

Short Communication

# An Attempt to Explain Why There Are No Psychology Courses in the School Curricula of Nearly All Countries Worldwide

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At the outset, the authors propose two selected methods of estimating the overall social and psychological condition of society. One of the tools suggested is the objective ranking compiled by the World Justice Project<sup>[1]</sup>.

According to the authors, a preliminary review and analysis of the current geopolitical situation and the manifestations of people's present mental state lead to the conclusion that a reasonable and justified way to counteract adverse social processes would be to disseminate knowledge derived from scientific and intellectual inquiries in psychology.

However, the authors then review available data, which indicate that only a handful of countries worldwide include "psychology" as a compulsory subject in their school curricula.

This prompts the authors to reflect on why this state of affairs exists and then to design a survey study.

The study's aim would be to estimate how a selected group of young individuals — who recently completed their secondary education — perceive the suggested reasons behind the absence of psychology instruction in schools.

A discussion of the findings of this survey, along with several other facts concerning current social processes, leads the authors to conclude that the causes of this situation include a lack of approval from parents and even teachers for implementing compulsory psychology education in schools. In the authors' view, this reluctance is rooted in fundamental, specific cultural factors that are prevalent in most societies — factors previously discussed in the authors' earlier works<sup>[2][3][4][5]</sup>.

Because the authors believe that the possible introduction of compulsory psychology education in schools in most countries could serve as a form of self-defense — potentially helping to avert further wars, conflicts, enslavement, and injustice — there is a need to outline the possible actions that would facilitate the implementation of psychology education in schools.

## Introduction

Even a merely average familiarity with historical events leads to the conclusion that, for various reasons, a great deal of evil has been perpetrated around the world. Wars and acts of cruelty, unjust decisions, humiliations, and actions driven by prejudice have occurred throughout the entirety of human history. When one reviews the current geopolitical situation and considers people's present mental state, an unsettling picture emerges. The world stands on the brink of nuclear war, and in most countries, people are experiencing frustration caused by excessively emotional disputes — described euphemistically as “deepening polarization.”

Adverse events of the past, as well as the current troubling situation, stem from human attitudes and behaviors. With the development of our accumulated knowledge about the world, there has, for roughly 150 years, been an area of intellectual inquiry and scientific research referred to as psychology. Therefore, if in contemporary times we ask which domain of knowledge should be consulted to understand why people behave destructively, in addition to references to improper social mores and a failure to follow religious principles, psychology must also be mentioned.

It would seem, then, that the natural self-protective response of societies would be to promote those findings established within psychology, in order to prevent social pathology and to safeguard against the seizure of power by individuals who threaten the collective well-being. It turns out, however, that this is not the case.

A review of primary and secondary (high school) curricula in various countries worldwide indicates that, at most, only a few countries allow psychology as an elective subject in specialized educational tracks. To be sure, psychology is a field of study at universities, albeit in some countries only to a limited extent<sup>[6][7][8][9][10][11]</sup>.

To assess the tendency to incorporate psychology into school curricula, one should scrutinize the details of educational programs in several Scandinavian countries.

In examining this issue, an attempt should be made to distinguish whether a particular country's school system merely provides an opportunity to acquire psychological knowledge as one of many areas of study, or whether it also assumes that the widespread dissemination of psychological knowledge is important for systematically improving behavioral standards.

We believe that if the population of a given country were convinced of the beneficial impact of psychology education on society's spiritual and health-related well-being, then it would likely be a compulsory subject

for all students — perhaps only within a relatively short period of schooling, for example, in the final year of high school.

In this article, after reviewing the current state of psychology education, we attempt to identify the causes of this situation, so that we might then formulate recommendations aimed at making it easier to undertake broader implementation of knowledge concerning human motivations. Our reflections on the desirability of teaching psychology are limited to the possibility of doing so at the secondary (high school) level; they do not pertain to primary school curricula.

### *Review of school curricula worldwide with regard to the implementation of “Psychology” as a school subject*

In some countries, “psychology” is integrated into the high school curriculum but generally remains an elective course. Below are several examples of countries where “psychology” is part of the school program:

1. **United States:** Psychology is frequently offered as a subject in high schools. It is usually an elective course, and AP (Advanced Placement) Psychology classes allow students to earn credits that may be recognized by universities<sup>[12]</sup>.
2. **United Kingdom:** In secondary schools, psychology may be chosen as one of the A-level subjects. Psychology is generally an optional subject that may be chosen based on student interest and school resources<sup>[13]</sup>.
3. **Canada:** In certain provinces, such as Ontario, psychology is offered as a high-school course. These courses cover various aspects of psychology, including developmental, social, and cognitive psychology<sup>[14][15]</sup>.
4. **Australia:** In some states, such as Victoria, psychology is offered in secondary schools. These courses typically prepare students for final exams (e.g., the VCE – Victorian Certificate of Education)<sup>[16][17]</sup>.

Although comprehensive, compulsory psychology instruction from the earliest grades is rare, there are countries where psychology becomes a mandatory subject at some stage of education, most often in the final years of secondary school (equivalent to high school):

- **Denmark:** In Denmark, psychology is mandatory for all students in Gymnasium (upper-secondary school), which prepares them for higher education. It is a subject included in the final examinations, thereby influencing overall results and university admission<sup>[18]</sup>.
- **Norway:** Similar to Denmark, in Norway psychology is compulsory in Videregående skole (upper-secondary school), which prepares students for higher education<sup>[19]</sup>.

- **Sweden**, by contrast, *does not* require *all* upper-secondary students to take psychology — only those who have selected relevant study programs<sup>[20]</sup>.
- **Finland**: Under Finland's national core curriculum, high-school (lukio) students have a required number of hours in psychology, after which they may (but do not have to) pursue more advanced psychology courses. In the Finnish education system, each student must complete at least one mandatory course (module) in psychology. This requirement is part of what students must fulfill to graduate from upper-secondary school<sup>[21]</sup>.

Finland, Denmark, and Norway are among the few countries in which psychology is a compulsory component of the high-school (upper-secondary) curriculum. In most other countries, if psychology is offered at the secondary level at all, it is usually an elective subject or integrated into broader courses such as civic education, socio-emotional learning, or family studies.

### *Contemporary attempts to explain why psychology as a school subject is often avoided*

Although psychology is a science devoted to studying the human mind and behavior, it rarely appears as a standalone subject in primary and secondary curricula worldwide. Various explanations are given for this situation<sup>[6][7][8][9][10][22][23][24]</sup>. Below is a brief overview of some commonly proposed explanations.

Usually, the absence of psychology in high-school curricula is explained as follows:

School curricula are already packed with content deemed essential for students' development. Subjects such as the native language, mathematics, natural sciences, or history occupy a significant part of the timetable. Adding an additional subject, like psychology, would lead to overloading both students and teachers.

Another crucial aspect is the age and cognitive development level of the students. Psychology encompasses numerous complex and abstract concepts that may be difficult for adolescents to grasp. It is assumed that explaining psychological theories could exceed the perceptual capacities of high-school students.

A frequently mentioned challenge is the lack of adequately qualified teaching staff. Teaching psychology requires specialized knowledge and appropriate training. In many countries, there is a shortage of teachers qualified to teach the subject at the school level. Training educators so that psychology can be feasibly taught would require additional financial and organizational resources. Developing a curriculum, textbooks, and teaching materials, as well as training teachers, would also entail considerable costs.

Traditional educational systems are typically conservative and rely on long-standing curricula. Introducing psychology into these programs might provoke controversy or demand changes in pedagogical approaches, which could encounter resistance from teachers, parents, or policymakers. Psychology is generally perceived as a specialized science intended mainly for university students.

There are widespread concerns about the appropriateness of certain content for high-school-aged students. Some topics discussed in psychology, such as mental disorders, family dynamics, or sexuality, may be considered unsuitable for teenagers. Parents and local communities may worry about the information being conveyed to children, which can lead to opposition regarding the inclusion of psychology in schools.

It is often argued that in many countries, elements of psychology are already incorporated into other subjects. For instance, in biology, students learn about the fundamentals of the brain and nervous system functioning, while in social studies classes, they address topics related to social behavior or communication. The argument goes that students gain basic psychological knowledge without needing an entirely separate course.

Another factor is that educational systems are strongly oriented toward exam results. Subjects not included in standard examinations may be viewed as less important and fail to receive sufficient support.

Many authors discussing the advisability of teaching psychology in schools note that widespread awareness of the benefits of psychological education is lacking. Although understanding of mental health and social-emotional skills is on the rise, it remains insufficiently persuasive for many educational decision-makers around the world.

### *Aim of the Study*

The authors of this paper are from a country where psychology is likewise not part of the school curriculum. There is currently an attempt to introduce a new subject called “Health Education,” which would include some psychology-related content. We therefore decided to conduct a preliminary, simple survey among young people who graduated from high school a few months ago. The planned survey focuses on their perceptions and attitudes regarding the issue discussed here. We assume that the results of such a survey will allow us to formulate an initial working hypothesis explaining the avoidance of psychology instruction in high schools. Presenting such a hypothesis might help promote further investigations into why psychology is not taught in high schools. Recognizing the reasons behind this phenomenon is, in our view, crucial for preserving or improving the psychological well-being of entire populations.

## **Methodology**

To conduct the study, we used a questionnaire presented below. It is important to note that questions 1-8 refer to the opinions of respondents about the most common presumed reasons for the lack of implementation of the subject “psychology,” briefly discussed above. Questions 9 and 10 concern

respondents' personal beliefs related to two issues. In question 11, we additionally ask which factor contributes the most to excluding psychology from school curricula. Including such a question should, by aggregating opinions, help to highlight which factor is most significant.

The questionnaire responses were collected from a group of 37 first-year nursing students, i.e., individuals who were still high school students a few months earlier. In the studied group, 30 were women and 7 were men, with an average age of 19.8 years.

The questionnaire responses were gathered using the so-called "Google Forms" methodology. The data obtained in this manner are presented below in the "Results" section.

**Original questionnaire aimed at investigating respondents' beliefs about the absence of the subject "psychology" in school curricula in most countries worldwide, considering the most common arguments:**

1. Do you believe that an important reason why "psychology" is not included in school curricula is their excessive overload?
  1. This factor plays a certain role but is not very significant.
  2. This factor is quite significant but not crucial.
  3. It is one of the most important reasons.
2. Do you believe that focusing on future exam results makes it difficult to introduce psychology into the curriculum because it is not a standard exam subject?
3. There is a belief that the education system should focus on content traditionally perceived as standard school subject matter and not introduce new ideas.
4. There is a belief that psychological content is too complicated for high school students.
5. There is a desire to introduce psychology into school education, but there is a lack of qualified teachers to teach this subject in schools.
6. There is a belief that elements of psychology are already sufficiently covered within other subjects, such as biology or social sciences.
7. There is a concern that some psychology topics might be inappropriate for young people (e.g., mental disorders, sexuality).
8. The intention to introduce psychology into schools is met with resistance from teachers, parents, or decision-makers?
9. Do you think society is aware of the benefits of psychological education in schools?
10. Do you personally support the introduction of psychology as a separate subject in high school curricula, or allocating a significant number of hours to psychological knowledge within the "health education" subject?

11. Indicate the question numbers (1-8) you consider address the most significant factors preventing psychology from being included as a school subject in most countries worldwide?

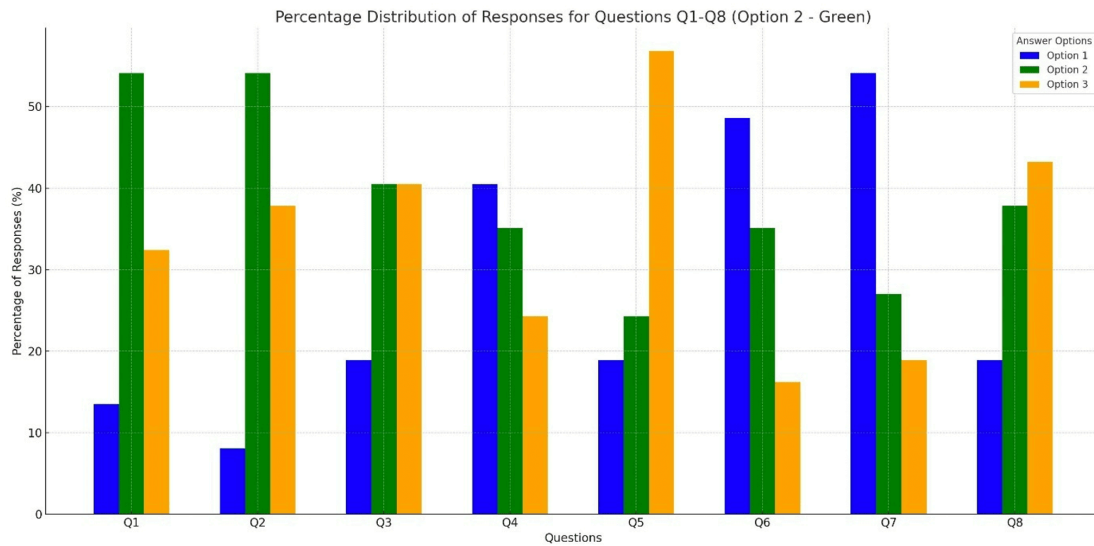
1. Yes, but definitely as a separate subject.
2. Yes, psychological knowledge can be part of the “health education” subject.
3. Psychology should not be introduced into school curricula.

12. Your gender

13. Your age

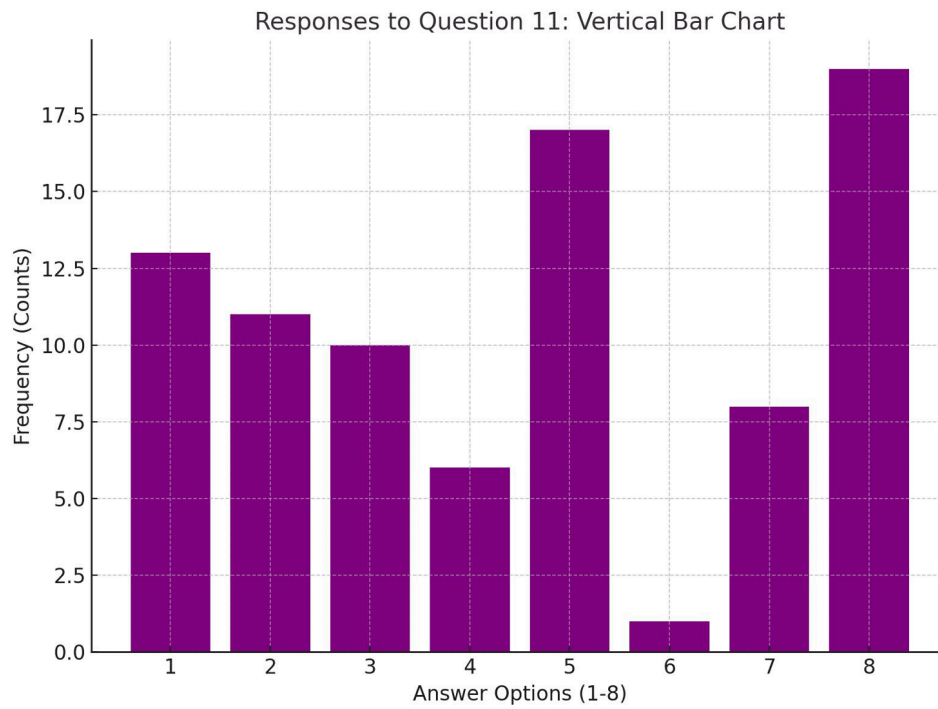
## Results

We present the results of the survey in Figures 1-4. Figure 1 shows the proportion of responses to survey questions 1-8, which address the most common presumed reasons for the lack of implementation of a “psychology” subject, as raised in discussions on this topic. Figure 2 depicts the proportion of responses to the summary question that again asks which factor most strongly contributes to excluding psychology from school curricula. Figure 3 shows the proportion of responses regarding whether society is aware of the benefits of psychological education in schools. Finally, Figure 4 illustrates the proportion of responses on whether the respondents in this study would personally support an actual plan to introduce psychology as a separate subject in high school curricula or to devote a significant number of hours to psychological knowledge within the “health education” subject.



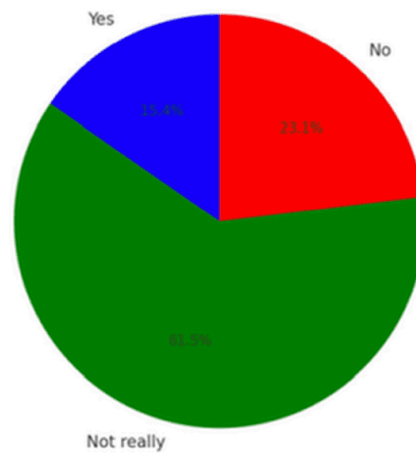
**Figure 1.** Legend: The proportion of responses to survey questions 1–8, which address the most common presumed reasons for the lack of implementation of a “psychology” subject. Option of the answer a.: This factor plays a certain role but is not very significant. Option of the answer b.: This factor is quite significant but not crucial. Option of the answer c.: It is one of the most important reasons.



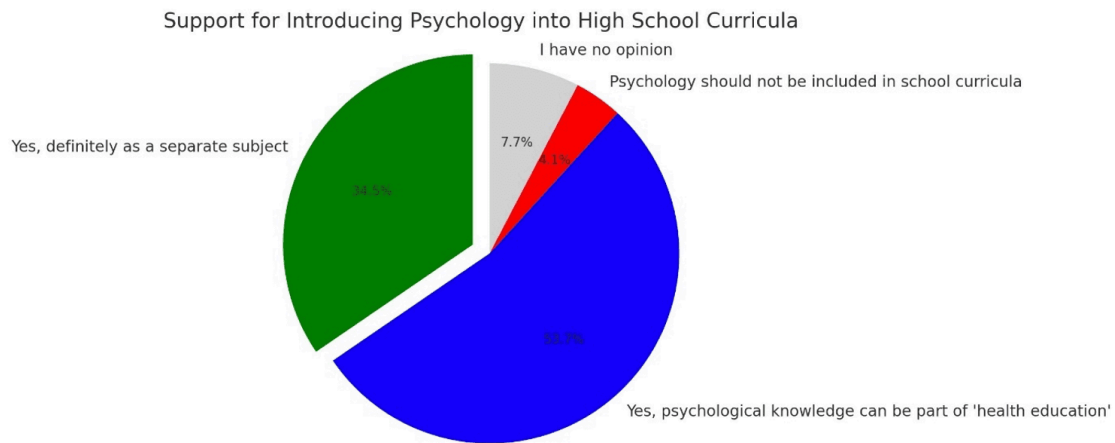


**Figure 2.** Legend: Figure depicts the proportion of responses to the summary question that again asks which factor most strongly contributes to excluding psychology from school curricula.

### Public Awareness of the Benefits of Psychological Education in Schools



**Figure 3.** Legend: This figure shows the proportion of responses from participants regarding whether they believe society is aware of the benefits of psychological education in schools.



**Figure 4.** Legend: This figure illustrates the proportion of responses on whether the respondents in this study would personally support an actual plan to introduce psychology as a separate subject in high school curricula or to devote a significant number of hours to psychological knowledge within the “health education” subject.

## Discussion

In line with our initial remarks, the dissemination of psychological knowledge would aim to foster changes that enhance people’s well-being, quality of life, and mental health. A factual discussion first requires presenting the actual state of these parameters of human existence on our planet. This could be done in countless ways. Because an in-depth presentation of the quality of human existence would be extremely long, in this essential stage of discussing our results, we will limit ourselves to two atypical examples illustrating the current existential —or even anthropological — situation. One might refer, for example, to the latest annual report from the *World Justice Project*, which provides objective assessments of the “quality of human existence” in various countries worldwide<sup>[1]</sup>. We encourage readers to review the graphics illustrating these assessments [<https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/global>].

For the purposes of the present discussion of the results, it is worth noting that the few countries where psychology is taught in schools (Denmark, Norway, Finland) occupy the top positions in rankings of overall well-being.

As a second, contrasting — and thus more subjective — way to quickly approximate the average “quality of human existence,” we present a statement from a recognizable figure with significant intellectual and journalistic authority. Many people fit this description, inspiring confidence in the quality of their opinions. The choice here must be, to some extent, arbitrary. Thus, purely as an example, we quote a short fragment from Zadie Smith’s novel “The Fraud”<sup>[25]</sup>. Among other things, she writes:

“Every novel is a commentary on the present, even if it seems we’re writing science fiction or something about prehistory. And despite obvious differences, the Victorian era strikes me as surprisingly similar to the times we live in. It was a period of enormous hypocrisy, the triumph of lying, both at the heights of power and in ordinary, everyday interactions. People were constantly lying to themselves and everyone around them. It’s easy to believe that the times we live in are absolutely unique. They are not”<sup>[25]</sup>.

### *Author’s Working Hypothesis Explaining the Phenomenon*

Reflecting on the average responses leads, in our view, to an explanation pointing to a very difficult issue. It appears that in almost every contemporary society (nation or cultural sphere), there are sizable groups of people who oppose the dissemination of psychological knowledge. Many psychologists’ findings expose our collective hypocrisy, and their theories threaten authoritarian power, the wealthiest social strata, patriarchal structures, and ecclesiastical hierarchies. The problem also stems from existing ideological polarization, whose causes require in-depth explanation. We have attempted to do so in our previous publications<sup>[2][3]</sup>.

This state of affairs explains why, in our pilot exploratory survey, we obtained the result presented in Figure 2. From that figure, it follows that if we apply the two-phase opinion-gathering approach described in the *Methodology* section, the reason most often cited for excluding psychology from school curricula is simply resistance from parents and teachers, who do not want it.

By coincidence, the thesis raised here finds additional confirmation in current social processes. The authors of this paper come from a country in which, as is well known, a liberal-democratic political option gained a parliamentary majority less than a year ago. Among many new initiatives, there was a plan to introduce a new school subject called “Health Education.” The already-developed curriculum for this subject envisaged that, among eight other modules, it would include elements of psychology and sexual education. However, during the preparation of this paper, the prevailing public rhetoric changed due to the upcoming presidential elections. The idea of introducing this particular approach to “Health Education” as a compulsory subject was abandoned. According to numerous media commentaries, this shift was prompted by concerns about the voting preferences of conservative-leaning individuals.

In the broadest terms, it can therefore be stated that there is a general pattern in most countries worldwide: a thorough dissemination of psychological knowledge is seen as inconvenient and undesirable. There is a tendency to avoid analyzing behaviors through a psychological lens — thus avoiding “psychologizing.” In part, we presented such an interpretation of the cultural context in our previous works<sup>[2][3][4][5]</sup>. In short, resistance to “psychologizing” arises from an aversion to considerations of ideological or moral attitudes, which are precisely the focus of fierce disputes between individuals with liberal and conservative views.

Aware that more precisely identifying the psychological concepts that evoke fear and resistance may be debatable and somewhat subjective, we will nonetheless outline them briefly to stimulate further development of the hypothesis presented here. Summarizing these ideas concisely, we believe that:

1. Many people, in line with Jonathan Haidt's findings<sup>[26][27][28]</sup>, adopt a "purity" mindset, making them uncomfortable with discussions surrounding sexuality.
2. Many individuals feel embarrassed by Sigmund Freud's observations<sup>[29]</sup> on the stages of psychological development in every child, partly due to the terminology of the anal and genital stages, as well as his concept of subconscious conditioning.
3. Many are unwilling to acknowledge Carl Gustav Jung's ideas regarding the existence of the so-called shadow of the personality and the conditioning of herd behavior<sup>[30]</sup>.
4. Many people cannot accept that behavioral strategies are often forms of games, as proposed by Eric Berne<sup>[31]</sup>.
5. Many reject psychological justifications that promote empathy, respect for diversity, and the ability to negotiate and compromise.

Taken together, these observations point to a persistent tension: as soon as psychological theories highlight the complexities of human behavior, they risk conflicting with traditional values, societal expectations, or personal comfort.

The observed correlation between the highest levels of rule of law, freedom, and well-being (as measured by objective indicators such as the World Justice Project reports) and the fact that psychology is taught in schools in these top-ranked countries suggests that implementing the teaching of psychology in schools would be socially beneficial.

A discussion of possible initiatives aimed at achieving this progress requires a separate analysis. Some aspects of such measures have been addressed in our previous works<sup>[4][32]</sup>.

Recognizing that these cultural underpinnings are important, only by acknowledging the sources of fear and resistance can educators, policymakers, and psychologists find probably productive pathways to introduce nuanced psychological insights into school curricula.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that, as the authors, we are aware that the presented survey study involved a small, non-representative group of respondents and can only be considered a preliminary investigation. However, we believe that the results presented here may serve as an impetus for other researchers to develop objective studies on the views of various social groups regarding the purposefulness of teaching psychology in schools.

## Conclusions

1. A preliminary review and analysis of the current geopolitical situation and the manifestations of people's present mental condition lead to the conclusion that a reasonable and justified response to adverse social processes would be the widespread dissemination of knowledge derived from scientific and intellectual inquiries in psychology.
2. A review of available data shows that only a few countries include the subject of "psychology" as a mandatory part of school curricula.
3. The discussion on the reasons for this situation points to many possible factors; however, the survey results presented in this study suggest that the primary determinant is the lack of approval from students' parents and teachers.
4. Resistance to implementing psychology in school education appears to be deeply rooted in specific cultural attitudes that make open engagement with certain psychological concepts uncomfortable.
5. It is both purposeful and feasible to outline actions that should contribute to efforts to introduce psychology as a compulsory school subject.

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