

Public policies for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America: a systematic review

Galo E. López-Gamboa* & Jesús E. Pinto-Sosa

Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mérida (Méjico)

KEYWORDS

PRISMA
Health education
Youth
Types of policies
Educational policy

ABSTRACT

Mental health refers to the balance of various areas of life, involving cognitive, behavioral, and biopsychosocial elements that impact individuals' quality of life and relationships. While mental health issues are present across all social and age groups, adolescence is the stage where these problems are most concentrated. Therefore, the objective of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review to identify and analyze public policies aimed at promoting mental health among adolescents in Ibero-America. The PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was employed to ensure transparent and adequate systematic reviews. A total of 18 texts meeting the established inclusion and quality criteria were selected. The findings highlight that most public mental health policy actions, proposals, and initiatives primarily focus on public and free healthcare services provided by national governments. A lack of involvement from other sectors, such as education, was identified, as well as the absence of a multi, interdisciplinary, or cross-sectoral approach to mental health issues. Moreover, legislation and regulatory frameworks have remained unchanged over the past decade, with minimal or no follow-up on the implementation of mental health policies in Ibero-America.

Políticas públicas para la promoción de la salud mental en adolescentes en Iberoamérica: una revisión sistemática

PALABRAS CLAVE

PRISMA
Educación sanitaria
Juventud
Tipo de políticas
Política educativa

RESUMEN

La salud mental refiere el equilibrio de diferentes áreas de la vida que implican elementos cognitivos, de conducta, biopsicosociales que impactan en la calidad de vida y las relaciones de los individuos. Si bien los problemas de salud mental están presentes en todos los grupos sociales y etarios, es la adolescencia en donde se concentran las principales afectaciones a la misma. Por ello, el objetivo del presente trabajo fue realizar una revisión sistemática de la literatura para identificar y analizar las políticas públicas en función de la promoción de la salud mental en los adolescentes de Iberoamérica. Se empleó la metodología PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) para la realización transparente y adecuada de revisiones sistemáticas. Se seleccionaron 18 textos que cumplieron con los criterios de inclusión y calidad establecidos. Los resultados enfatizan que la mayoría de las acciones, propuestas e iniciativas de políticas públicas de salud mental se centran principalmente en servicios de atención médica pública y gratuita que ofrecen los gobiernos nacionales. Se identificó una ausencia de involucramiento de otros sectores, como el educativo, y la falta de un enfoque multi, interdisciplinario o transversal sobre los problemas de salud mental. Además, la legislación y los marcos normativos se han mantenido constantes en los últimos diez años y existe muy poco o nulo seguimiento en la implementación de políticas de salud mental en Iberoamérica.

* Corresponding author: Galo E. López-Gamboa. Facultad de Educación, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, km 1. Carretera Motul-Tizimín, Cholul, 97305, Yucatán, México. galo.lopez@correo.uady.mx

Cite this article as: López-Gamboa, G. E., & Pinto-Sosa, J. E. (2025). Public policies for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America: a systematic review. *Psychology, Society & Education*, 17(1), 29-40. <https://doi.org/10.21071/psye.v17i1.17390>

Received: 1 August 2024. First review: 22 November 2024. Accepted: 24 January 2025.

Psychology, Society & Education is published under Creative Commons License ([CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)).

ISSN 1989-709X | © 2025. Psy, Soc & Educ.



One of the most affected areas by the challenges of the modern world is mental health, which impacts the overall health of individuals, as well as their performance and quality of life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022b), mental disorders affect a significant proportion of the global population and are one of the leading causes of disability, accounting for approximately 16% of years lost due to this condition (1 in 8 people report experiencing some form of mental health disorder). This highlights the magnitude of the issue and its repercussions across various domains.

The National Institute of Mental Health (2024) defines mental health as a state of well-being that encompasses cognitive, behavioral, emotional, psychological, and social dimensions, all of which affect an individual's quality of life. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, mental health extends beyond the absence of mental disorders, as it is a determinant for overall well-being and is fundamental for engaging in various activities such as feeling, thinking, learning, working, interacting with others, establishing meaningful relationships, and contributing to community development (UNICEF, 2024).

This conception has the need for a holistic perspective, which is associated with human well-being and determined by an understanding of social, emotional, and psychological factors that require analysis from an interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach (Rubio, 2020), as well as a consideration of the psychological well-being, subjective factors, and contextual influences (Muñoz et al., 2022). From this same perspective, García et al. (2020) define mental health as the ability to leverage personal resources to achieve optimal functioning within a sociocultural context. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that this capacity includes resilience in the face of adversity and full development throughout the various stages of life.

Mental health in adolescence

Although mental health affects all social groups, particular attention must be given to adolescents. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), "one in seven young people aged 10 to 19 suffers from a mental disorder, a type of disorder that accounts for 13% of the global burden of disease in this age group" (para. 1). Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders rank among the leading causes of illness and disability in adolescents, while suicide is currently the fourth leading cause of death in this demographic.

In recent years, the literature underscores the urgent need to take action to mitigate or eliminate the challenges adolescents face today. Castro-Jalca et al. (2023) recommend establishing early detection programs in schools and healthcare centers, implementing education and family- and community-support programs to address risk factors, and creating psychological and social support services. Similarly, Morales et al. (2023) argue that addressing adolescents' mental health during adaptive processes is an urgent priority, as it represents one of the principal public health challenges. They also emphasize the

importance of emotional education to provide adolescents with more effective coping tools.

The progressive deterioration of mental health during adolescence is increasingly evident (Lázaro, 2023), highlighting the critical role of prevention. In this regard, neglecting adolescent mental health disorders has long-term consequences, extending into adulthood, impairing physical and mental health, and restricting individuals' opportunities to lead fulfilling lives (WHO, 2021, para. 4). Therefore, the implementation of public policies that address and respond to this public health issue is imperative.

The review of public mental health policies for adolescents in Ibero-American countries: a critical necessity

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in diverse research production on mental health. In 2019 alone, 64,646 articles were published on the topic of mental health (WHO, 2022b). That year, the global proportion of research output in this field, relative to the total volume of research, amounted to 4.6%. However, with respect to the specific relationship between public policies and adolescent mental health in Ibero-America, significant informational gaps remain.

While interventions and mental health promotion for adolescents focus primarily on addressing the determinants of mental health, as well as preventing issues stemming from poor mental health and situations of crisis or risk, the WHO (2022a) emphasizes the imperative need for the design and implementation of public policies and laws that promote and protect adolescent mental health. This can be achieved through the establishment of both school-based and extracurricular guidelines for mental health promotion, educational guidance programs, initiatives aimed at improving the quality of community environments, spaces for personalized care, medical attention, worker training programs for societal support, ongoing legislative and regulatory frameworks, organizational strategies, among other measures.

The review of public mental health policies targeting adolescents in Ibero-American countries is essential due to the growing impact of psychological distress within this population, framed by the region's unique historical and socioeconomic context (Souza et al., 2021). This analysis is particularly relevant given that adolescent mental health not only affects their present well-being but also has significant implications for their future health (Santre, 2022).

However, the WHO has identified significant deficiencies in child and adolescent mental health policies and services, emphasizing an urgent need for developing evidence-based interventions and implementing continuous evaluations (Belfer, 2007).

In this context, social determinants –particularly poverty– exert a substantial influence on mental health, underscoring the need for a paradigm shift from a biomedical model to a biopsychosocial approach (Leiva-Peña et al., 2021). While progress has been achieved in mental health programs for developing

communities, challenges persist in terms of operational capacity, financing, and cultural adaptation (Leiva-Peña et al., 2021).

Public policies in this domain play an imperative role in key areas such as public health, disability, childhood, and social inclusion (Campodónico, 2022). However, their outcomes have been uneven. While many countries have taken steps to address historical issues in policy implementation, nearly one-third still lack national mental health policies. Additionally, significant disparities in funding and coverage persist between high- and low-income countries, highlighting the need for further efforts to ensure equitable and effective care (Alarcón y Aguirre-Gaxiola, 2000; Leiva-Peña et al., 2021).

The present study

The objective of the present study was to conduct a systematic review of the literature to identify and analyze public policies aimed at promoting mental health among adolescents in Ibero-America. To achieve this, a rigorous analysis was undertaken to address the following research question: What public policies have been implemented in Ibero-America over the past decade to promote and address mental health among adolescents? This endeavor seeks to contribute to future research initiatives and to update the current state of knowledge on this subject. The working hypothesis posited that there is a limited number of public policies focused on promoting adolescent mental health, particularly within the educational sector and through school-based programs.

Methodology

The methodology of systematic review, as described by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2020), constitutes an academic approach that provides a current overview of the existing knowledge and understanding of a specific subject, as well as the theoretical and methodological contributions surrounding the concept or term in question. According to these authors, through the establishment of delimitation criteria for the topic of interest, it is possible to refine data and obtain precise information that contributes to the generation of new knowledge.

This methodology was chosen because it offers an updated and comprehensive overview of the state of knowledge on a particular subject, providing findings based on the collection of recently developed insights into the phenomenon. This process involves following a series of precise methodological steps (Jesón et al., 2012). Subsequently, to present an accurate descrip-

tion of the collected data, a quantitative method was employed for the representation, counting, and analysis of data and results.

Procedure

The PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was selected as the framework for this study. This approach encompasses a structured set of processes designed to guide researchers in conducting systematic reviews transparently and rigorously. The methodology entails several key stages, including the criteria for document selection, identification of information sources, development of search strategies, selection process for entries, data collection, assessment of information quality, synthesis of data, and the drafting and discussion of the final report (Equator Network, 2020).

Phase 1. Data inclusion and exclusion criteria

Initially, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to identify a broad spectrum of academic texts relevant to the specific focus of this research. The criteria for this study were as follows: (1) publications from 2013 to 2023; (2) research articles, technical reports, books, and book chapters; (3) articles published in Spanish, English, or Portuguese; (4) articles in indexed journals containing the established keywords; (5) explicit mention of the term “public policy” associated with “mental health”; (6) a focus on adolescent populations (ages 10 to 19); and (7) studies conducted in Ibero-America (including Spain and Portugal). The documents selected for systematic review were required to be scientific, academic, and reliable.

The decision to analyze publications from the past decade was driven by the aim to explore a broad temporal range, enabling the identification of the evolution and emergence of public policies within the study’s scope. Additionally, there was a specific interest in examining findings related to Ibero-American countries to highlight progress and recognize the state of public policies in nations sharing similar cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts, as well as common concerns and challenges.

Phase 2: Information sources and search strategy

An initial exploratory phase was conducted to investigate academic search engines and databases relevant to the topic of public policies for promoting mental health among adolescents in Ibero-America. Various search commands were utilized to

Table 1

Keywords, Boolean operators and search engines that were used for this study

Keywords	Search Engines
Public Politics, Mental Health, Depression, Stress, Adolescence	(Public Politics AND Mental Health) OR (Depression OR Stress) AND (Adolescence OR Teenager)
Política pública, Salud Mental, Depresión, Estrés, Adolescente	(Política pública Y Salud Mental) O (Depresión o Estrés) Y (Adolescente o Adolescentes)

support the retrieval of documents and academic texts aligned with the established inclusion criteria. These commands are detailed in Table 1.

The following search engines were consulted: SciELO, Redalyc, EBSCO, Dialnet, Eric, and Google Scholar. Additionally, the databases JSTOR and Springer were accessed; however, no articles meeting the inclusion criteria were identified within these platforms.

Phase 3: Information refinement

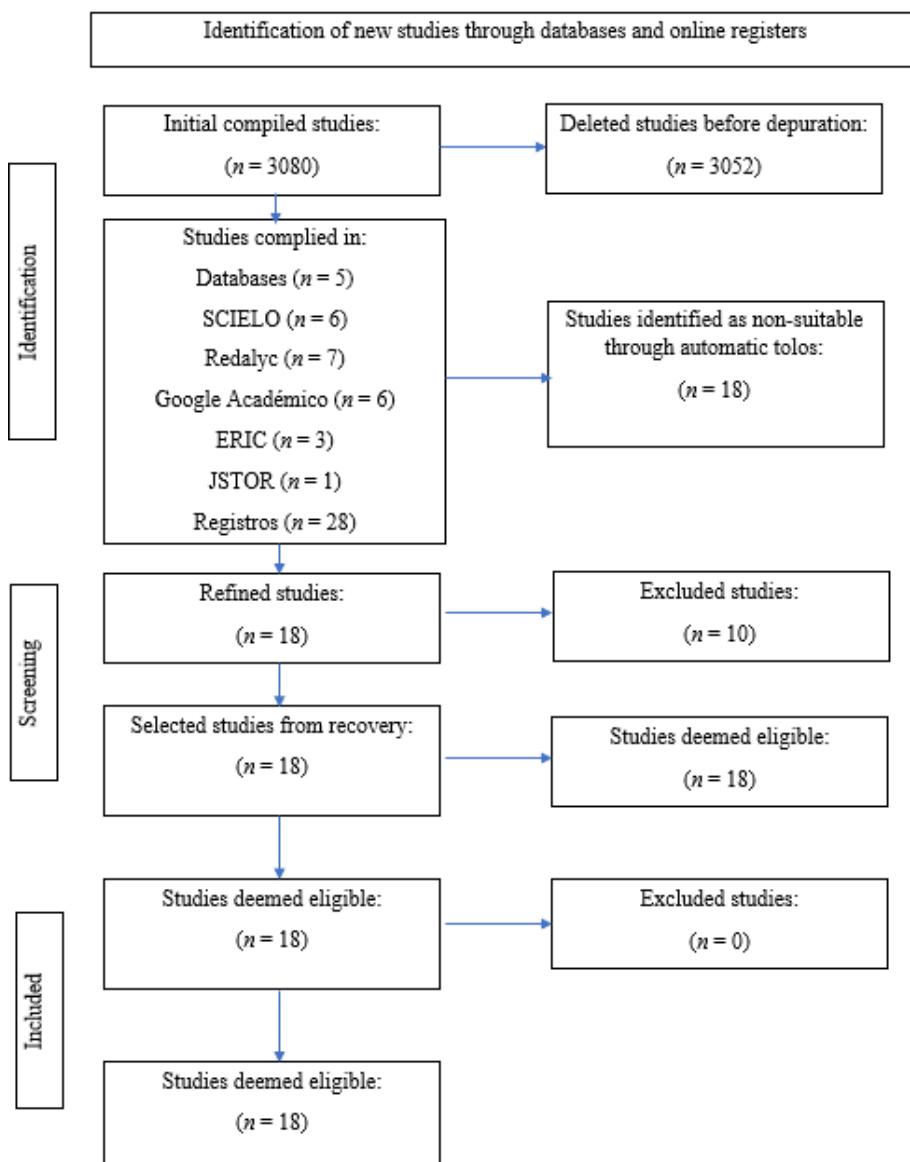
Following the use of search engines with the keywords “educational policy” and “mental health”, the initial exploration identified a total of 3,080 documents, including scientific and academic articles, opinions, government documents, reports, blogs, development plans, news articles, and more. However,

after an initial evaluation, 3,052 documents were excluded for failing to meet the established quality criteria. From the remaining 28 documents, titles, abstracts, keywords, length, and relevant information related to the purpose of the analysis were reviewed to determine their alignment with the primary objectives of the systematic review.

In this context, Newman and Gough assert that studies identified during the initial stages of a search must undergo a validation process to ensure they meet the necessary quality criteria for inclusion (as cited in Zawacki-Richter, 2020, p. 9). This process constitutes the cornerstone of systematic reviews following the PRISMA methodology, where inclusion criteria help establish an initial corpus of documents, but the rigorous assessment of quality ultimately determines their incorporation into the analysis.

Figure 1

Flowchart of the stages of the systematic review process applied



Subsequently, a second refinement phase was conducted through a more detailed evaluation of the quality of the selected publications. This process involved analyzing the content, the structure of their sections, general and specific objectives, methodologies, results, and conclusions. Additionally, the relevance of each document was assessed in relation to the main intent of the systematic review.

Finally, as a definitive criterion for inclusion, it was considered that the documents should refer specifically to information from the Ibero-American region. Although some texts met quality standards, they dealt with contexts from other regions of the world, such as Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, or Asian countries, so they were excluded. In this way, considering the initial criteria, which referred specifically to Ibero-America as well as reviewing each document in detail to ensure its quality, 10 additional texts were eliminated, leaving a total of 18 documents selected for data extraction and synthesis. This process is detailed graphically in Figure 1.

Phase 4: Selection of articles and report

Finally, after the documents that met the established inclusion criteria were finalized, the preliminary examination and the content quality assessment were carried out, they were subjected to an extraction and synthesis of results based on aspects such as the years and geographic location of the publications, and a methodological analysis on the educational level, data collection techniques, and a breakdown of the main public policies regarding the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America. In this sense, an analysis of the areas of mental health care was carried out.

Results

The results of the systematic review process are presented below; first, the data related to the general characteristics of

the documents were analyzed. Most of the network entries are research articles ($n = 12$, a 66.66%), then systemic reviews were found ($n = 4$, a 22.22%) and, lastly, a book chapter and a report, which represented 5.55% respectively. In relation to the year of publication, 2021 registered the highest presence in the literature, with 4 documents (22.22%) (See Figure 2).

As can be seen in Figure 3, the places of origin of the publications were analyzed, where it is highlighted, that Chile was the country with the most entries ($n = 7$, a 38.88%) of the 18 total.

According to the methodological aspects of the resulting articles, it can be observed that quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods were used. However, there were entries without methodology, that is, they were texts that reported the results obtained or the policies and programs implemented but without indicating any type of evaluation or analysis from the data collection. It should be noted that the majority of documents analyzed used a qualitative method ($n = 6$, a 33.33%) of the total (see Figure 4).

In the analysis of public policies for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America as described in the different texts compiled, a variety of policy proposals for addressing the issue were found. In this sense, it was first necessary to establish what type of policy is being referred to. One of the best-known typologies is the one proposed by Theodore J. Lowi, a specialist in government and public policy, which is taken up by Aguilar-Villanueva (2000). This typology identifies four main types of public policies. First, the regulatory policy, which is based on the promulgation or decree of norms that limit individual freedoms, either by obliging or prohibiting certain actions. Second, the distributive policy, through which the State grants specific benefits to individuals or particular groups of the community without making distinctions. Third, the redistributive policy, which establishes criteria for assigning benefits to classes of cases or subjects, which generates intense conflicts due to opposing interests in sensitive issues. Finally, constituent

Figure 2

Number of selected articles and year of publication

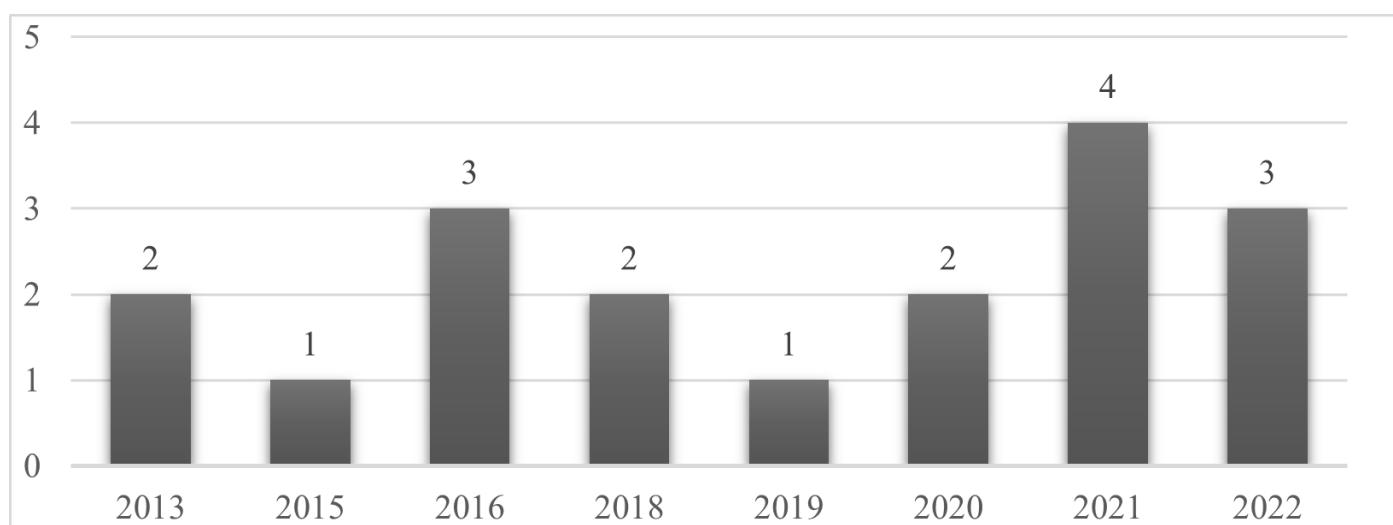
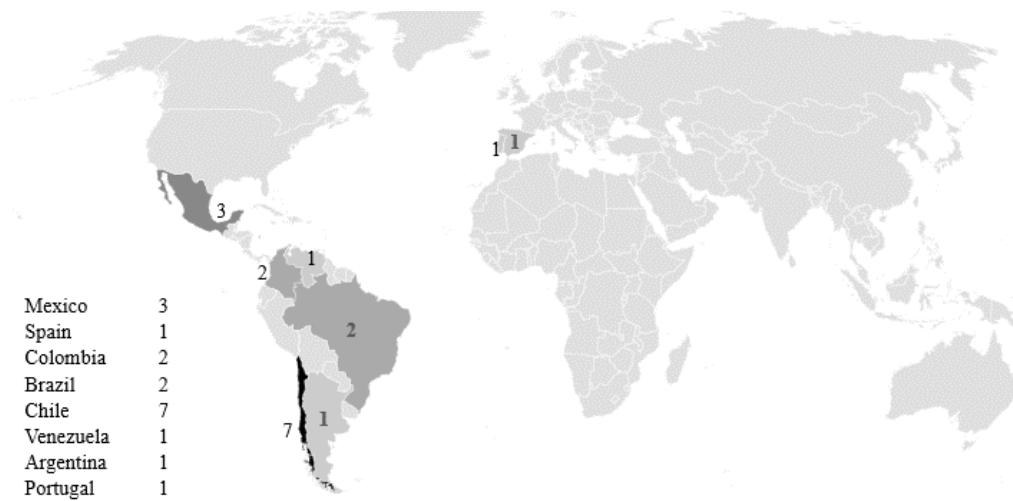
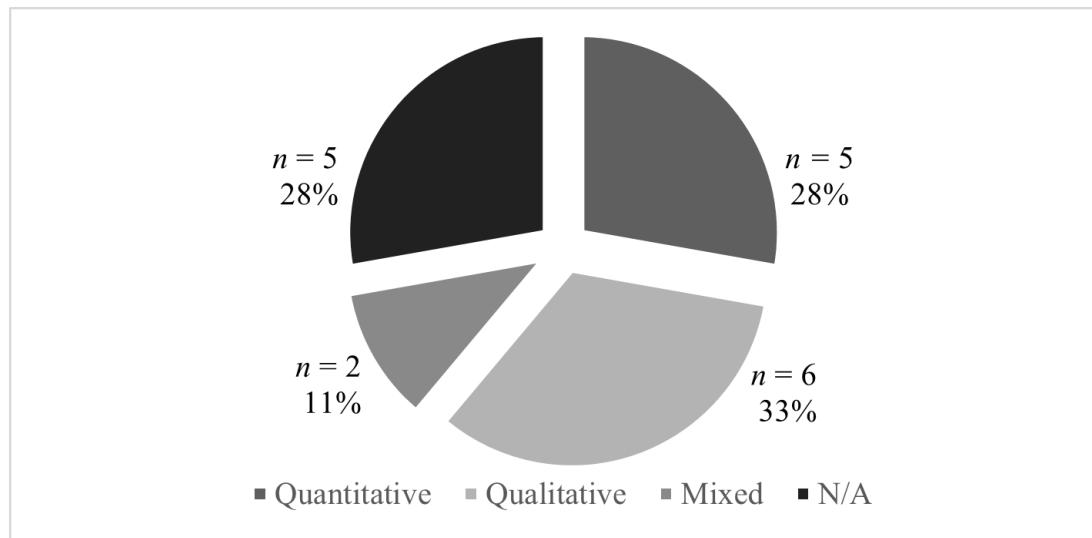


Figure 3*Number of items selected according to country of origin***Figure 4***Distribution of articles based on the applied methodology*

politics encompasses public actions that define norms related to power, such as constitutional reforms, special laws, or the creation of organizations.

Based on this classification, Table 2 presents the texts analyzed, indicating, if applicable, the type of policy referred to and the sector to which it is directed. The sectors usually declared in national development plans were considered, finding only works on health ($n = 12$, a 54%), economy ($n = 4$, a 18%), and education and culture ($n = 6$, a 27%). These classifications allow a particular view of the analysis, not exhaustive but exploratory and illustrative in nature regarding the policies. This analysis served as a first exercise to analyze the type of public policy and the sector on which it is emphasized, which allows exploring advances and absences in the definition of said policies and responding to the working hypothesis.

A variety of proposals, active and current projects, actions, and initiatives aimed at promoting and preventing mental health are identified (see Table 2). In this sense, the involvement of various areas of public policy is clear, which highlights the importance of addressing mental health.

In the analysis of the six public policies identified in the education sector, it is striking that five of them are from the last five years, that is, from 2019 to 2023, which shows the increase in public policies in this sector. In addition, only the study by Leiva et al (2021) and Núñez (2019) makes explicit reference to the education sector, as it points out promotional and preventive interventions for mental health in school contexts and educational guidance programs based on mental health, as well as life skills programs by the education sector. From the educational sector, the mentions of the National Pro-

Table 2*Core elements, type and sector of public policies for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America*

Source	Central elements of the text	Type of policy and country of origin	Sector to which the policy is directed
Berenzon et al (2013) <i>Mexico</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of national budgets allocated to mental health and psychiatric hospitals Medical services for health care and mental disorders Distribution of human resources for mental health: psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers Health education and links with civil associations 	Distributive	Health Economy
López & Herrera (2013) <i>Spain</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and free mental health services for children and teenagers 	Distributive	Health
Leiva et al (2015) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotional and preventive interventions for mental health in school contexts Implementation of educational guidance programs based on the promotion of mental health 	Distributive	Education
Patias et al (2016) <i>Brazil</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in actions to prevent violence against adolescents Acceleration of the fight against poverty, socioeconomic disparities, gender discrimination, etc. and to face the challenges of their daily lives National Programs for Adolescent Health National Policy for Comprehensive Health Care for Adolescents and Young People 	Distributive	Education
Henao et al (2016) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current regulatory provisions such as agreements, resolutions and laws that support the content of public policies on mental health Policies in administrative mechanisms such as programs, plans and projects on mental health 	Normative	Health
Vicente et al (2016) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government agencies empowered to prevent and rehabilitate drug and alcohol use Public health insurance for mental health and neuropsychiatric care 	Redistributive	Health
Albuquerque (2018) <i>Portugal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of institutions and organizations for mental health Prioritizing mental health care for children and adolescents Mental health prevention and promotion programs Epidemiological registry of pathologies derived from mental health presented in children and adolescents for the planning of specialized medical services Evaluation systems, indicators and meta-evaluations for services and actions provided for mental health 	Distributive	Health
Barcala (2018) <i>Argentina</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal legislation and current evaluation protocols applied to regulatory frameworks and legislative systems for the protection of human rights and mental health Specialized health services, psychiatric care and hospitalizations Proposals for collective therapeutic projects accessible to children and adolescents. 	Normative	Health
Núñez (2019) <i>Colombia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life skills program by the education sector 	Distributive	Education
Cuenca et al (2020) <i>Venezuela</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention and prevention protocols for risky behaviors Care, diagnosis and clinical evaluation for mental health. 	Distributive	Health

Tabla 2 (continued)

Source	Central elements of the text	Type of policy and country of origin	Sector to which the policy is directed
Morales (2020) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public policies on the protection of the human rights of girls, boys and adolescents • Attention to the human rights of adolescents in situations of vulnerability and marginalization 	Redistributive	Education
Baeza & Barrera (2021) <i>Mexico</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuals, protocols and processes for the protection of human rights • Legislation on health, medical services and general health • Specialized medical care and mental health clinics 	Normative	Health
Leiva-Peña et al (2021) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of economic resources to the realization of congresses, organizations and actions for the prevention of addictions and substance use, and promotion of mental health • Plans and programs aimed at the promotion of mental health 	Distributive	Economy Health
Moreira de Freitas et al (2021) <i>Brazil</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public policy regarding the promotion of mental health aimed at the interests of children and adolescents based on the appropriate use of social networks • Timely, adequate and evaluated training of specialized medical personnel 	Distributive	Health
Fernández et al (2021) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize mental health care in vulnerable adolescent populations • Medical and clinical care services, timely and appropriate diagnosis and treatment 	Redistributive	Health
Campodónico (2022) <i>Mexico</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to socio-affective problems of children and adolescents • Protection of human rights of children and adolescents, with a post-pandemic approach • Identification and attention to gender inequality problems • Care for early childhood as a condition for the general well-being of adolescents 	Distributive	Education
Rengifo et al (2022) <i>Colombia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans and programs for the protection and prevention of mental health of children and adolescents • Legislation and regulatory frameworks on human rights protection and mental health • Proposal for the participation of youth and children in citizen decision-making • Actions for promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation in the field of mental health 	Redistributive	Education
Defensoría de la Niñez (2022) <i>Chile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of economic resources and federal budgets established for the promotion of mental health • Establishment of civil and informal support networks for the promotion of mental health • Evaluation of results and meta-evaluation of services and policy for mental health 	Normative	Health Economy

gram for Adolescent Health and the National Policy for Comprehensive Health Care for Adolescents and Young People (Patias, et al, 2016), Protocols for intervention and prevention of risk behaviors (Cuenca, et al, 2020), Organizations and institutions for the protection of the integrity of minors and adolescents (Barcala, 2018), and the Proposal for the participation of youth and children in citizen decision-making (Defensoría de la Niñez, 2022), among others, stand out.

Regarding the type of policy, it was found that 56% fall on being distributive ($n = 10$), followed by regulations ($n = 4$, a 23%) and redistributive ($n = 4$, a 23%) and nonconstituent. From the educational sector, it was found that the policies are mainly distributive ($n = 4$, a 67%).

Based on the above, a more specific analysis was carried out to identify the actions and proposals with greater specificity. From this, they were sub grouped into eight areas, which are

Table 3*Actions and proposals of public policies identified for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America*

Authors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Berenzon et al. (2013)	X	X	X	X				
López & Herrera (2013)		X						
Leiva et al. (2015)				X				
Patias et al. (2016)					X			
Henao et al. (2016).						X		
Vicente et al. (2016).		X					X	
Albuquerque (2018)		X				X	X	
Barcala (2018)		X				X	X	
Núñez (2019)				X				
Cuenca et al. (2020).		X				X		
Morales (2020)					X	X		
Baeza & Barrera (2021)		X				X		
Leiva et al. (2021)	X	X						
Moreira de Freitas et al. (2021)						X		
Fernández et al. (2021)	X		X				X	
Campodónico (2022)		X				X		
Rengifo et al. (2022)					X			
Defensoría de la Niñez (2022)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X

Note. 1 = Allocation of economic resources; 2 = Health services, medical care, clinic, and psychiatry; 3 = Training of human resources; 4 = Educational policies; 5 = Well-being and eradication of inequality; 6 = Legislation and regulatory frameworks; 7 = Institutions and specialized organizations; 8 = Citizen participation.

presented in Table 3. These subareas arose from the public policies identified in the documents. The categories emerged from this analysis. The table shows which subareas correspond to the policies found.

Table 3 provides information on the strategies, initiatives and actions identified in public policy aimed at promoting mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America. It was found that the Office of the Ombudsman for Children (2022) has a greater presence of proposals within its content related to the eight established categories, with seven of these being included. From the analysis of the 18 documents, the following findings regarding these initiatives stand out. On average, two types of actions, proposals or initiatives were identified, except for the Office of the Ombudsman for Children (2022). A total of 61% of the actions and proposals (11 of 18) are oriented towards health services, medical care, clinics, and psychiatry. In the last 10 years, the actions and initiatives that have remained consist mainly of health services. A total of 50% of the initiatives and actions (9 out of 18) are related to legislation and regulatory frameworks, with this number remaining constant until 2019 and after that date.

On the other hand, the areas that have received less attention are citizen participation, with only one initiative (5%), and training and human resources, with two initiatives (10%). Regarding the area of well-being and eradication of inequality, three initiatives were found (16%), one by Morales (2020) and two more recent ones by Rengifo et al. (2022) and the Ombudsman for Children. In addition, five initiatives (28%) on education

nal policies were identified, of which three date back to 2019, corresponding to Berenzon et al. (2013), Patias et al. (2016), and Núñez (2019), while the most recent ones come from Leiva et al. (2021) and the Children's Ombudsman (2022).

Discussion

The results emphasize that, as mentioned in the study by Henao et al. (2016), most of the actions, proposals, and public policy initiatives on the promotion of mental health focus more on medical and clinical care, including diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders, rather than on preventive or promotional measures and from a multi and interdisciplinary approach to the problem of mental health; in which actions related to medical services and regulatory frameworks predominate, leaving behind aspects such as citizen participation and training of human resources, which are essential for a preventive and sustainable approach.

A second sector that has remained the same in the last 10 years has been legislation and regulatory frameworks, through the creation, application, and evaluation of laws, protocols, jurisdictions, among other formats for the protection of rights based on the promotion of mental health.

Another relevant finding was the inclusion of public policy actions to prioritize adequate access for girls, boys, adolescents, and youth to the different services and citizen rights for the formation of their well-being and optimal human development, in accordance with global plans and agreements, such as the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Organization (UN, 2015).

In terms of educational policies, it was found that little is stated or identified about the areas of action such as schools, colleges, educational centers, educational institutions or organizations; or the actors (e.g., teachers, parents, communities, directors). In this sense, only 6 (33%) of the 18 documents explicitly identified the presence of the educational sector.

Based on the above, it is possible to indicate that the declared research hypothesis is accepted, that is, that there are fewer public policies in favor of promoting mental health aimed at adolescents in the educational sector and in school programs. This is because, although some public policies related to the promotion of mental health in the educational field have been identified, these are limited compared to the predominance of policies focused on medical and clinical care. Although some initiatives have been identified, such as prevention in school contexts, life skills programs and strategies to cope with daily life, these actions are not sufficient to comprehensively address the needs of adolescents. In addition, a weak preventive approach is observed, since fundamental elements such as citizen participation and the training of human resources, essential to strengthen prevention and sustainability of policies, have been relegated.

For its part, the predominant emphasis on regulatory frameworks and medical services reflects a political design more focused on guaranteeing diagnoses and treatments than on promoting preventive actions within the educational sector. This highlights the need for a more balanced approach that integrates educational policies with effective and sustainable preventive measures for the promotion of mental health in adolescents. Given this finding, as pointed out by Leiva-Peña et al. (2021), a change of course is necessary that directs efforts in a balanced way from the biomedical model to a biopsychosocial approach. Studies such as that of Pautassi (2012) highlight the need to adopt comprehensive approaches that address the interdependence between home salary conditions and the situations of children and adolescents at home. The effective implementation of these policies continues to face significant challenges, with a gap between theory and practice evident (Minetto & Weyh, 2019), which is why there is a need to strengthen universal social policies and reform educational policies to guarantee the rights to education and care of children and adolescents (Pautassi, 2012).

It will be necessary to return to the theoretical proposal of Caplan (1964) as well as the studies of Barry et al. (2015), which indicate that although prevention rests on three levels: primary (preventing the onset of diseases), secondary (detecting and treating problems at early stages), and tertiary (managing the consequences of existing diseases), the review shows that policies in Ibero-America are more aligned with secondary and tertiary prevention, while primary prevention receives little attention. This limits the ability to prevent mental health problems from arising or worsening.

In addition, no documents or references were found that account for the continuity, implementation, and evaluation of

these policies over the years. At least three absences were very evident: citizen participation, training and human resources, and well-being and eradication of inequality. These do not seem to be explicitly specified at the level of public policy. These gaps reflect red flags in the definition and integration of public policies in mental health because it gives a sign of a conservative, atomistic, and fragmented approach to how to address these problems in the countries; in contrast to the need for an interdisciplinary, intercultural, holistic, and integral vision between initiatives and actions; as well as the involvement of the largest number of institutions, organizations and actors in society.

Likewise, the findings reported public policies with different actions and initiatives for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America. On the one hand, most are dedicated to addressing situations or cases of the youth population that are corrective, not preventive, and on the other hand, most are of a distributive nature ($n = 10, 56\%$), recognizing the need for a greater number of redistributive policies and regulations oriented toward the needs and granting of benefits to minority groups, with specific characteristics and from a comprehensive approach. Evidence of this is that most of these policies do not include actions for groups at risk or vulnerable and, consequently, even those who might require more precise support services continue to be attended to equally.

Particular attention was drawn to the few studies/reports located to carry out this systematic review (only 18), on public policies on mental health for adolescents in the last decade. Pending further investigation into what is attributed to it, as it is a priority issue of social interest, the publication of this type of information should be mandatory. Therefore, more published, relevant and quality research is needed (based on the criteria for carrying out the systematic review) on what is happening in terms of public policy on adolescent mental health.

Limitations and future lines of research

The analysis was based on documents that met the inclusion criteria from a set of academic search engines. From this delimitation, it will be necessary to understand the results presented. It will be necessary to add other types of documents such as: national development plans, national diagnosis on mental health, evaluation of public policies, among others. In general, these documents are kept in government institutions and there is no open access policy for their review. Another limitation was that the analysis of the characteristics of the legislation of the different Ibero-American countries was not included, which undoubtedly is guiding for the understanding not only of public policy but of the concepts themselves such as health, mental health, quality of life, preventive care, among others; and to deepen the discussion on the topic of interest addressed by this systematic review.

As future lines, an in-depth analysis by country, axes, scope, and results would be important, from different perspectives and theoretical-methodological approaches as well as in relation to the impact, continuity, and scope of the policies.

Conclusions

The public policy landscape in Ibero-America requires greater integration of interdisciplinary and preventive approaches, informed by solid theories and empirical evidence. The expansion of educational programs and the design of preventive strategies not only have the potential to reduce mental disorders in the long term, but also to build a sustainable and equitable mental health model for future generations. The role of the school, supported by public policy and its connection with prevention and mental health care from the perspective of the overall well-being of the person, will be key pieces for the construction of a more just, more humane and more integrated society.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Methodology: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Software: G.L.G.
 Validation: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Formal analysis: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Investigation: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Resources: G.L.G.
 Data curation: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Visualization: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Supervision: G.L.G.
 Project administration: G.L.G., J.P.S.
 Funding acquisition: G.L.G.
 Writing – Original draft: G.L.G.
 Writing – Review & editing: G.L.G., J.P.S.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Acknowledgements

Our gratitude to the technical team: Génesis Cohuo Pech, Luis Morales Zafra, Moisés Ayala Cáceres, and Guillermo Contreras.

Declaration of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as the analyses conducted do not derive from new datasets.

References

- Aguilar Villanueva, L. (2000). *El estudio de las políticas públicas* (3^a ed.). Porrúa.
- Alarcón, R. D., & Aguilar-Gaxiola, S. A. (2000). Mental health policy developments in Latin America. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 78(4), 483-490.
- Albuquerque, C. (2018). Portugal a la vanguardia de la promoción de la salud mental de niños y adolescentes. *Acta Paulista de Enfermagem*, 31(5). <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0194201800064>
- Baeza, A., & Barrera, M. (2021). La salud mental como derecho humano en Quintana Roo, México: Análisis desde la disciplina de la política pública. *Revista Interdisciplinaria*, 38(3), 257-274. <https://doi.org/10.16888/interd.2021.38.3.15>
- Barcala, A. (2018). Niñez e institucionalización psiquiátrica: Violencias en contextos de encierro. En P. Vonmmaro, A. Barcala y L. Rangel (Eds.), *Derechos y políticas en infancias y juventudes: Diversidades, prácticas y perspectivas* (pp. 87-116). CLACSO. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvn5tzq9.6>
- Barreira, I. (2020). Una revisión sistemática sobre efectividad en psicoterapias breves y focalizadas. *Perspectivas Metodológicas*, 20, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.18294/pm.2020.3235>
- Barry, M. M., Clarke, A. M., & Petersen, I. (2015). Promotion of mental health and prevention of mental disorders: priorities for implementation. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 21(7), 503-511. <https://doi.org/10.26719/2015.21.7.503>
- Belfer, M. L. (2007). Critical review of world policies for mental healthcare for children and adolescents. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 20(4), 349-352. <https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0b013e3281bc0cf4>
- Berenzon, G. S., Saavedra, S. N., Medina-Mora, I., Aparicio, B., & Galván, R. (2013). Evaluación del sistema de salud mental en México: ¿Hacia dónde encaminar la atención? *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública*, 33(4), 252-258.
- Campodónico, N. (2022). Una revisión sistemática sobre la salud mental y las problemáticas actuales en la infancia y la adolescencia. *Revista Perspectivas en Psicología*, 19(2), 44-63.
- Caplan, G. (1964). *Principles of preventive psychiatry*. Basic Books.
- Castro-Jalca, A. D., Matute-Uloa, G. H., Morales-Pin, N. J., & Zambrano-Arauz, P. E. (2023). Problemas emergentes de salud mental en adolescentes ecuatorianos: Una revisión bibliográfica. *Polo del Conocimiento: Revista Científico-Profesional*, 8(9), 976-1020. <https://doi.org/10.23857/pc.v8i9.6064>
- Cuenca, N., Robladillo, L., Meneses, M., & Suyo-Vega, J. (2020). Salud mental en adolescentes universitarios Latinoamericanos: Revisión sistemática. *Revista Archivos Venezolanos de Farmacología y Terapéutica*, 39(6), 689-698. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4403731>
- Defensoría de la Niñez. (2022). *Estudio de políticas públicas relacionadas con la salud mental de niños, niñas y adolescentes*. Instituto de Asuntos Públicos y Escuela de Salud Pública de la Universidad de Chile.
- Equator Network. (2020). *The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews*.
- Fernández, O., Irrázaval, M., Ortega, B., Carrasco, P., Martínez, P., Rojas, G., & Mundt, A. (2021). Salud mental primaria para niños, niñas y adolescentes institucionalizados: Perspectiva de equipos de salud. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud*, 19(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.11600/rlecsnj.19.2.4175>
- Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia (UNICEF). (2024). *La salud mental en pocas palabras. Conozca los términos y condiciones más comunes de la salud mental y cómo apoyar el bienestar de su familia*. <https://www.unicef.org/lac/crianza/seguridad-protección/salud-mental-pocas-palabras>
- García, D., Hernández-Lalinde, J., Espinosa-Castro, J., & Soler, M. (2020). Salud mental en la adolescencia montevideana: Una

- mirada desde el bienestar psicológico. *Archivos Venezolanos de Farmacología y Terapéutica*, 39(2), 182-190. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4068398>
- Henao, S., Quintero, S., Echeverri, J., Hernández, J., Rivera, E., & López, S. (2016). Políticas públicas vigentes de salud mental en Suramérica: Un estado del arte. *Revista Acta Scientae*, 34(2), 184-192. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.rfnsp.v34n2a07>
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (2023, 6 de julio). *Estadísticas a propósito del Día Mundial de la Población: Datos nacionales* (Comunicado de prensa núm. 395/23).
- Jesson, J., Matheson, L., & Lacey, F. (2012). *Doing your literature review: Traditional and systematic techniques*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Lázaro García, L. (2023). Retos y oportunidades para la salud mental en la infancia y la adolescencia en el siglo XXI. *Revista de Psiquiatría Infanto-Juvenil*, 40(3), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.31766/revpsij.v40n3a1>
- Leiva-Peña, V., Rubí-González, P., & Vicente-Parada, B. (2021). Determinantes sociales de la salud mental: Políticas públicas desde el modelo biopsicosocial en países latinoamericanos. *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública*, 45, Article 158. <https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2021.158>
- Leiva, L., George, M., Squicciarini, A., Simonsohn, A., & Guzmán, J., (2015). Intervención preventiva de salud mental escolar en adolescentes: Desafíos para un programa público en comunidades educativas. *Revista Universitas Psychologia*, 14(4), 1285-1298. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy14-4.ipsm>
- López, P., & Herrera, S. (2013). Infancia y salud mental pública en España: Siglo XX y actualidad. *Revista Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría*, 33(117), 95-111. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4321/S0211-57352013000100007>
- Minetto, T. M., & Weyh, C. B. (2019). Educación y políticas públicas para la protección del niño y del adolescente en el contexto brasileño. *Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudios em Educação*, 14(4), 2123-2140. <https://doi.org/10.21723/riaee.v14i4.9920>
- Morales Rodríguez, M., Barajas, D. D., y Solís, A. (2023). Impacto de afectividad y habilidades resilientes en la salud mental de adolescentes: Fin del confinamiento. *Religación: Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, 8(36), Article 2301042. <https://doi.org/10.46652/rgn.v8i36.1042>
- Morales, C. (2020). Salud mental de los niños, niñas y adolescentes en situación de confinamiento. *Revista Anales*, 7(17), 304-318. <https://doi.org/10.5354/0717-8883.2020.58931>
- Moreira de Freitas, R. J., Carvalho, T. N., Lopes de Melo, J. A., Do Vale, J., De Oliveira, K. C., & Fontes, F. S. (2021). Percepciones de los adolescentes sobre el uso de las redes sociales y su influencia en la salud mental. *Enfermería Global: Revista Electrónica Trimestral de Enfermería*, 20(4), 324-364. <https://doi.org/10.6018/eglobal.462631>
- Muñoz Arroyave, C. O., Cardona Arango, D., Restrepo-Ochoa, D. A., y Calvo, A. C. (2022). Salud mental positiva: Entre el bienestar y el desarrollo de capacidades. *CES Psicología*, 15(2), 151-168. <https://doi.org/10.21615/cesp.5275>
- National Institute of Mental Health. (2024). *Caring for your mental health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>
- Núñez, R. M. (2019). Promoción de la salud mental infanto-adolescente. Aprendizajes, percepciones y desafíos. *Revista Electrónica de Trabajo Social, Universidad de Concepción (Chile)*, 19, 77-86.
- Patias, N. D., Silva, D. G., & Dell'Aglio, D. D. (2016). Exposição de adolescentes à violência em diferentes contextos: Relações com a saúde mental. *Temas em Psicología*, 24(1), 205-218. <https://doi.org/10.9788/TP2016.1-14>
- Pautassi, L. C. (2012). Educación, cuidado y derechos: Propuestas de políticas públicas. *SER Social*, 13(29), 10-34. https://doi.org/10.26512/SER_SOCIAL.V13I29.12664
- Rengifo, J. R., Fenton, S. J., Pinilla, M., Aranguren, J. P., Jackson, P., Carranza, F., Weberg, S., & Casas, G. (2022). Sistema de salud mental para niños, niñas, adolescentes y jóvenes en un país de conflicto: El caso de Colombia. En *V Congreso Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Ciencias Sociales: Democracia, justicia e igualdad* (pp. 411-432). FLACSO.
- Rubio León, D. C. (2020). Dimensiones para abordar la salud mental en el contexto de la migración: Revisión de literatura científica entre 2016 y 2019. *Revista Gerencia y Políticas de Salud*, 19, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.rgps19.dasm>
- Santre, S. (2022). Mental health promotion in adolescents. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 18(2), 122-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09731342221120709>
- Souza, T. T., De Almeida, A. C., Fernandes, A. D. S. A., & Cid, M. F. B. (2021). Promoção em saúde mental de adolescentes em países da América Latina: Uma revisão integrativa da literatura. *Revista Ciência & Saúde Coletiva da Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva*, 26(7), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232021267.07242021>
- United Nations (UN). (2015). *La Asamblea General adopta la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible*. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/2015/09/la-asamblea-general-adopta-la-agenda-2030-para-el-desarrollo-sostenible/>
- Vicente, B., Saldivia, S. & Pihán, R. (2016). Prevalencias y brechas hoy; salud mental mañana. *Revista Acta Bioethica*, 22(1), 51-61. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S1726-569X2016000100006>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). *Salud mental del adolescente*. https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw9vqyBhCKARIsAIIcLMFpkpOmPTxHTJ6potv8HAAj85CLV_yi10UnZAX11KoXT7rv-sHIPvg_aAttcEALw_wcb
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022a). *Salud mental: fortalecer nuestra respuesta*. https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw9vqyBhCKARIsAIIcLMFpkpOmPTxHTJ6potv8HAAj85CLV_yi10UnZAX11KoXT7rv-sHIPvg_aAttcEALw_wcb
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022b). *Mental disorders*. <https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>
- Zawacki-Richter, O., Kerres, M., Bedenlier, S., Bond, M., & Buntins, K. (Eds.). (2020). *Systematic reviews in educational research: methodology, perspectives, and application*. Springer.

**Available in:**

<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=775582300004>

How to cite

Complete issue

More information about this article

Journal's webpage in redalyc.org

Scientific Information System Redalyc
Diamond Open Access scientific journal network
Non-commercial open infrastructure owned by academia

Galo E. López-Gamboa, Jesús E. Pinto-Sosa

Public policies for the promotion of mental health in adolescents in Ibero-America: a systematic review
Políticas públicas para la promoción de la salud mental en adolescentes en Iberoamérica: una revisión sistemática

Psychology, Society & Education

vol. 17, no. 1, p. 29 - 40, 2025

Universidad de Córdoba,

ISSN: 2171-2085

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21071/psye.v17i1.17390>