

Role of School Nurses in Promoting Adolescent Health: Aligned with SDG 3 & SDG 11

Jasmin B. Saquing¹, Nitchakun Phichachan², Minu Mary Mathai³, Prof Dr Samuel Ernest⁴

¹Cagayan State University, Philippines, jasminsaquing@csu.edu.ph

²Faculty of Nursing, Shinawatra University, Thailand, nitchakun.p@siu.ac.th
0009-0000-4643-6713

³Assistant Professor, Department of Biochemistry, Sree Balaji Medical college and hospital, Bharath institute of higher education and research, Chrompet, Chennai, 600044 Orchid ID: 0009-6660-9532-7728

Email ID: minumarypramod@gmail.com

⁴Director Strategy & Regulatory Affairs - Nursing & Medical, Dental Health Sciences
Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth, India
Samuel_ernest@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

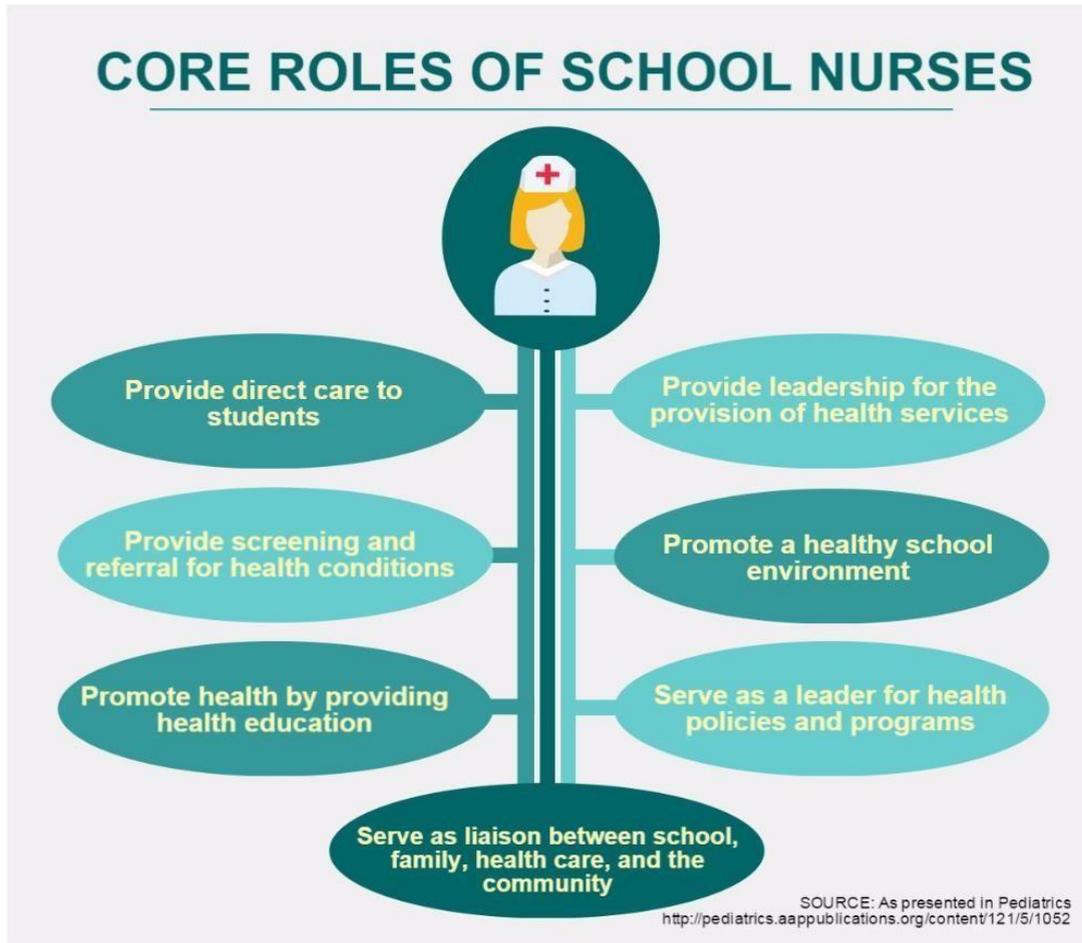
Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes, yet it is also a period of vulnerability to health risks such as mental illness, poor nutrition, substance use, and reproductive health challenges. Schools, as daily points of contact for young people, provide an ideal setting for health promotion, with school nurses playing a central role in safeguarding adolescent well-being. This secondary research paper explores the multifaceted contributions of school nurses in promoting adolescent health by synthesizing evidence from global studies, policy documents, and program evaluations. The findings reveal that school nurses improve health outcomes by providing preventive education, mental health support, sexual and reproductive health counseling, chronic illness management, and lifestyle interventions. Their work has also been linked to reduced absenteeism, improved academic performance, and increased health awareness among students. However, systemic barriers such as shortages of trained personnel, high nurse-to-student ratios, cultural resistance to sensitive topics, and insufficient institutional support limit their effectiveness. The study concludes that empowering school nurses through increased investment, specialized training, and stronger policy integration is essential for achieving comprehensive adolescent health promotion and building healthier, more resilient future generations.

KEYWORDS: School Nurses; Adolescent Health; Health Promotion; Mental Health Support; Sexual and Reproductive Health; Chronic Illness Management; Health Education, SDG 3, SDG 11.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical stage of human development characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. It is also a period marked by vulnerability to health risks such as poor nutrition, mental health challenges, substance use, early sexual activity, and exposure to violence (Rankine, et al. 2023). According to global health reports, more than 1.2 billion people—approximately one-sixth of the world's population—are adolescents, and their well-being directly shapes the future of societies. However, adolescent health is often neglected within traditional healthcare systems that focus more on maternal, child, or adult health. Schools have increasingly become an important place to conduct health promotions where young people spend a big part of their days. In this environment, school nurses can serve as decision-making centres since they offer conveniently located, reliable, and developmentally appropriate health services that meet the adolescent's unique needs (Bocquier, et al. 2023). Their role goes beyond simple care to preventive health education and early detection of risks, counseling, and referral to specialized services when such is necessary.



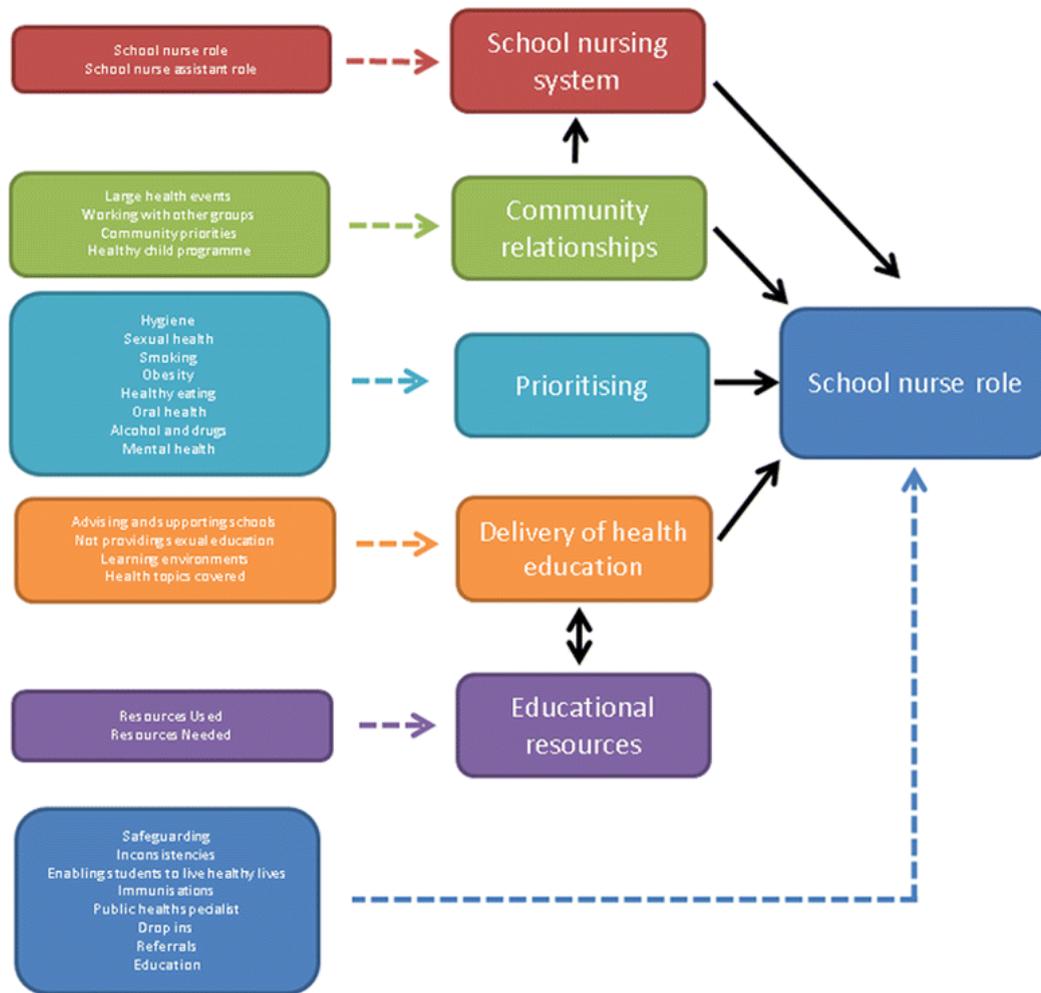
School nurses occupy an intermediate position between healthcare and education, thus being the best positioned in such a way that they can affect not only health outcomes but also the performance. Studies have indicated that teenagers with unattended health challenges like anxiety, unhealthy eating or chronic diseases are most likely to skip school and achieve low grades as well as develop further health related complications. On-site assistance allows school nurses to solve pressing problems, including injuries and asthma attacks, as well as to develop and maintain the most effective programs to promote vaccination, nutrition education, or mental health programs (Zabek, et al. 2023). They play a significant preventive role in the promotion of healthy lifestyles, prevention of risky behaviors and strengthening resilience. As an example, school-based sexual and reproductive health programs conducted by school nurses have proven to be useful in curbing teenage pregnancies and increasing awareness on safe practices. Equally, nurse intervention and education on mental health has been associated with decreased stigma and willingness of the students to seek help. This combination of effects on health and education is further reason why school nursing has long been viewed as an invaluable pillar of comprehensive adolescent health promotion.

The significance of school nurses has increased even more due to the recent challenges confronted by adolescents, like the increasing number of obesity cases, mental health disorders, cyberbullying, and the post-effects of such global crises as the COVID-19 pandemic. School-based nurses as a first-line of response may be uniquely placed to identify the early warning signs of depression or eating disorders or substance use and intervene to prevent the development of more severe outcomes. Furthermore, their access to secure relationships with teenagers, makes them ideally suited to provide sensitive health classes on topics which are somewhat taboo, like sexual orientation or elemental and birth health/ benefits. By aligning with teachers, parents, and healthcare professionals, school nurses establish a comprehensive system of support that would allow adolescents to remain in the state of consistent and comprehensive care (Williams, et al. 2021). Through a second level review of literature, this research paper is aimed to discuss the various duties that can be offered by school nurses in the pursuit of health among adolescents. This paper critiques evidence of international research and explains the benefits, drawbacks, and policy recommendations of school nursing as an effective intervention to reduce the risk of health problems in the future generations.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Adolescents face a unique set of health challenges that require specialized attention, yet traditional healthcare systems are often not designed to address their developmental needs. Issues such as mental health disorders, poor nutrition, substance abuse, reproductive health risks, and lack of physical activity frequently emerge during adolescence and, if left unaddressed, can have long-term consequences on adulthood and overall well-being (Martinsson, et al. 2021). At the same time, adolescence is also a period of opportunity—habits and behaviors formed during these years often carry into adulthood. Schools provide a natural setting to influence these behaviors because they serve as daily points of contact for young people. Within this environment, school nurses play an indispensable role in bridging healthcare and education, ensuring that students receive timely and appropriate interventions. Their presence within schools makes healthcare accessible, reduces stigma around seeking help, and

fosters a supportive environment that prioritizes both academic success and health outcomes (National Association of School Nurses, 2024). This study is therefore driven by the urgent need to examine how school nurses contribute to adolescent health promotion, particularly in areas where prevention and early intervention can transform lifelong health trajectories (Melander, et al. 2022).



The reason behind it can also be found in the increased awareness of school nursing as a strategic investment in the sphere of public health. Experience in different countries has shown that the health results, as well as reduction in absences and evaluation academic achievements, are improved considerably with nurse-led intervention in schools (Christiana, et al. 2025). School nursing involves not only intercession of direct health issues like chronic and injuries conditions but also sets up prevention programs concerning the overall health concerns like mental health, sexual health, obesity, and substance use. Due to this effect, the work of school nurses has been underestimated and underfunded as many areas have a shortage of qualified professionals, inadequate policy support, or uneven implementation of school health professionals in school health departments. The study aims to distill the evidence on the role of school nurses through a secondary research of available literature and identify the limitations that exist that restrict the effectiveness of school nurses in adolescent health promotion and make recommendations on how to enhance the role of school nurses. In conclusion, the article shows that allocating funds on school nursing not only represents a health care solution but entails the holistic approach that will produce healthier, more robust, and better-equipped generations (Aronowitz, et al. 2021).

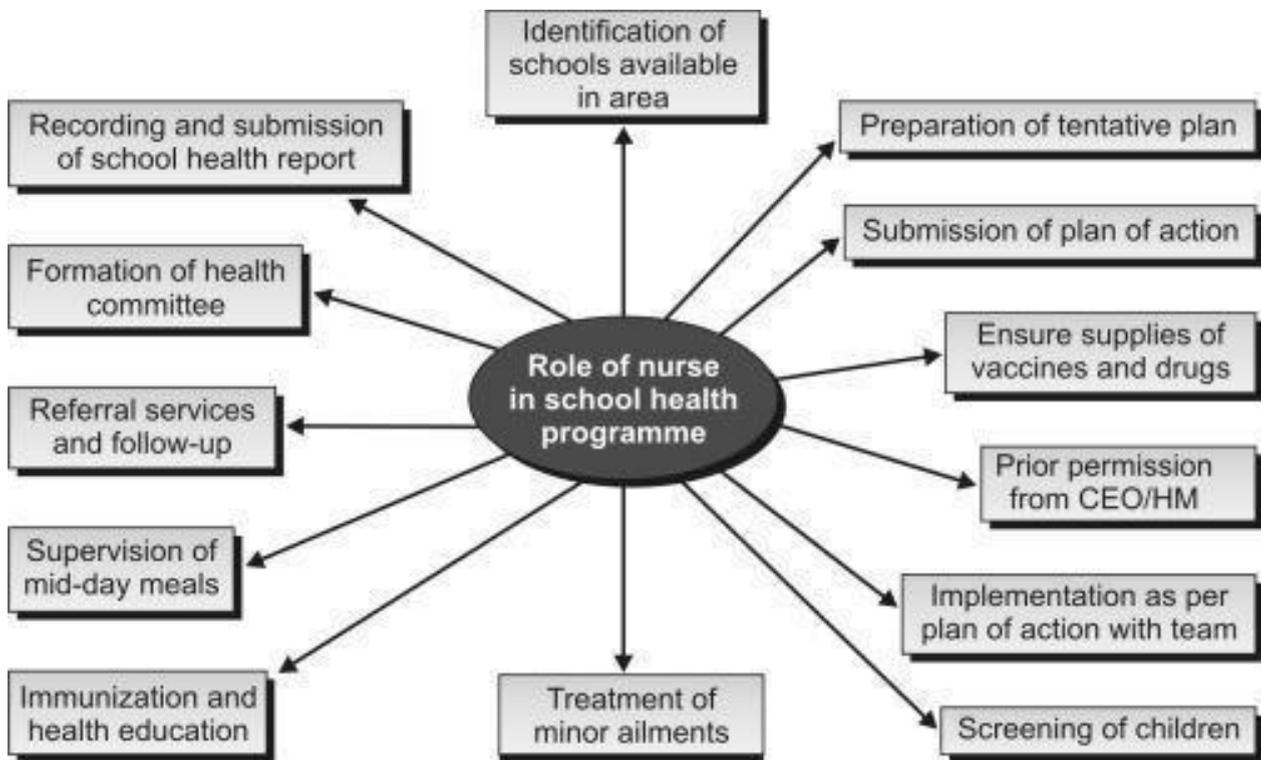
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Adolescent Health as a Global Priority and Evolution of the School Nurse Role

Hilli & Pedersen (2021) Adolescent health is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of global health and development. Adolescents account for nearly one-sixth of the world’s population, and their health status strongly influences future productivity, social stability, and intergenerational well-being. However, this group remains vulnerable to a wide range of health issues including mental illness, obesity, malnutrition, substance use, sexual and reproductive health risks, and violence. Studies consistently reveal that early intervention during adolescence can prevent chronic diseases, improve educational attainment, and establish lifelong healthy behaviors. Despite this, healthcare services for adolescents are often fragmented, underfunded, or inaccessible. Schools, where adolescents spend the majority of their waking hours, have therefore become critical platforms for health promotion. Within this setting, school nurses emerge as key actors, uniquely positioned to address both immediate healthcare needs and long-term preventive strategies.

Pawils, et al. (2023) The concept of school nursing originated in the early 20th century to address communicable disease

outbreaks among schoolchildren. Initially, the role was focused on screening for illnesses, administering basic first aid, and preventing the spread of infections. Over time, however, the scope of school nursing has expanded dramatically to encompass preventive care, chronic disease management, mental health support, and health education. The modern school nurse is expected to figure in many roles which are clinician, counselor, educator, and advocate. Their role now extends to the application of immunization programs, nutrition and physical activities supervision, the encouragement of safe sex activities, as well as managing the psychosocial activities of teenagers. This transformation is indicative of the understanding that to be treated as a healthy adolescent, there must be a combination of medical, social and learning supplements to health care.



3.2. Mental Health Interventions by School Nurses

Hoskote, et al. (2023) Adolescent mental health is one of the bright spots of current school nursing practise. Rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm among youth have been growing internally around the world on top of the burdens of academic study, social media, bullying and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. School nurses are particularly crucial in recognizing the early mental distress-related symptoms, initial counseling, and referral of the students to more in-depth services. A research study reveals that an adolescent is likely to visit school nurses more than other outsider providers because of convenience and lack of stigmatism involved with visiting the nurses. Nurse-led programs, including anti-bullying, stress management, and mental-health awareness programs, have been associated with better student well-being and decreased absences. These results emphasize that mental health promotion in schools will not become efficient without an active participation of school nurses.

3.3. Sexual and Reproductive Health Promotion

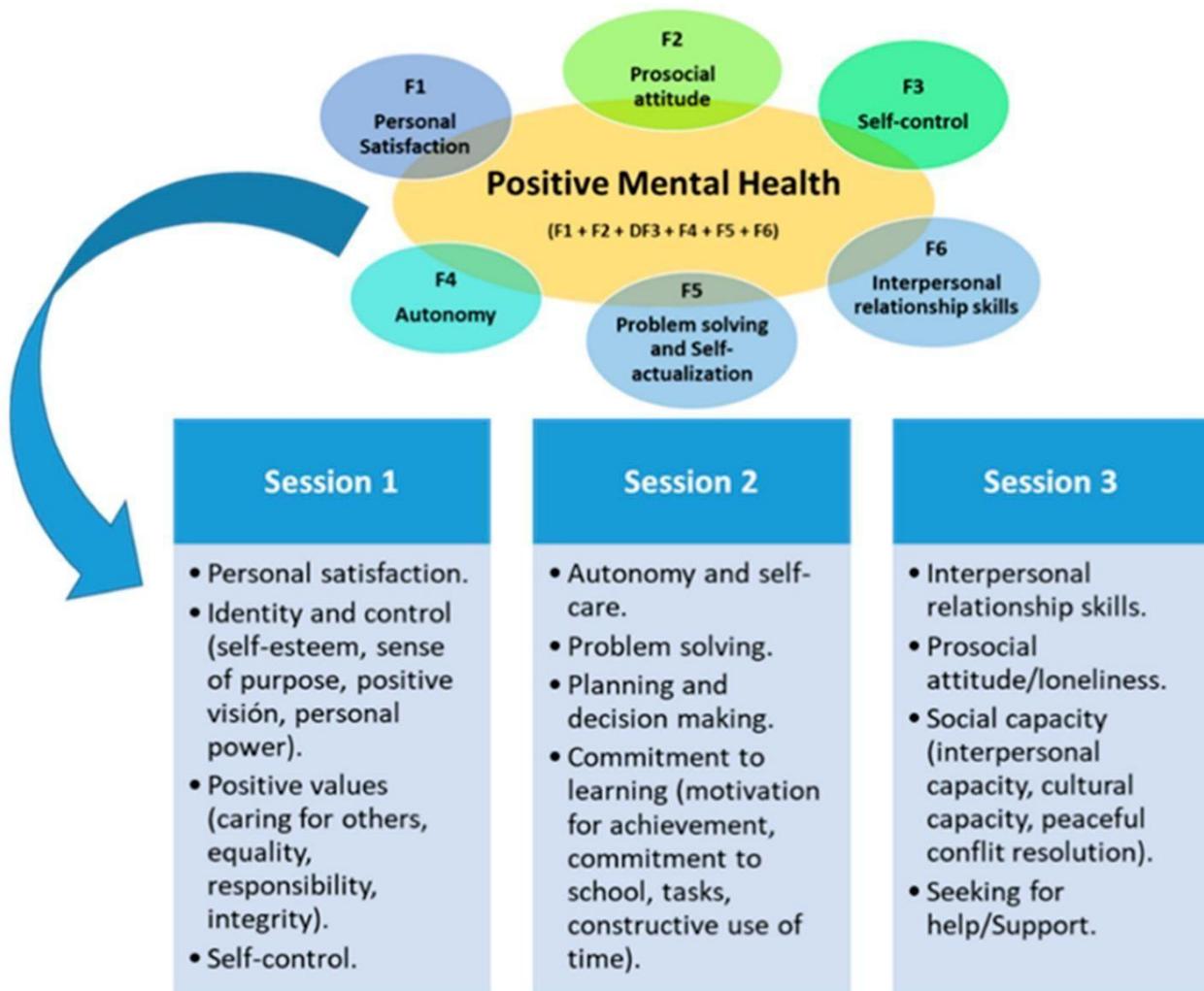
McCabe, et al. (2022) Adolescence is the time when people are becoming more conscious of sexuality and reproductive health. Unless they have proper guidance, they can be exposed to dangers in the form of procreating against their wishes, STIs, and mental trauma. The school nurses have been major players in educating students on sex education and counseling them about reproductive health and also securing contraceptives in areas where this kind of counseling and access is encouraged and legal. A review of the literature of other countries with developed school health, like the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries, indicates that intensive sex education by nurses was accompanied by reduced pregnancies among teenagers and increased knowledge of safe sex. With more conservative societies, school nurses can usually become unspoken confidants, who provide advice that teenagers may not feel free to solicit among their parents or teachers. He or she can confidentially and without judgement assist in reproductive health promotion in schools.

3.4. Addressing Nutrition and Lifestyle Risks

Silva, et al. (2021) The emergence of higher rates of obesity and malnutrition in adolescents poses the necessity of specific nutrition and lifestyle intervention. School nurses make a great contribution in conducting nutrition assessment activities, arranging health classes on healthy nutrition, and promoting physical fitness. In a lot of settings, they work with cafeteria services in an effort to encourage healthier food choices and to evaluate the outcome of school meals on the health of students. There are nurse-led campaigns against smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use and such measures have proven effective in containing the risks of these behaviours among the adolescents. An example is that in programs in which nurses offer counseling about the harm of substance abuse, the experimentation with tobacco and alcohol has been reduced. By integrating health promotion into the school setting, nurses will enable adolescents to become instilled with better health habits that follow into their adulthood.

Kaskoun & McCabe (2022) Teenagers with chronic diseases like asthma, diabetes or epilepsy usually have to be regularly

monitored and assisted during schooltime. School nurses make sure that these students are provided with proper care, administration of medications, and offered emergency in case of a necessity. Their presence does not only protect the health of these students, but also decreases absenteeism and academic disruption. Studies have shown that school nurses have benefited students with chronic illnesses in that they have enhanced their academic and social roles because they feel safer and less stigmatized. This underlines the dual mission of school nurses as ensure protection of health and inclusive education so that no child is left behind because of a health issue.



3.5. Barriers to Effective School Nursing and Future Directions

Pestaner, et al. (2021) Even though the importance of school nurses has been proved, there are barriers that hinder their effectiveness. The amount of qualified school nurses in ratio to students is very low to the extent of overwhelming caseload. The budget of schools means that often they will not be able to hire full-time nurses much to the detriment of care. In other areas, school nurses may be unqualified to deal with adolescents, in terms of their need to be more trained in issues such as mental health counseling or sexual health education. Their work is also affected by cultural resistance in talking about some issues particularly reproductive health. In addition, the lack of sound policy structures that bring health into the education systems undermines the institute acceptance of school nursing. These problems highlight the necessity of the orientation towards systemic improvements and budgetary investments to ensure the role of school nurses is reinforced worldwide.

Kostenius (2023) Literature indicates the importance of inbuilt school nurses into the schools and education as a whole at the health and education policies. Adolescent health indicators and better performance attained in school are shown in countries with well-established school nursing systems. The idea of an investment in school nursing is not only the flow of financial capital to pay for the nursing care on-site, but also creating a supportive environment to help adolescents flourish physically, mentally and socially. Future strategies should be directed at the increase of workforce, special training, and the use of technology to promote health, e.g., online counseling services and telehealth. Moreover, inviting school nurses in policymaking will make sure that actualities of adolescent health needs are sufficiently reflected. Societies can invest in the long-term health of future generations by prioritising school nursing.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach used in the research was a secondary research design because the study will be synthesis of existing literature, reports, and documented case studies on role of school nurses in the promotion of adolescent health. The choice of the

approach was motivated by its over-viewing and comparative nature relative to numerous geographic and cultural contexts through without necessitating fieldwork in terms of logistic and financial barriers. A wide variety of reliable sources was consulted, such as peer-reviewed journals, international health reports, and learning policy documentation that is no older than decade-old, with several seminal works that laid the basis of school nursing practice also being used. Search terms were: “school nursing,” “adolescent health,” “health promotion in schools,” “nursing interventions” and “youth well-being.” Larger databases like PubMed, Scopus and Google scholar were utilized with supplementary efforts being made to obtain reports of various organizations like the World Health Organization, UNICEF and home and education ministries. This guaranteed a broad depth of sources which varied between empirical research studies to the reviews of the policies and program evaluations.

The collected literature was analyzed with the aid of thematic coding strategy, which made it possible to identify some common patterns, outcomes, and challenges that school nursing can meet in facilitating behaviors that enhance the health of teenagers. The contents were defined in the mainstream areas, such as mental health promotion, sexual and reproductive health, lifestyle and nutrition interventions, chronic disease management, and barriers on the system. It was also planned to view qualitative results (including how students perceived the degree of trust they placed in school nurses) and quantitative results (including a reduction in absenteeism rates, teenage pregnancy rates, or obesity rates) to flesh out an understanding on how this intervention turned out. Triangulation was also used to improve reliability through cross references across studies and contexts. The disadvantages of this methodology are the perception of publication bias, under-representation of data collected in the countries with low school nursing establishment, and the inconsistency of reporting outcomes of studies. Nevertheless, by incorporating various sources and opinions, the methodology yields a reasonably balanced and plausible picture of the role school nurses play in health promotion of adolescents, along with their achievements and the changes that still need to be made in order to empower their role in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

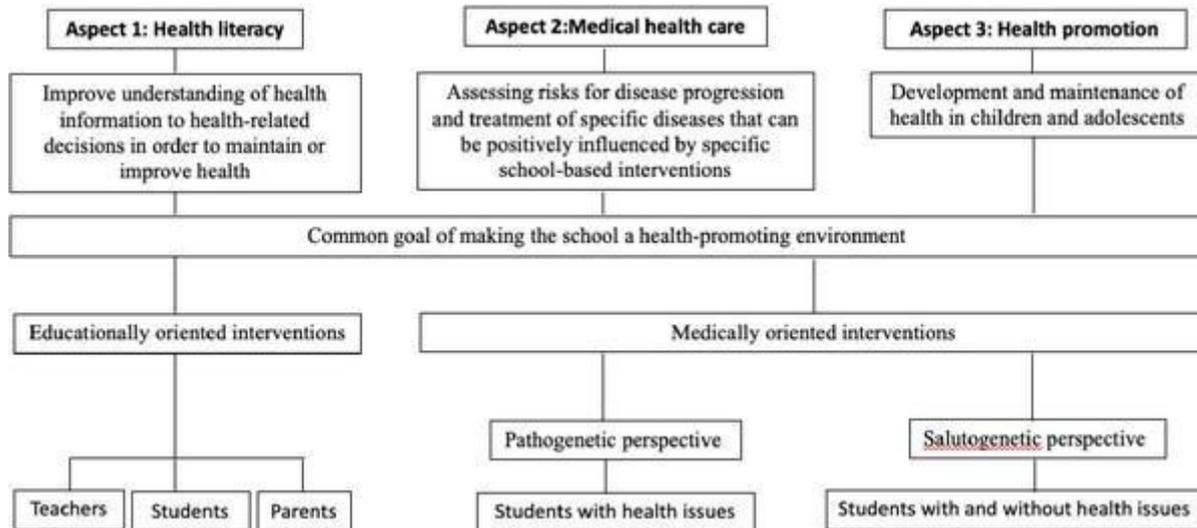
The examined sources indicate that school nurses perform a vital role in improving the health state of adolescents as they represent the main source of medical assistance, counseling, and preventive education to be turned to by students. Their experience in clinical practice combined with their ability to communicate clearly, is their greatest asset in reaching out to health issues in the schools context. There is some evidence that indicates that schools with active nursing programs have higher attendance rates of students, reduced emergency hospital stays, and an enhanced overall well-being of students. Teens perceive nurses as friendly and dependable, and this trait is highly valuable when conveying sensitive information like sexual health, mental well-being or drug use. This relationship benefit allows the school nurses to not only be caregivers but also health advocates to empower the students, allowing them to make better health decisions.

Field	Nursing Intervention	Reported Outcomes / Impact
Mental Health	Early detection of anxiety, depression, stress; counseling; referral services	Reduced absenteeism; improved willingness to seek help; decreased stigma around mental illness
Sexual & Reproductive Health	Sex education, confidential counseling, contraception guidance	Lower rates of teenage pregnancy; improved knowledge of safe practices; responsible decision-making
Nutrition & Lifestyle	Health education on diet, physical activity; anti-smoking and anti-drug campaigns	Healthier eating habits; reduction in obesity trends; decreased experimentation with tobacco and alcohol
Chronic Illness Management	Monitoring asthma, diabetes, epilepsy; administering medication; emergency response	Fewer hospital visits; improved academic participation; inclusive school environment
Injury & Immediate Care	First aid, injury management, health screenings	Quicker response to health issues; reduced disruptions to learning
Preventive Health Promotion	Vaccination programs, hygiene education, stress management workshops	Increased vaccine uptake; stronger awareness of hygiene; improved resilience to health risks

All the strongest findings are found in the influence of school nurses on adolescent mentality. Persistent elevation of the rates of depression, anxiety, and stress in the youth demonstrates the necessity of early identification and treatment. School nurses usually see the dangerous signs of changes in behavior or indications of psychological annoyance at first. Nurse-based programs that involve stress management educational seminars, peer support groups, and individual counselling sessions have correlated to an improvement in the number of missed classes and with increase in grades. Students with mental health support services provided by nurses also report a high willingness to seek such service again, implying a placebo effect of reducing mental illness stigma. The position of school nurses to mediate between students and external mental health care services is filled by offering safe, confidential forums in which to discuss problems.

The transformation brought about by the role of school nurses in instilling sexual and reproductive health is always mentioned. Nurse-led interventions, such as sex education programs, counselling on the contraception methods, and awareness programs on sexually transmitted infections, have been proven to prevent teenage pregnancies and bring about awareness on sexually transmitted infections. In the case of schools that are actively engaged in delivering comprehensive sex education, we see better informed choices, more acquired safe practices by the adolescents. Nurses can play a pivotal role in conservative cultures that tend to be less open when discussing reproductive health because the roles of nurses can be seen as that of a confidential and trusted confidant who can provide clear and trustworthy information and advice to the adolescent. Such findings indicate that the

role of school nurses is not only to treat the current medical needs regarding reproductive health: they also have preventative effects on adolescent behavior by raising awareness and sense of responsibility.

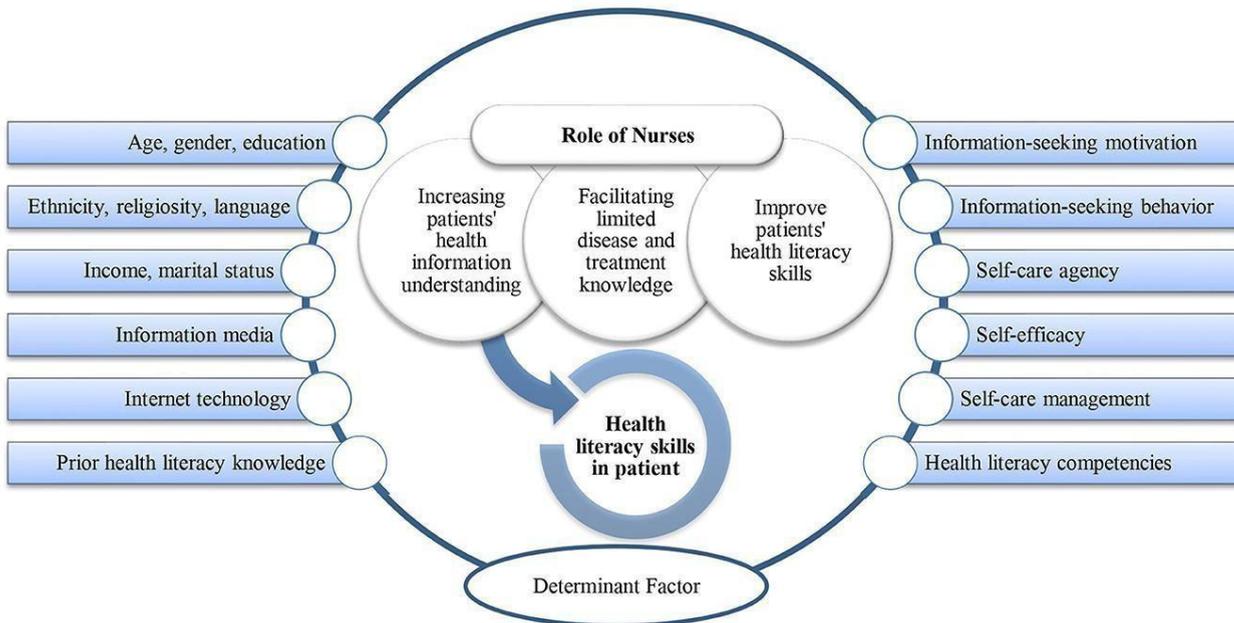


The other important discovery is that school nurses largely impact on lifestyle behaviours of adolescents especially on nutrition, and physical activity. Nurse-driven initiatives on the aspects of balanced diets and exercise as well as substance abuse prevention are linked to a decrease in obesity rates and long-term healthier habits. Also, school nurses are critical in the management of chronic diseases such as asthma, epilepsy, and diabetes. Their surveillance and action minimize absenteeism, enhance scholastic engagement, and lessen the emergency hospitalization levels. Not only can nurses in this way influence the health outcomes of students with chronic illnesses, but the approach also helps address the overall experience of students with chronic illnesses who would otherwise find themselves at the margins of education. The twofold nature of addressing chronic illness and ensuring healthy behaviours in adolescents reflects the scope of this work in terms of its contribution to adolescent well-being.

Barrier	Description
Workforce Shortages	High nurse-to-student ratios limit ability to provide comprehensive care
Resource Limitations	Lack of private counseling spaces, medical supplies, and educational materials
Training Gaps	Insufficient specialization in adolescent mental health and reproductive health
Cultural Resistance	Taboos around discussing sexuality and mental health reduce program effectiveness
Policy Weaknesses	Limited integration of school nursing into national health and education systems
Funding Constraints	Inadequate budgets prevent full-time nurse deployment in many schools

Although effective, the studied articles demonstrate the presence of major impediments to accessibility of school nurses. Shortages are acute in many areas and some schools serve hundreds or even thousands of pupils per trained school nurse. These resource shortages include the unavailability of a place to offer individual counseling, medical supplies, and missing specification training, which all lower the quality of service provided. There are also cultural and institutional factors that inhibit the effectiveness of the work of the nurses to meet the teenage requirements, including unwillingness to talk about mental conditions or reproductive problems at school. Uncoordinated policies and under financing also add to these troubles. Such obstacles emphasize the importance of institutional changes, such as allocation of more funding to school health infrastructure and policy acknowledgement of the role that nurses play, as well as special training programs focused on adolescent health promotion.

The implications of findings are explicit both at the policy and practice level. There is evidence that the enhancement of the school nursing programs is associated with objective health and education achievements in adolescents. The governments and educational powers thus ought to focus on enhancing the presence of school nurses reducing nurse to student ratio as well as incorporating health promotion within school curriculums. The training of nurses in the field of adolescent mental health, reproductive health counseling, and digital health communication has the potential to be more effective. Additionally, policy planning that includes school nurses takes cognizance of the true nature of the needs of students, so that the strategy becomes real. There is strong evidence in the relation of school nursing as a strategic investment in the sphere of public health and education and a force that can shape healthier and more resilient generations.



CONCLUSION

This synthesis of the evidence demonstrates that school nurses are invaluable to the improvement of health and well-being among adolescents. At the confluence of education and healthcare, they offer convenient, trusted, and comprehensive care that meets an immediate need and long-term prevention services. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage when health behaviors considered at this point can influence life-long patterns and school nurses can be instrumental with regard to helping the adolescents to develop health behavior that is not only positive but also sustainable. School nurses protect the health of students through a wide variety of methods, including both dealing with chronic conditions and administering first aid, and coming up with health promotion campaigns on a mass scale. Not only do their contributions help with the health outcomes, but they also improve their school outcomes because healthier pupils can more easily attend classes, engage, and succeed in their school studies. Among the most debatable discoveries is a fundamental role of school nurses in the mental health and psychological assistance. Anxiety, depression, and stress levels are on the rise in adolescents, demonstrating the need to identify and resolve the problem at an early stage. Some warning signs can be detected by school nurses who can offer both advice and referrals. By being approachable and non-judgmental, they minimize stigma and they make the students discuss with them and seek their assistance. Also notable is the role that they play in sexual and reproductive health-education where they act as key providers of confidential advice and reliable information. School nurses can help themselves become more empowered to make responsible decisions by educating them on sensitive matters that might otherwise be ignored at school or home. As such, school nurses will have reduced chances of unwanted pregnancies as well as sexually transmitted diseases. The abovementioned functions illustrate the great extent of nursing contributions, which legitimize their role of promoting comprehensive well-being of youths.

The research also establishes that school nurses greatly influence lifestyle choices made by adolescents, especially the food consumed, exercise and substance abuse prevention. Nurses help establish healthy lifestyles by conducting programs on balanced diet, physical activity, and the harmful effects of tobacco and alcohol in order to prevent obesity and chronic disease. Their work in the provision of students with long term conditions such as asthma and diabetes is also critical because it enables such students to integrate fully in the academic and social life and ensures there is a continuity of care. In spite of these achievements, the success of school nurses is many times limited by systemic impediments. Lack of trained personnel, large nurse-student ratios and a shortage of resources will restrict them in offering full-service. Also the cultural sensitivities in subjects like mental health or reproductive health usually limits their reach so that much of their needs as adolescents go unaddressed. To overcome these problems, there must be a conscious investment in school health systems, professional preparation and development of supportive policies acknowledging and extending the role of school nurses. The position of school nurses concerning the achievement of teenage health is, in its turn, multiple and invaluable.

Their activities in schools mean that health promotion is not a non-essential activity in schools but an integrated activity in schools. School nurses can connect with schools and healthcare to bring about physical and academic success of adolescents by promoting mental health, reproductive health, healthy lifestyle choices and management of chronic illnesses. The empowerment of their role should be systemic: an increase in the workforce, the decrease of the nurse-student ratio, special training, and incorporation of health promotion into school policies. By investing into school nursing, the societies invest into the future producing healthier and more resilient generations that are better prepared. The literature clearly demonstrates that adolescent health promotion is impossible to conduct without the involvement of the school nurses as the key figures in this operation.

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