution, and effective communication. Celebrities, musicians, and public figures who are committed to spreading positive messages and advocating against bullying can have a significant impact on raising awareness. Students should take an active role in anti-bullying efforts. They can lead peer-led initiatives, awareness campaigns, and discussions on respectful behavior and being "upstanders" rather than bystanders, intervening when they witness bullying, is crucial. It's important to assess the impact of anti-bullying programs by collecting data on the prevalence of bullying incidents, changes in student attitudes, and the effectiveness of interventions. Sustainable anti-bullying efforts should be integrated into the school's culture and curriculum, creating a lasting commitment to promoting respect and kindness.

By combining education, youth empowerment, influential voices, and technology, schools can create a comprehensive approach to address bullying and promote a culture of respect and inclusion. Such initiatives not only reduce incidents of school violence but also contribute to a more positive and supportive school environment.

Thirdly, it is crucial to reduce the burden on students, parents, and teachers to alleviate academic pressure. This involves strategies such as decreasing workload, minimizing private lessons, and streamlining the curriculum. Teachers should review and adjust curriculum requirements to reduce excessive homework and assignments, strive for a balanced workload that allows students time for extracurricular activities and leisure. They can evaluate the curriculum to eliminate unnecessary content and focus on core concepts and skills that are essential for students' overall development.

However, recognizing the complexity of this challenge is essential, as it is deeply rooted in systemic issues related to teacher training, examination schedules, and educational objectives. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Training may need to establish dedicated task forces and integrate academic pressure assessment processes into departmental and extracurricular activities. Emphasizing student-centric learning approaches that prioritize skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, and reflection over rote subject content can help achieve enhanced learning outcomes while reducing academic pressure. Your proposal to reduce academic pressure on students, parents, and teachers acknowledges the need for a comprehensive approach to address this complex issue. Reducing academic pressure while maintaining high educational standards is a complex challenge, but it is achievable through a collaborative and systematic effort that prioritizes the well-being and holistic development of students. Such efforts can lead to a more balanced and fulfilling educational experience for all stakeholders.

Fourthly, dealing with family conflicts necessitates increased parental awareness and improved communication. Parents should be encouraged to actively listen, express love, refrain from comparing their children to others, and create an environment where their children feel comfortable sharing their problems.

Addressing family conflicts and promoting healthy communication within families is essential for the well-being of children and adolescents. Workshops and parenting classes that focus on effective communication, conflict resolution, and understanding the emotional needs of children can provide resources and guidance on parenting through schools, community organizations, or online platforms. Parents should actively listen and avoid judgmental or dismissive responses when talking to their children. This means giving their full attention, asking open-ended questions, and validating their child's feelings and experiences.

They can promote love, support, and affection within families and express their love and appreciation for their children regularly. Showing love and support does not mean overindulgence but rather creating a nurturing and secure environment. Parents must know about the harmful effects of comparing their children to others. Emphasize that each child is unique and has their own strengths and weaknesses. They should discuss family conflicts in a calm, respectful, and constructive manner so that home is a safe and open spaces where children feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, concerns, and problems. Parents ought to spend quality time with their children, engaging in activities that promote bonding and communication. Family meals, outings, and shared hobbies can provide opportunities for meaningful conversations. By promoting effective communication and nurturing healthy relationships within families, parents can create a more supportive and harmonious home environment, which ultimately contributes to the well-being and emotional development of their children.

Lastly, enhancing mental health literacy across the entire school community, including teachers, parents, and students, is crucial. This literacy encompasses understanding common mental health issues, their prevalence among students, risk factors, and strategies for prevention and intervention. Special emphasis should be placed on enabling teachers and parents to recognize symptoms of severe mental health problems and know how and when to seek professional help for their students or children. A comprehensive campaign aimed at promoting mental health literacy will lay a strong foundation for further preventive and intervention measures. The issue of excessive screen time can be mitigated by introducing more outdoor and physical activities, reducing screen time, and guiding students to access clean and educational content. Promoting these activities, both within the curriculum and through extracurricular initiatives, alongside organizing mental health-focused events, competitions, forums, and health clubs within schools, can further contribute to the overall well-being of students. Implementing state policies, such as those outlined in government decision No. 442/QĐ-BGDĐT dated June 1, 2022 and circular 31/2017/TT-BGDĐT can create a safer and more conducive educational environment. This includes initiatives to prevent school violence, promote psychological counseling, and enhance mental health support for students. Additionally, the development of school counseling services and the integration of mental health education into teacher training curricula are vital steps in improving the mental health landscape in Vietnamese schools. By prioritizing mental health literacy, physical well-being, and a supportive school environment, Vietnamese schools can contribute to the overall well-being and success of their students. These efforts create a foundation for lifelong mental health and resilience.

4. Methodology

Literature Review: A comprehensive review of existing literature and research studies on mental health in Vietnamese adolescents and related topics. The research involves searching academic databases, journals, reports, and books to gather information, statistics, and findings from previous studies.

Data Analysis: Analyzing any available data from government agencies, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions to understand trends and statistics related to mental health, school violence, academic pressure, and other relevant factors.

Case Studies: Studying specific cases of school violence, cyberbullying, academic pressure, and other mental health challenges to provide real-world examples and insights into these issues.

Content Analysis: Analyzing media reports, social media discussions, and online content related to mental health and well-being in Vietnamese adolescents to understand public perceptions and concerns.

Comparative Analysis: Comparing data and findings from Vietnamese studies with international research and studies from countries with similar challenges to identify best practices and potential solutions.

Conclusion

The mental health landscape among Vietnamese adolescents presents a complex and pressing concern that requires immediate attention and comprehensive solutions, with approximately 12% of the students surveyed in 2022 said that they had potential mental disorders (Nhat Anh – Action Aid Report, 2022). Common mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI), ADHD, and suicidal behavior, are increasingly prevalent among Vietnamese young generation. These challenges are exacerbated by various factors, including academic pressure, family conflicts, excessive screen time, and the insufficient availability of mental health services. The high prevalence of mental health conditions among Vietnamese adolescents, coupled with the limited availability of mental health services, creates a significant burden on individuals,

families, and society as a whole. The alarming rate of suicides among Vietnamese adolescents is a stark reminder of the gravity of the situation. To enhance the mental health and well-being of Vietnamese adolescents, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. This approach should involve collaboration between schools and families, promoting student engagement, and providing opportunities for personal development. Addressing school violence and bullying requires educational initiatives and influential figures to raise awareness and promote positive behavior. To alleviate academic pressure, systemic changes in the educational system are needed, emphasizing student-centric learning and reducing workload. Improving family dynamics necessitates enhanced parental awareness and communication skills. Increasing mental health literacy across the school community is crucial for early intervention and support. Reducing excessive screen time can be achieved through a combination of outdoor activities, guidance on content consumption, and promoting healthy alternatives. The government plays a pivotal role in this endeavor. By implementing policies that prioritize mental health support in educational settings, the government can create a safer and more conducive environment for students. Up to date, about 70% of schools nationwide still do not have standard school counseling rooms, leaving students lacking timely and appropriate support (Nhat Anh, 2022).

In addressing these challenges, it is essential to recognize that mental health is not just an individual concern but a societal responsibility. Only through collective efforts, involving schools, families, communities, and government agencies, can we hope to improve the mental well-being of Vietnamese adolescents and pave the way for a healthier, happier future generation.

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