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## **Supporting youth mental health**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Mental health is a key factor influencing the overall well-being, success and personal development of young people. The period of secondary school studies represents an important phase of life in which students face a number of challenges, including academic pressure, social changes, decisions about future careers and personal formation. These factors can significantly affect their psychological balance, emotional stability and ability to cope with stressful situations.

Mental health is fundamental to an individual's cognitive, emotional and social development. Students who feel good about themselves perform better academically, are more motivated and are able to cope more effectively with the challenges of everyday life. The increasing levels of stress, anxiety and depression among young people highlight the urgent need for preventive measures in the school environment. This work responds to these trends and seeks to find solutions that could improve students' mental well-being. The school environment plays a key role in shaping the psychological well-being of students. In addition to education, schools should also provide a space for developing emotional resilience, building relationships and supporting the overall well-being of young people.

In this paper, we emphasize the need to connect different levels of support – from individual interventions for students, through teacher education to cooperation with the wider community, including families and professional organizations. Prevention is always more effective and less expensive than addressing the consequences of mental disorders. Through systematic and well-designed programs, schools can create conditions that prevent the emergence of psychological difficulties in students. A safe and inclusive environment is a basic prerequisite for students to feel accepted, respected and motivated to participate in social events and the educational process.

We aim not only to describe the current state of affairs, but also to propose practical recommendations for the school environment that could contribute to more effective support for the mental health of students. We believe that the results of this work will be useful for educators, school psychologists, and all those involved in shaping a safe and supportive environment for youth.

# 1 ISSUE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1 Basic theoretical foundations

There are several models and theories that deal with mental health.

The bio-psycho-social model of health presents a comprehensive view of mental health that includes biological, psychological and social factors. In the context of secondary schools, it focuses on biological factors such as sleep, nutrition, hormonal changes during puberty, psychological factors, i.e. the ability to cope with stress, emotional intelligence, self-esteem. Social factors are also important, which include support from family, relationships with peers and teachers, and the school environment.<sup>1</sup>

**Bandura's social learning theory** states that students' mental health is influenced by their social interactions. Through modeling positive behaviors (e.g., from teachers or peers) and promoting empathy, healthy habits can be reinforced.<sup>2</sup>

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, mental health is closely linked to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, such as a sense of safety in the school environment, a sense of belonging and recognition, as well as self-actualization through achievement and personal growth.<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic emphasizes the importance of mental health as a part of upbringing and education. Health promotion programs in schools include activities aimed at preventing stress, building psychological resilience and supporting an inclusive environment.

The Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences has conducted research that examines the impact of the school environment on the psychological well-being of young people, including factors such as bullying, stress, and relationships with peers.

Slovak experts, such as Vladimír Labáth and Ján Košťál, deal with the psychology of young people and their ability to cope with stress in the school environment: Labáth, V., & Košťál, J. (2016). *Psychology for Teachers: A Practical Guide*. Bratislava: SPN.

Slovak psychiatrist MUDr. Michal Patarák emphasizes in his work the importance of preventing mental illnesses, especially through psychoeducation and interventions at the

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<sup>1</sup>[https://is.muni.cz/el/med/podzim2019/BZKO011p/um/Psychologia\\_v\\_medicine.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/el/med/podzim2019/BZKO011p/um/Psychologia_v_medicine.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://eduworld.sk/cd/beata-tancsakova/7563/ako-funguje-u-deti-socialne-ucenie#:~:text=O%20%20C4%8Dom%20is%20te%20C3%B3ria%20soci%C3%A1lne,%20strengthening%20rejection%20and%20punishment.>

<sup>3</sup>Maslow, AH (1943). and theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.

school level: Patarák, M. (2018). *Mental health and mental disorders: Fundamentals of psychopathology*. Bratislava: VEDA.

A monograph by Slovak authors examines how the school environment influences the mental health of children and youth: Žiaková, E., & Kentoš, J. (2017). *Mental health in the school environment*. Prešov: PU.

## **1.2 Mental health situation in Slovakia**

According to *The State of the World's Children 2021: What I mean – promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health* – the most comprehensive document to date on the state of mental health of children, young people and their caregivers in the 21st century – even before the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people were at risk of mental health problems without significant investment in addressing them. The latest available estimates suggest that more than 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10-19 worldwide suffer from a diagnosed mental health disorder. Nearly 46,000 adolescents die each year from suicide, which is one of the top five causes of death in this age group. There remains a wide gap between the need for treatment for mental health problems and the resources allocated to this treatment. The report states that the cost of treating mental illness globally accounts for approximately 2% of government health budgets.

9 million young people aged 10-19 in Europe suffer from mental disorders. The prevalence of mental disorders among boys and girls aged 10-19 in Europe is 16.3%, compared to 13.2% elsewhere in the world. In this age range, around 3 people die by suicide every day in Europe. In 2019, depression and anxiety accounted for 55% of all mental disorders in young people aged 10-19.

The pandemic has taken its toll. According to early findings from an international survey of children and adults in 21 countries conducted by UNICEF and Gallup – reported in the *State of the World's Children 2021 Report* – an average of 1 in 5 young people aged 15-24 said they often felt depressed or lost interest in what was happening around them. As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its third year, its impact on the mental health and well-being of children and young people continues to worsen. According to the latest UNICEF data, at least 1 in 7 children worldwide have been directly affected by lockdowns and more than 1.6 billion children have had their access to education restricted. Disruptions to daily routines, education, leisure activities, as well as concerns about family income

and health, are leaving many young people feeling fear, worry and anxiety about their future.

Diagnosed mental illnesses such as ADHD, anxiety, autism, bipolar disorder, conduct disorders, depression, eating disorders, mental retardation and schizophrenia can seriously damage the health of children and young people, their education, their future life direction and their ability to be economically active. And while the impact on children's lives is incalculable, a new analysis by the London School of Economics reports that the loss of income to economies due to mental illness leading to young people's incapacity or death is estimated at almost \$390 billion per year.<sup>4</sup>

In 2017/2018, a survey was conducted in Slovakia as part of the international study Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), which addressed the issues of the experiences and behaviour of Slovak children and adolescents. The results of this survey pointed to a deterioration in several indicators, such as an increase in bullying, experiences with sexual content, emotional problems and attention problems.

HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-aged children) from 2017/2018 - the research addressed the issues of the experiences and behaviour of Slovak children and adolescents every four years, and in these years they also mapped the impact of the pandemic.

The questionnaire mainly asked questions about spending free time, focusing on internet use, online risks, substance use, sleep habits, and psychological and social variables. The results were then compared with the results of the EU Kids Online Slovakia survey from 2018 and found that most indicators had worsened. The problematic area – the incidence of bullying, experience with sexual content, the incidence of emotional problems and attention problems – had expanded. Positive factors – self-esteem, feeling of safety and acceptance at home and at school – had also decreased.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www.unicef.sk/clanky/551-sprava-o-stave-dusevneho-zdravia-deti-vo-svete/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.unicef.sk/clanky/551-sprava-o-stave-dusevneho-zdravia-deti-vo-svete/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>5</sup>. [https://ozinkluziv.sk/2023/04/15/dusevne-zdravie-deti-a-dospievajucich-z-pohladu-statistiky-od-roku-2017-2021/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://ozinkluziv.sk/2023/04/15/dusevne-zdravie-deti-a-dospievajucich-z-pohladu-statistiky-od-roku-2017-2021/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

## 2 WORK OBJECTIVES

The main goal of our work is to examine and analyze the state of mental health of students in selected secondary schools and to propose specific activities and measures to support it.

We have chosen the following as the partial objectives of the project:

1. identify students' mental health needs and problems
  - to investigate the main factors influencing the mental well-being of students
  - assess the current state of psychological well-being based on a questionnaire survey
2. propose specific activities to promote mental health in the school environment
  - focus on areas such as integrating mental health into the educational process, developing social and emotional skills, and creating a safe and inclusive environment
3. develop a proposal for the implementation of the proposed measures and activities
  - determine personnel, organizational and financial requirements
  - to propose effective ways to promote mental health activities in schools
4. evaluate the benefits of the proposed measures for the school environment
  - assess the potential impact on psychological well-being, academic success and relationships between students

We chose the goals because they reflect the current need to improve mental health care for secondary school students, which is significantly influenced by factors such as stress, interpersonal relationships and the school environment. We focused on identifying needs and problems in order to pinpoint the areas where support is most needed.

The proposed concrete solutions allow for a response to the identified problems. They can be easily implemented in the school environment. The implementation proposal, including personnel and financial requirements, ensures the feasibility and sustainability of the measures.

The evaluation of benefits is key to assessing the concrete impact of proposed measures on students' well-being, their educational performance and relationships. The objectives thus combine theoretical research with practical measures, allowing for a comprehensive and effective approach to improving the mental health of young people.





### **3 MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY**

In preparing our work, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, which enabled a comprehensive view of the issue of students' mental health.

#### **1. Theoretical analysis**

- study of professional literature and available resources related to the mental health of children and youth
- analysis of educational programs and legislative documents related to mental health in schools

#### **2. Questionnaire survey**

- data collection through anonymous questionnaires distributed among students of selected secondary schools
- The questionnaire included questions focused on the level of stress and psychological strain, perception of support from school and family, and ways of coping with difficult situations.
- data were analyzed using basic statistical methods

#### **3. Qualitative interview**

- conducting interviews with selected educators, school psychologists and mental health experts
- The aim was to gain their perspective on the current state of students' mental health and the possibilities of support in the school environment.

#### **4. Activity proposal**

- Based on the findings from the analysis, specific activities were proposed to support the mental health of students
- these activities were consulted with experts and teachers to ensure their feasibility and effectiveness

#### **5. Benefit assessment**

- The proposed measures were evaluated in terms of their potential impact on the well-being of students, the school environment and the community.

## **4 RESULTS OF WORK**

### **4.1 Analysis of the mental health of students in selected secondary schools**

#### **4.1.1 Questionnaire survey and its results**

We conducted a questionnaire survey among students from 5 secondary vocational schools - our classmates at the Unified School in Detva, SOŠ Zvolen, SOŠ Krupina, SOŠ Žarnovica and SPŠ Banská Bystrica. We received a total of 280 responses.

The survey was conducted among students aged 15-19, 66% of whom were girls and 34% were boys. The ratio between the individual grades was balanced - 30% first-year students, 26% second-year students, 21% third-year students and 23% fourth-year students.

To begin with, we were interested in how students feel at school. Most of them feel safe at school in terms of mental well-being - 44% completely and 39% partially. Fortunately, only 4% (10 respondents) do not feel safe at school at all.

36% of students are under stress at school several times a week, and the same proportion said they rarely do. 17% of respondents are under stress daily, which is quite a high number.

The most common emotions experienced at school are fatigue (49%), stress (41%), and anxiety (22%). Among the positive feelings, it is joy (30%) and motivation (18%).

We also investigated possible problems that affect the mental health of young people. The most common cause is schoolwork (38%), but there are also circumstances outside of school, such as personal relationships (29%) and family problems (24%). In the case of 9% of high school students surveyed, social media also causes these problems.

In the next part, we focused on possible solutions. Young people most often talk about their problems with their friends (46%) and parents (24%). Other partners for conversations are experts at school such as a school psychologist, assistant or social worker - 9%, for 8% of respondents it is teachers and for 7% other experts. Unfortunately, up to 16% do not talk about their problems with anyone.

Students would welcome more forms of support at school, such as relaxation exercises (28%), stress management workshops (21%), lectures and discussions with experts (20%), and counseling with a school psychologist (18%). They would also welcome freely available information on the school bulletin board (12%), or support groups with classmates (11%).

We were also interested in young people's views on ways to improve their mental health. Almost half (49%) want more time to relax and less pressure from parents and teachers. Other answers were more distant - mental health education and public discussions (24%), improving access to leisure activities (24%), training for teachers on how to better recognize and support students struggling with mental health problems (23%), better access to a mental health professional - 19%, reducing the negative impact of social media on self-esteem and mental well-being (17%), strengthening cooperation with parents so that they know how their children are at home (17%).

Most students (64%) are able to manage and properly balance school duties with rest and free time, in the case of 22% of students the answer was rather no, and 14% of those surveyed do not know how to manage their time at all.

43% of respondents feel that their school offers enough resources to support mental health, 18% of respondents say that there are definitely enough of them, 29% think that they are rather lacking. 10% say that they are not offered at all.

At school, students are most stressed by exams (51%), little free time (25%), communication with teachers (19%), homework and projects (17%), and relationships with classmates (14%).

The proportion of students who are able to talk openly about their feelings with people around them (54%) is relatively balanced with those who do not talk about their feelings (46%).

They described their relationships with their family as very good (39%) to good (31%). In the case of 14% of respondents, these relationships were described as weak.

When feeling stressed or sad, music and hobbies (42%), relaxation and sleep (41%) help young people the most. Talking to parents or friends (27%) or physical activity (20%) are less helpful. Here we can observe a rather passive attitude of young people towards solving problems. Young people rarely have enough time for their hobbies and relaxation (up to 41%), 29% have time several times a week, 18% can find time every day. 13% never find time.

As for social networks, their impact is rather positive. They help young people connect with friends (41%) and motivate them (19%). In the case of 20% of respondents, they sometimes cause them stress or anxiety.

Finally, we were also interested in the possibilities of support from the community or municipality. They would most welcome the creation of places for rest and relaxation such as community centers or parks (37%). Free consultations with experts (23%), sports

or physical activities (22%), creative workshops (20%), support groups for young people (18%) and public lectures and events on mental health (13%).

The questionnaire and its detailed evaluation are in Appendix F and Appendix G.

#### **4.1.2 SWOT analysis**

##### **S – Strengths**

- Increasing availability of mental health information through the internet, school activities and public campaigns
- Young people are more aware of the importance of mental health and its impact on quality of life
- Presence of experts (school psychologists, assistants, social educators)
- Organizing lectures and workshops on stress management
- Most young people are willing to communicate about problems with friends and parents
- Support through hobbies, music, relaxation and physical activity to manage stress
- Positive aspects of social media, such as the ability to connect with friends and gain motivation

##### **W – Weaknesses**

- Limited availability of school psychologists and mental health professionals
- Inadequate information to students about existing support options
- Young people often choose passive ways to cope with stress, such as music and relaxation, instead of active solutions.
- Many students do not talk to anyone about their problems, there is a risk of problems escalating
- Students are under stress daily and more than a third experience it several times a week.
- Schoolwork, relationships, and family problems are major sources of stress.
- Up to 41% of students rarely have time for hobbies and relaxation, which negatively affects regeneration and mental well-being.

##### **O - Opportunities**

- Introducing more professional positions in schools, such as school psychologists, assistants and social educators
- The possibility of schools collaborating with local counseling centers and therapists to offer free or subsidized consultations
- Creating spaces where students could spend time during breaks
- Supporting initiatives to establish support groups for students that would allow for sharing experiences and mutual support

- Organizing regular workshops and lectures with psychologists, stress management and life coaching experts
- Expanding opportunities for sports activities that help mental well-being
- Educating youth about setting healthy boundaries when using social media
- Supporting public spaces for relaxation and activities, such as community centers, parks, and sports fields

### **T - Threats**

- Traditional attitudes in some families or communities that downplay the importance of mental health
- Young people's concerns about open communication about mental health problems due to ridicule, rejection or misunderstanding
- The ever-increasing demands for academic performance and success can lead to burnout, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy.
- The combination of school obligations, family expectations and personal ambitions can create unsustainable pressure on young people.
- Social media can create pressure for perfection, low self-esteem and comparisons with others, excessive use of digital technologies can lead to isolation, disrupted sleep patterns and increased anxiety.
- Lack of qualified psychologists and therapists in schools and the community can prolong problem solving
- The absence of preventive measures in schools and the community can lead to a worsening of the mental health situation
- Ignoring signals of stress or anxiety in young people can result in more serious psychological problems, such as depression or suicidal tendencies.
- Insufficient training of teachers and other staff to recognize psychological problems in students
- Young people often do not perceive the need to address their mental health problems, which can delay necessary intervention.

## **4.2 Proposal for measures to support mental health**

### **4.2.1 Initial situation**

The current social situation and the challenges faced by today's youth create an urgent need to pay increased attention to their mental health, the development of social skills and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Children and youth in Slovakia are increasingly facing problems such as stress, bullying, emotional problems and addiction to digital technologies, which have a negative impact on their psychological well-being and overall quality of life. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified isolation, weakened social ties and increased the incidence of anxiety and depression among young people. In the field of education, there is still a lack of systematic integration of mental health and emotional intelligence into the teaching process. Most schools address these topics only marginally, without linking them to long-term activities that would support prevention and create a safe environment for problem-solving. Many teachers and parents do not have sufficient skills to recognize problems early and provide first aid, which can lead to the warning signs being overlooked. In addition, cooperation between schools and professional organizations that could provide professional support is often insufficient.

#### **4.2.2 Project target groups**

We have chosen the following participants as the main target groups:

##### **1. Children and youth (primary and secondary school students)**

###### **Needs:**

- Mental well-being: students need a safe environment where they can express their feelings, cope with stress and solve personal challenges. They also need support in managing the emotional problems that often arise during adolescence.
- social skills: the ability to cooperate, resolve conflicts, and communicate effectively with classmates and teachers,
- physical health: regular exercise and proper eating habits to promote physical fitness and prevent obesity.
- development of creative skills: opportunities for creative self-expression through art, music, theatre or literature,
- development of creative thinking so that they can realistically assess situations related to their mental health,
- supporting relationships with classmates, teachers, and family that support their personal growth.

We can engage this target group through participation in interactive workshops focused on mental health, self-awareness and conflict resolution, sports, artistic and team activities, collaboration in the creation of educational and promotional materials about healthy lifestyles. We also give them the opportunity to actively participate in peer-to-peer support as trained mentors.

## **2. Teachers and school support teams**

### **Needs:**

- Knowledge and skills: teachers need training and practical tools to manage student problems, prevent bullying and promote mental health,
- support in solving problems: the opportunity to consult with school psychologists and experts in difficult situations,
- Burnout prevention: techniques for managing stress and preventing mental exhaustion due to demanding working conditions,
- innovative teaching methods: new approaches to developing students' critical thinking, creativity and social skills.

Teachers can participate in training on mental health, inclusion and effective teaching, lead workshops and get involved in organizing school and community events. We also consider their feedback on the project activities to be important.

## **3. Parents**

### **Needs:**

- support in their parental role - they need knowledge and practical advice on how to support the healthy development of their children and manage problems associated with upbringing,
- prevention of risky behavior, how to prevent addictions, bullying and other negative phenomena,
- healthy habits and practical instructions on how to introduce healthy eating and exercise into the family's everyday life,
- better communication and improved relationships with children through mutual understanding and empathy.

We recommend that parents be involved in educational workshops, lectures and consultations with experts. They should also actively cooperate with the school in organizing community events, sports days and campaigns and participate in joint activities organized by the school.

## **4. School psychologists and specialists**



**Needs:**

- access to schools: the opportunity to work regularly with students and teachers to prevent problems and provide support,
- Presentation of expertise: creating a platform for disseminating good practices in the field of mental health and prevention.

External collaborators need to be entrusted with management workshops, lectures and consultations for students, teachers and parents. They should also participate in the creation of methodological materials for the school and the community and support the creation of a safe and inclusive environment in schools.

**5. Community organizations and professional institutions****Needs:**

- connection with schools, cooperation on projects that support mental health, healthy lifestyles and inclusion,
- presentation of professional services and raising awareness of available community and health services,
- social impact through involvement in initiatives that have a positive impact on the community.

These institutions can provide experts for lectures, workshops and consultations, participate in school and community events, or provide material and financial support for the project.

**6. The wider community****Needs:**

- supporting the young generation, because healthy and educated youth are the basis for community development,
- the opportunity to actively participate in initiatives that improve the quality of life,
- long-term results - prevention of social and health problems in the local community.

We will involve the wider community in community events organized by the school and partners, volunteering. It should also support and spread awareness about mental health and a healthy lifestyle.

### **4.3 Proposal of specific activities to support mental health**

Our proposed structure of mental health activities reflects the need for a comprehensive approach that takes into account the diverse aspects of young people's psychological well-being. Individual categories of activities have been designed to cover the basic areas of mental health support while creating a synergistic effect within the school community.

A detailed list of activities is in Appendix A. Specific activities and their organizational arrangements are in Appendix B.

#### **4.3.1 Integrating the topic of mental health into the educational process**

The first step is to integrate the topic of mental health into the educational process, because school is a natural space where students can acquire not only knowledge, but also practical skills to cope with life's challenges. This integration allows students to understand that taking care of mental health is just as important as taking care of physical health. Linking this topic with different subjects, such as biology, civics or literature, contributes to making it a natural part of education.

##### **Lectures and workshops**

- a) **Lecture: "What is mental health?"**– basics about psychological well-being, stress management and prevention of mental disorders.
- b) **Workshop: "Emotions and how to manage them"**– practical techniques for managing emotions and stress.
- c) **Workshop: "Digital Hygiene"**– the risks of excessive use of social networks and practical tips for healthy digital habits.
- d) **Workshop: "Self-esteem and positive thinking"**– activities to increase self-confidence and positive thinking.
- e) **Lecture on bullying and cyberbullying**– how to recognize, manage and solve it.

##### **Self-awareness and relaxation**

- a) **Meditation and mindfulness classes**– short exercises to increase mindfulness and relaxation.
- b) **Days without technology**– supporting offline activities to improve social ties and psychological well-being.
- c) **Creative workshops**– expression through drawing, music, writing or dance to manage emotions.
- d) **Gratitude diary**– encouraging students to write down things they are grateful for daily.

- e) **Practicing emotional literacy**– games for recognizing and expressing feelings.

### **Integration into teaching**

#### **a) Integrated topics in subjects**

- Biology: explanation of the physiology of stress, sleep, mental disorders.
- Civics: topics such as self-reflection, self-esteem, work-life balance.
- Literature: analyzing characters in crisis situations and their reactions.

- b) **Creating school posters**– students will design informational posters to promote mental health.

- c) **Projects and group work - female**Students in teams will prepare presentations, posters or videos on the topic of mental health.

- d) **Role-playing games - with**simulations of real-life situations, e.g. conversations with a friend in crisis, visiting a counselor.

- e) **Case studies - and**Analyzing specific situations that illustrate mental health problems and discussing possible solutions and finding appropriate support.

- f) **Clubs and leisure activities**- establishing a circle focused on mental well-being

- g) **Experiential learning**- excursions to community centers or organizations dedicated to mental health

### **Community and social activities**

- a) **Peer-to-peer support**– creating a network of students trained in peer support.

- b) **Mental Health Week**– a weekly campaign with competitions, lectures and activities to improve well-being.

- c) **Adventure activities in nature**– hiking or spending time outdoors focused on relaxation and teamwork.

- d) **Discussion panels with experts**– participation of psychologists, therapists and activists in discussions with students.

- e) **Support groups for parents and students**– opportunities to share experiences and learn techniques to promote well-being.

### **Educational materials**

- a) **Interactive brochures**– Simple information on how to manage stress, anxiety and conflict.

- b) **Educational videos and podcasts**– Short multimedia formats explaining the topic of mental health.

- c) **Online courses**– Short e-learning courses for students and teachers.

- d) **Comics and illustrations**– Creatively processed situations that young people experience, with practical tips.

#### **4.3.2 Developing social and emotional skills**

Developing social and emotional skills is essential for successful interpersonal relationships and building emotional resilience. These skills are crucial during adolescence, when students face challenging social situations and go through important life changes. Strengthening them helps prevent conflict, build empathy, and improve the overall atmosphere in the classroom.

##### **Social and emotional skills training**

- a) **Empathy workshop**:simulations of situations in which students acquire the ability to perceive and understand the feelings of others.
- b) **Conflict resolution training**:practical exercises for managing conflicts in and outside of school.
- c) **Emotional Intelligence Course**:activities for recognizing and managing emotions in oneself and others.
- d) **Trust-building games**:group activities aimed at strengthening mutual trust between classmates.
- e) **Role-playing activities**:model situations where students learn to handle challenging social situations.

##### **Support for team collaboration**

- a) **Teambuilding activities**:games aimed at strengthening team spirit
- b) **Group projects**:creating a joint output, such as a poster, presentation or video
- c) **Sports tournaments**:supporting teamwork through sports activities
- d) **Survival game**:a simulation where students solve problems and make decisions together

##### **Mentoring and peer-to-peer programs**

- a) **Peer mentoring**:older students provide support to younger classmates.
- b) **Support groups**:organizing regular meetings where students can share their experiences.
- c) **Peer-to-peer support training**:special training for selected students to help their peers with emotional or social problems.

- d) **"Friend on the phone" program:**the possibility of anonymous advice provided by trained students.
- e) **Mentoring from external experts:**meetings with professionals on topics such as stress management, building resilience and motivation.

#### **Building community spirit**

- a) **Cooperation Week:**a thematic week with activities aimed at improving communication and teamwork.
- b) **Student community projects:**involving students in activities that support the school or local community (e.g. cleaning public spaces).
- c) **Competitions between classes:**programs where classes compete in different areas while also collaborating.
- d) **"Friendship Day":**activities that encourage random pairing of students to get to know each other and collaborate.

#### **Supporting communication and self-expression**

- a) **Debate circles:**development of communication skills through guided discussions on various topics.
- b) **Active listening exercises:**interactive activities where students learn to listen and respond effectively.
- c) **Creative writing:**encouraging students to express their emotions through diaries or essays.

#### **Social events and activities**

- a) **Community picnic or trip:**strengthening social ties outside the school environment.
- b) **Film and discussion:**screening of a film on social issues followed by a group discussion.
- c) **"Gratitude Day":**a special day focused on sharing positive experiences and gratitude among classmates.

### **4.3.3 Supporting collaboration between schools and community organizations**

Supporting collaboration between schools and community organizations brings expertise and resources to the educational environment that schools may not have. Community organizations can offer specialized programs, counseling services, and expert lectures,

expanding the possibilities for supporting students and teachers. This collaboration also strengthens the school's connection to the local community.

### **Partnerships with health and social organizations**

- a) **Series of lectures and workshops with psychologists and therapists** from local health facilities for students and teachers.
- b) **Consultation days with mental health professionals**
- c) **"Adopt an organization"**: Students work on projects that support a specific community organization

### **Joint projects with schools and community centers**

- a) **Volunteer programs**: students help in community centers (e.g., with activities for seniors or children).
- b) **Skills workshops**: organizing practical workshops (e.g. cooking, art activities) for the community with the participation of students.
- c) **Support for disadvantaged groups**: joint activities to help marginalized communities (e.g. organizing collections or educational programs).
- d) **Intergenerational programs**: students and senior citizens meet at the community center to collaborate on projects or share experiences.

### **Participation in community events**

- a) **School stands at community events**: presentation of school projects aimed at promoting mental health.
- b) **Participation in Health Days**: School teams prepare activities focused on mental well-being and a healthy lifestyle.
- c) **Community festivals**: The school organizes performances, exhibitions or lectures at local cultural events.
- d) **Sporting events**: joint school and community sports events to promote physical and mental well-being.
- e) **Open Day**: The school and local organizations jointly present their activities.

### **Educational and awareness-raising activities**

- a) **Creating a community library**: a collection of books, brochures and materials on mental health available to both the school and the community.
- b) **Educational campaigns**: Joint preparation of information campaigns on mental health (e.g. posters, videos, podcasts).
- c) **Parental discussions**: meetings of parents, teachers and experts from community organizations on the topic of supporting children's mental health.

- d) **Mental health screening:**cooperation with professional organizations to provide anonymous questionnaires for students.

#### **4.3.4 Developing critical thinking, creative skills, and social intelligence**

The development of critical thinking, creative skills, and social intelligence reflects the need to prepare students for life in a world where they will face complex issues. These skills are the foundation for the ability to solve problems, innovate, and build healthy relationships. Creative activities provide space for self-expression and boost self-confidence.

##### **Art workshops**

- a) **Art workshops, music and theater improvisations**
- b) **Literary writing:**writing stories, poems, or essays on the topic of social values or emotional intelligence.
- c) **Photography workshop:**documenting everyday life or a project on the topic of "what's important to me."

##### **Emotional and social intelligence courses**

- a) **Active listening training:**practical exercises to improve communication skills.
- b) **Empathy workshop:**simulations of situations to develop the ability to empathize with other people's feelings.
- c) **Conflict management exercises:**model situations where students practice conflict resolution.
- d) **Interview simulations:**practicing conducting sensitive conversations or persuasion.

##### **Developing critical thinking**

- a) **Debate competitions**focused on solving current social problems.
- b) **Media content analysis:**critical evaluation of news and articles in the media.
- c) **Workshop "Logical Thinking in Everyday Life":**problem solving through logical tasks and discussions.
- d) **Philosophy lesson:**open discussions about ethical dilemmas or philosophical questions.

##### **Creative problem solving**

- a) **Hackathons:**solving challenges (ecological or social) in a limited time.

- b) **The "what if..." game:** discussions on alternative scenarios (e.g. "what if there were no schools?").
- c) **Brainstorming workshops:** collective search for creative ideas on specific topics.
- d) **Prototyping:** design and presentation of new products or services aimed at solving problems.
- e) **Games to promote innovative thinking:** creating improvements for everyday objects.

### **Digital literacy**

- a) **Workshop on critical work with information:** searching, verifying and analyzing online resources.
- b) **Internet safety:** training focused on recognizing cyberbullying, hoaxes and fake news.
- c) **Multimedia content creation:** teach students how to create videos, podcasts, or blogs on meaningful topics.
- d) **Digital detox:** a project where students explore the impact of limiting digital devices on their well-being.

### **4.3.5 Creating a safe and inclusive environment**

Creating a safe and inclusive environment is a fundamental prerequisite for effective learning and personal development. Only in an environment where students feel accepted and safe can they fully develop their potential. An inclusive environment also reduces stigmatization and trivialization of mental health problems, thereby promoting openness and willingness to seek help.

#### **Supporting an inclusive school environment**

- a) **"Diversity Day":** a theme to celebrate the diversity of cultures, languages, religions, and interests of students.
- b) **Class rules of inclusion:** creating rules of conduct that promote mutual respect and inclusion.
- c) **Diversity wall map:** a visual representation of the diversity of a class or school.
- d) **The "Heroes of Inclusion" project:** students present stories of people who fought for equality and respect.
- e) **Group discussions about stereotypes:** open discussion on the topic of stereotypes and their impact on society.



### **Mentoring for students**

- a) **"Older Brother/Sister" Program:**older students support younger peers who need guidance.
- b) **Peer mentoring:** specially trained students provide emotional and social support to their peers.
- c) **Support for new students:** a program to help new students integrate into the school environment.
- d) **Mentoring clubs:** regular meetings between the mentor and his group of students on various topics (e.g. self-confidence, relationships).
- e) **Individual consultations** students with problems.

### **Bullying prevention**

- a) **Anti-bullying program:** creating a school bullying prevention program, including training for teachers and students.
- b) **Trust boxes:** an anonymous place where students can report bullying or ask for help.
- c) **Film and discussion:** screening of a film about bullying followed by a discussion about prevention.
- d) **"Let's Talk About Bullying" Campaign:** A week dedicated to raising awareness about bullying and its solutions.
- e) **Theatre for Change:** skits performed by students about bullying and its consequences with interactive audience participation.

### **Building a safe environment**

- a) **Regular anonymous surveys** to determine the level of safety and inclusion in the school.
- b) **Teacher training:** training in techniques for recognizing and solving problems in the classroom.
- c) **Support groups:** meetings for students who feel marginalized.
- d) **Circles of support:** weekly class meetings to share positive experiences and solve problems.
- e) **Creating a school code of ethics:** Students, together with teachers, define how they want to create an inclusive school.

### **4.3.6 Promoting mental health and well-being**

Promoting mental health and well-being is a central pillar of all activities. Regardless of other aspects, it is important to create a space where students can focus on their psychological well-being through relaxation techniques, building resilience and the availability of psychological support.

### **Lectures and courses for students**

- a) **Lecture "What is mental health?"** – the basics of how to maintain mental well-being.
- b) **Stress management workshop:** practical techniques for managing stressful situations.
- c) **Emotional literacy course:** identifying and managing emotions.
- d) **The "Road to Resilience" program:** how to build psychological resilience to challenges.
- e) **Lecture on mindfulness:** techniques aimed at improving concentration and calmness.

### **Consultation and support**

- a) **Individual consultations with a psychologist:** regular availability of psychologists for students.
- b) **Group discussions:** an open space for sharing experiences and problems.
- c) **Support groups:** meetings for students experiencing psychological difficulties.
- d) **Parental consultations:** helping parents support their children's mental health.
- e) **Professional advice for teachers:** consultations on the topic of managing problem situations.

### **Addiction prevention**

- a) **Lecture "Risks of digital addictions":** information about the impact of social media and games.
- b) **Workshop on managing cravings for addictions:** strategies for preventing and managing addictions.
- c) **"Life without addictions" campaign:** promotion of healthy alternatives for spending time.
- d) **Student outputs on the topic of addiction:** preparing posters, videos or essays on this topic.
- e) **A week without technology:** a call to limit the use of electronics and share experiences.

### **Teacher and parent education**

- a) **Training "How to be a first aider"**:training for teachers and parents to recognize problems and provide first aid.
- b) **Stress management workshop**:techniques for parents and teachers to manage their own stress.
- c) **Parenting seminars on mental health**:information on how to support children's psychological well-being at home.
- d) **Burnout Prevention Course**:for teachers focused on managing work stress.
- e) **Information brochures**:creating and distributing simple materials for parents and teachers on mental health promotion.

#### **Activities to promote well-being and prevent problems**

- a) **Relaxation techniques**:group meditations or breathing exercises for students.
- b) **Sports activities**:programs to support physical and mental health.
- c) **Art workshops**:painting, music, or writing as a form of emotional expression.
- d) **"Mental Health Day"**:a special day with lectures, activities and consultations.
- e) **Books on the topic of mental health**:School library with literature to support psychological well-being.

#### **4.3.7 Supporting a healthy lifestyle for children and youth**

Promoting a healthy lifestyle for children and youth complements this framework by emphasizing the relationship between physical and mental health. Regular exercise, healthy eating and adequate sleep have a significant impact on psychological well-being and the ability to cope with stress. Their integration into the school environment is therefore essential.

##### **Support for physical activities**

- a) **School sports clubs**
- b) **Morning warm-up**:short physical activities at the beginning of the school day.
- c) **Movement Week**:a weekly program focused on sports and physical activities for all age groups.
- d) **Movement breaks**:introducing short exercises during classes.
- e) **Group fitness classes**:aerobics, yoga or stretching for students and teachers.

##### **Organization of school competitions and tournaments**

- a) **School tournaments**
- b) **Interclass sports competitions**

- c) **Outdoor game days:**organizing games and sports activities in the fresh air.
- d) **Tourist trips:**joint hikes or orienteering in nature.

#### **Education about healthy nutrition**

- a) **Healthy eating workshops:**lectures on the topic of a balanced diet and drinking regimen.
- b) **Cooking classes:**teach students to prepare simple and healthy meals.
- c) **Healthy Eating Day:**demonstrations of healthy foods, tastings and discussions about proper nutrition.
- d) **Healthy snacks:**competitions for the most creative and healthiest snacks.
- e) **Gardening activities:**growing herbs or vegetables in school gardens.

#### **Combining exercise and education**

- a) **Active learning:**educational games and activities related to movement.
- b) **Pedometer challenge:**a competition to see who takes the most steps during the week.
- c) **Cycling days:**promoting cycling, including road safety.
- d) **Health awareness campaign:**creation of information materials about a healthy lifestyle.
- e) **Sports days with the family:**activities involving both children and parents in sports games.

#### **Long-term programs**

- a) **Healthy school:**a long-term program including physical activity, healthy eating and psychological well-being.
- b) **Fitness challenge:**Challenges to improve physical fitness (e.g. number of squats or push-ups per month).
- c) **"Green Lunch":**Dining menu focused on vegetarian and healthy dishes.
- d) **Running club:**regular runs for students, teachers and parents.

### **4.4 Organizational arrangements for activities**

The implementation of the proposed activities requires thorough personnel, material-technical and financial support. Personnel support includes the involvement of qualified professionals, such as school psychologists, social educators, special educators and trained teachers. Cooperation with external experts from the field of mental health, community organizations or health facilities is also important.

Material and technical support includes the availability of suitable spaces for the implementation of activities, such as classrooms, school libraries or relaxation areas. These spaces should be equipped with the necessary aids, such as visual materials, didactic tools or technologies for interactive learning.

Financial support is an integral part of the project. It is necessary to cover the costs associated with the preparation and implementation of activities, including remuneration for experts, purchase of materials, organization of training for educators and promotion of activities among students and parents. Financial resources can come from the school budget, grant programs, sponsorship contributions or cooperation with community organizations and local governments.

Detailed security is provided in Appendix D.

#### **4.5 The concept of a community center to support the mental health of children and youth**

The community center would function as a space that brings together different groups of people – children, parents, educators and local organizations. Joint activities and programs would promote cooperation and solidarity, thereby strengthening social ties in the community. The center would provide opportunities for young people to actively participate in community projects, volunteer activities and personal development programs. This contributes to the creation of a more active and cohesive society.

##### **4.5.1 Premises and equipment**

The community center would have the following layout:

###### **1. Reception and information zone**

A point of first contact for visitors to the center, where they can obtain necessary information about services and activities.

**Equipment:** reception desk with information materials, comfortable seating for waiting visitors, interactive information kiosk for searching for programs and services.

###### **2. Relaxation zone**

A place for relaxation and regeneration, where children and young people can gain new strength. A space for creative and leisure activities that support self-realization and fun.

**Equipment:** comfortable bean bags, sofas and armchairs, subdued lighting that creates a calm atmosphere, shelves with books and magazines about mental health and motivation, an aquarium or nature decorations, building sets and creative games.

### **3. Therapy room**

Space for individual or group therapy sessions.

**Equipment:** discreet and soundproof rooms to ensure privacy, comfortable chairs and tables for sitting, therapeutic aids, wall boards or flipcharts

### **4. Multifunctional room**

Space for workshops, lectures, discussions and group activities.

**Equipment:** folding tables and chairs for flexible space arrangement, projector, interactive whiteboard and sound system, aids for group activities (e.g. flipcharts, cards, worksheets), projection equipment for movie nights.

### **5. Exterior garden**

Space for outdoor activities and relaxation in nature.

**Equipment:** rest benches and a gazebo, garden playground or play area, herb and flower zones, space for outdoor workshops and meditations.

#### **4.5.2 Programs and activities**

The community center could organize workshops on mindfulness, stress management, self-esteem building, communication, art therapy, music therapy, theater and literary creation, sports activities, lectures on mental health, healthy relationships and social skills, Peer-to-peer programs of older students as mentors of younger ones, family days, community forums between schools, parents and professionals, and volunteer programs.

#### **4.5.3 Operating model**

The center should operate as a partnership between schools, health facilities, local non-profit organizations and local governments. Funding would be obtained through a combination of public sources, grants, sponsorships and voluntary contributions. Staffing would consist of a team of experts including psychologists, social workers, educators and therapists, supplemented by volunteers.

## **4.6 Promotion of the project in schools and motivation to implement activities**

Promoting the project in schools is a key element to ensure that the proposed activities gain the necessary support among students, teachers and parents. Successful promotion should be systematic, creative and inclusive.

### **4.6.1 Promotional strategies**

Effective promotion and motivation ensure that the project is perceived as valuable and beneficial. We suggest using the following promotion strategies.

#### **a) Presentation of the project to school management**

- Prepare a brief, engaging information package that includes the main objectives and benefits of the project for the school, students, teachers and parents, funding options
- Personal meetings with school management

#### **b) Involvement of teachers and school staff**

- It is advisable to organize introductory workshops for teachers to understand how they can integrate the project into their teaching.
- Provide teachers with methodological materials and customized educational plans

#### **c) Information campaigns for pupils**

- Posters and flyers in visible places
- Simple and engaging posts on school social media or websites
- Kick-off events where experts will explain the benefits of the project

#### **d) Parental involvement**

- Parents' associations - present the project at parents' meetings
- Newsletters and information emails about planned activities

### **4.6.2 Motivation to carry out activities**

There are several effective ways to motivate schools and target groups to participate in programs.

#### **a) Financial support**

- Find suitable grants or sponsorships that will cover the costs of materials, training, and professional lectures
- Provide schools with a clear overview of available funding sources

#### **b) Recognition and visibility**

- Organize competitions between schools where implemented activities will be awarded
- Promote the successes of schools on social networks, in the media, and at events

**c) Implementation guide**

- Prepare methodological guidelines and tools that teachers can easily apply
- Provide the opportunity to consult with experts during the project implementation

**d) Possibility to participate in pilot activities**

- Schools can try out part of the project first without the need for a long-term commitment

**f) Sharing with other schools and institutions**

- Active participation of the school in regional or national educational events where they can share their experiences
- Organizing meetings or exchanging experiences with other schools, community organizations and institutions
- Implementation of online seminars where other schools and institutions can discuss the benefits of the project and implement similar activities.

**g) Networking and partnership building**

- Sharing results through national and international networks such as ERASMUS+, eTwinning or local pedagogical organizations
- Connect schools with community organizations that can help them implement the project

**4.7 Project implementation timeline**

The project will be divided into four phases: preparatory, implementation, evaluation and sustainability. The expected duration of the project is 12 months.

A detailed schedule is in Appendix E.

**4.8 Evaluation of activity proposals by school experts**

With the help of a social pedagogue from the United School in Detva, we contacted educational counselors and mentors in schools in the Banská Bystrica region. We contacted 35 people, and received 10 responses at the time of writing our work. We expect that more responses will be received by the time the project results are presented.



70% of respondents believe that the topics of our proposed activities correspond to the current needs of the school, 30% are convinced that they partially correspond. Similarly, 70% of respondents see room in their school for implementing activities.

50% of respondents are convinced that these topics can be very well or to some extent integrated into the regular teaching process. The other half thinks that this possibility is rather unrealistic. Most often, they would apply teaching about mental health during class hours (70%), from regular subjects mainly in ethics and civics (60%), or physical education (40%).

Up to 70% of respondents rate the potential of these activities to improve relationships between students positively - 60% see high potential in them, 10% even very high potential.

All 100% of respondents think that their teachers would be able to lead such activities if they were professionally trained - half of them definitely and the other half probably yes. They also perceive the opportunities offered to schools by cooperation with local organizations very positively - up to 80% of those surveyed see this as a great opportunity for preparing appropriate activities to support the mental health of young people.

They see the greatest potential in youth counseling centers (100%), non-profit organizations focused on mental health, cultural organizations (80%), local governments and regional authorities (70%), psychological centers and clinics, organizations promoting a healthy lifestyle, youth and volunteer groups, organizations focused on bullying prevention (60%), and healthcare facilities and professionals (50%).

Experts from schools see great benefit in our activities - up to 80% of those surveyed.

All respondents agree that the proposed activities can contribute to creating a safer and more inclusive school (90% definitely, 10% probably). 60% of respondents see the need to strengthen these activities in their school as great, 40% as average.

As for forms of support, they would most welcome: relaxation zones at school for students to relieve stress during breaks, stress and emotion management training for students and teachers, cooperation with external experts (80%), individual consultations with experts for students and teachers, activities aimed at developing critical thinking and creativity (70%), regular workshops and lectures on the topic of mental health, training for teachers on techniques for supporting students' mental well-being, support groups for parents to cope with challenges in upbringing, programs for preventing bullying and creating an inclusive environment, educational materials on mental health for students and teachers (60%). They are also interested in sports activities and supporting a healthy lifestyle,

relaxation exercises (50%), thematic days and weeks focused on mental health, experiential activities for building team spirit and communication (40%).

Almost all (90%) school representatives think that activities focused on a healthy lifestyle could also be attractive to students.

Finally, we summarized the use of our proposed activities. 60% of respondents consider our activities to be partially realistic, 20% to be realistic. Only 20% consider them to be rather unrealistic (especially in their scope). If such a program were launched (e.g. through a founder), everyone would be willing to implement it at their school - 70% answered probably yes, 30% definitely yes.

The tragic event at the Spišská Stará Ves grammar school highlights the need to pay more attention to the mental health of young people. It is a reminder that prevention and support in this area cannot be underestimated. Programs that promote an inclusive environment, emotional management, and relationship building are key to creating safer schools.

The findings of this survey confirm the importance of targeted mental health support, community collaboration, and professional involvement. Any interventions must be systematic and long-term to have a positive impact on the school environment and the students themselves.

The questionnaire and its detailed evaluation are in Appendix H and Appendix I.

#### 4.9 Budget proposal for a specific mental health project

The proposed project is suitable for any secondary school. It includes a wider spectrum of activities of several types.

Item	Justification	Number of units	Price per unit	Units	Total
<b>Workshop "Breathing and Relaxation Exercises" - LucYoga</b>	Basic course on breathing and relaxation exercises for students - for better physical and psychological well-being of students	4	€60.00	throw	€240.00
<b>Predná Hora Specialized Medical Institute – online lectures</b>	2 workshops: Sport as prevention of addictions "lifestyle therapy", Addiction as a consequence of burnout syndrome - increasing awareness in the given area and increasing competences	2	€90.00	per day	€180.00
<b>IPČKO – Káčko mental health workshop</b>	The workshop is aimed at supporting the mental health of students through several interactive activities in the classroom.	2	€25.00	throw	€50.00
<b>"Health, Exercise and Relationships Day"</b>	A full-day activity for the whole school. Content: lectures on mental health, stress management, self-assessment and emotional intelligence, exercises to strengthen teamwork, mutual understanding and self-confidence, sports activities, preparation of healthy food... The activity will support communication,	1	€500.00	per day	€500.00

	teamwork, a healthy lifestyle, positive emotions, relationships between teachers and students: costs for renting a sports area (250), costs for workshops (250)				
<b>Winter sports day</b>	entrance fee to the ice rink and ski area - The activity will support communication, teamwork, a healthy lifestyle, positive emotions, relationships between teachers and students	1	€300.00	pcs	€300.00
<b>Costs of volunteer activities</b>	material provision for volunteer activities - small materials, paints for painting Christmas decorations, Easter decorations, material provision for joint activities with pensioners (planting flower beds, herb gardens)	1	€400.00	pcs	€400.00
<b>Purchase of teaching aids</b>	purchase of professional literature for the school support team for better orientation in the issue	5	€20.00	pcs	€100.00
<b>Material support for project activities</b>	purchase of small items to make the environment more pleasant for students - purchasing bean bags, relaxation mats, flower decorations, etc.	1	€400.00	pcs	€400.00
<b>Hackathon security costs</b>	material support for the Hackathon (small materials, tools for presenting the hackathon output, refreshments)	1	€250.00	pcs	€250.00
<b>Total</b>					€2420

## 5 DISCUSSION

The project directly affects the quality of the educational process, the school environment and the overall reputation of the institution. The implementation of such activities contributes to the improvement of the school environment in which students feel safe and supported. At the same time, a significant reduction in the incidence of bullying and conflicts in the classrooms allows for the creation of more harmonious relationships between students, which positively affects their cooperation and the overall atmosphere in the school.

At the same time, the educational process is strengthened. Students who are physically and mentally resilient achieve better academic results, are more motivated and active in their education. Moreover, the integration of mental health topics develops their abilities to cope with challenges not only at school but also in everyday life. Such projects contribute to the development of students as holistic personalities.

Implementing health and well-being programs also brings significant benefits to the school itself. It becomes more attractive to parents and the wider community, increasing its prestige and positive perception. In addition, participation in innovative educational projects helps the school establish itself as a leader in modern approaches to education.

Equally important is the support of teachers and school staff. Training teachers on topics such as mental health and burnout prevention helps them to manage challenging situations in the classroom more effectively. Teachers gain tools to recognize students' problems and the ability to provide basic psychological support, which increases their readiness to respond to the individual needs of children. Such a comprehensive approach contributes to the overall quality of the learning environment and strengthens the well-being of all parties involved.

The project also brings significant benefits to the wider community, going beyond the school itself. One of the most important aspects is the strengthening of social cohesion. Community events bring together different age groups and encourage cooperation between parents, schools and local organisations. These activities help build mutual trust and support, which contributes to an overall increase in the quality of life in the community.

At the same time, such initiatives contribute to increasing health literacy. Outreach activities and educational campaigns focused on healthy lifestyles not only enrich

students, but this knowledge is also transmitted through children to their families and the wider community. More informed parents and community members can then more effectively promote the health and well-being of children, thereby improving the overall health of the entire community.

The economic benefits of such projects are also an important part. Preventing health problems and reducing risky behaviors, such as addictions, leads to long-term reductions in health and social care costs. In addition, the involvement of local organizations, businesses and service providers in these activities supports the local economy and creates opportunities for deepening cooperation between the school and the community. In this way, the projects indirectly contribute to economic development and strengthen the economic stability of the community.

One of the main benefits is the long-term improvement of public health. These initiatives shape a generation that is aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and thus can prevent chronic diseases. At the same time, they develop the psychological resilience of the younger generation, thus supporting their ability to cope with future challenges in their personal and professional lives.

They also contribute to the reduction of social inequalities. Inclusive activities ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have equal access to support and opportunities for development. This approach also reduces the stigmatization of disadvantaged groups, thereby promoting social justice and equality in society.

Another important aspect is the promotion of active citizenship. Young people who are involved in community and school activities acquire important skills and values needed to become active and engaged members of society. In this way, they contribute to the development of their community and promote the values of cooperation, solidarity and mutual respect. Together, these benefits create the basis for a stronger, healthier and more inclusive society.

## 6 CONCLUSION AND BENEFITS

Supporting the mental health of secondary school students is one of the key areas that requires increased attention from schools, educators, parents and society as a whole. Our work analyzed the current state of mental health of students in selected secondary schools and proposed specific measures to improve it.

The work was divided into several chapters, each of which gradually contributed to the achievement of the objectives set in the introduction.

In the introductory chapter, we explained the importance of the topic of mental health and its impact on the lives of young people. We defined the main concepts and theoretical frameworks that form the basis of this issue.

We collected data on the mental health status of students in selected secondary schools through a questionnaire survey and interviews. This chapter provided a detailed overview of the most common problems students face, as well as their needs for psychological support.

Based on the data collected, we proposed specific activities to support students' mental health. We divided these into several areas, such as integrating the topic of mental health into the educational process, developing social and emotional skills, collaborating with school communities, and creating a safe school environment.

In the next section, we elaborated in detail the personnel, organizational and financial requirements necessary for the implementation of the proposed measures. We proposed ways to ensure the sustainability of the activities and their effective use in practice.

We also proposed strategies for promoting the proposed measures, which should increase awareness of their importance among educators, parents and students themselves. We also addressed the possibilities of evaluating the effectiveness of these measures and ways of their continuous improvement.

The final part of the thesis focused on evaluating the benefits of the proposed measures for students, schools and the community. We emphasized the positive impact of these measures on the mental health, academic performance and interpersonal relationships of students.

The main contribution of the work is to emphasize that mental health care is not only an individual matter, but also a collective responsibility. The implementation of the proposed

measures can positively affect not only students, but also the overall school environment, thereby contributing to the development of a healthy and supportive community.

### **Contributions to theory**

The project brings new information about the mental health status of secondary school students based on the analysis of specific samples. It provides a more detailed look at the factors that influence young people's psychological well-being and their interactions with the school and family environment.

The project findings allow for a better understanding of how cultural and social factors influence students' mental well-being. The project provides empirical data and suggestions that can serve as a basis for further research in areas such as school psychology, prevention of mental health problems, and inclusive education.

The project results can be used to create teaching materials, training programs for educators, and methodologies for implementing mental health into the educational process. The proposed questionnaires and diagnostic tools can serve as standardized methods for assessing the mental health of students in schools.

### **Benefits for practice**

The project provides schools with specific activities and recommendations that help students manage stress, improve social skills, and build emotional resilience, thereby supporting their overall well-being and ability to achieve academic success.

It raises awareness among educators, parents and students about the importance of caring for psychological well-being and the possibilities of systematically supporting it. The implementation of the proposed activities and measures helps prevent the emergence of problems such as anxiety, depression and behavioral problems.

Teachers gain methodological tools to support the mental health of their students. At the same time, their education is expanded to include knowledge from the field of psychology and prevention. The proposed measures contribute to improving interpersonal relationships in schools, preventing bullying and creating an environment in which students feel accepted and respected.

The project supports the connection of schools with community organizations, health facilities and families. This cooperation enables more effective support for students and the development of local support networks.

Long-term improvements in students' mental health can lead to a reduction in the incidence of mental illnesses, higher academic success and, consequently, greater productivity and better involvement of young people in society.

The results and suggested activities can serve as a model program for other schools that want to improve mental health support in their environments.



## 7 SUMMARY

Our work focuses on analyzing the mental health status of secondary school students and proposing specific measures and activities that could contribute to its improvement. The main goal was to examine and analyze the mental health status of students in selected secondary schools and propose specific activities and measures to support it.

In the theoretical part, we defined basic concepts and analyzed relevant theoretical frameworks. These theoretical foundations served as a basis for understanding the factors influencing students' mental health.

The empirical part of the work was based on a questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews with students, teachers and mental health professionals. The data obtained pointed to high levels of stress, low levels of emotional management and the need to develop social skills among students. These findings highlight the importance of systematic mental health support in schools.

Based on the analysis, we proposed specific activities focused on various areas: integrating mental health topics into the educational process, developing social and emotional skills, supporting cooperation between schools and community organizations, creating a safe and inclusive environment, as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle. The proposal also included recommendations regarding the personnel, organizational and financial provision of activities and their promotion.

The conclusion of the thesis evaluated the benefits of the project, which include improving the psychological well-being of students, their academic results, the quality of interpersonal relationships and the overall school environment. The thesis emphasizes the need for systematic and long-term support for mental health in schools, which is the basis for the personal and social development of the young generation.

This work represents a contribution to addressing the issue of student mental health and offers practical suggestions that can be used in schools and inspire further research or intervention projects in this area. We believe that its implementation can positively impact not only the lives of individual students, but also the quality of school and community environments.

## 8 REFERENCES

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Annex A      Proposal for a structure of activities to support mental health
- Annex B      Specific activities and their provision
- Annex C      School work plan for integrating mental health promotion activities into  
the secondary school curriculum
- Annex D      Organizational arrangements for activities
- Annex E      Project implementation timeline
- Annex F      Questionnaire - Mental health of young people
- Annex G      Questionnaire - mental health of young people - evaluation
- Annex H      Questionnaire on the usability of activities at school
- Annex I      Questionnaire on the usability of activities at school - evaluation