

Topic: 1.2: Prevention and early detection of risk (Prävention und Früherkennung von Risiken)

Symposium

Title:

Mental health literacy (MHL) as a mean to develop tailored interventions for children of mentally ill parents? Needs and demands in families, schools and child and youth services. First results of a German research consortium.

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Symposium:

The needs of children of mentally ill parents are focused in three research projects that are part of a German-wide research consortium on health literacy, launched in March 2015. The concept of Mental Health Literacy (MHL), serving as a comprehensive frame for this projects, will be presented and discussed as a tool for early risk detection, primary prevention and health promotion. The project NePP focuses on the perspectives of affected families and is aiming a summary of self-reported needs and help-seeking as well as patterns and/or levels of MHL as a precondition for health promotion and primary prevention. The other two projects assess the perspectives of professionals and organisations working with affected children. In everyday school life family problems can occur and could be recognized by teachers. The project TEACHER-MHL strives to assess the knowledge and skills of teachers with regard to affected students. PROVIDER-MHL focuses on the interpretations of child and youth welfare as well as health services professionals regarding the needs of the families. Assumptions of health/illness differ along different professions and organisations and have a tremendous impact on health promotion interventions as well as on professional and organisational interrelations.

Within this symposium, a multi-perspective and interdisciplinary overview of MHL in the field of children of mentally ill parents will be provided as all projects will present first research results.

Contribution 1: Developing an Understanding of the MHL Concept: Introduction of the “Mental Health Literacy Work Group” in the “Health Literacy in Childhood and Adolescence Consortium”

P. Wahl, K. Schulze, M. Rehder, PhD, E. Keiter, D. Bruland (Mental Health Literacy Research Group of the HLCA-Consortium)

First an introduction into the concept of MHL with background information on the three projects is provided. The projects benefit from their interdisciplinary cooperation as part of the larger research consortium on Health Literacy in Childhood and Adolescence. The consortium, composed of five German academic partners, is supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and aims at conducting mainly evidence-based health literacy research in ten subprojects. The common framework of the MHL-projects will be presented: From the high-risk-perspective, children of mentally ill parents inherit an increased risk of developing mental problems themselves and are therefore a target group for primary prevention. For Germany, estimations suggest that over

3 million children experience at least one parent with a mental disorder every year. The increasing burden of mental disorders in adults has become a health risk factor for their offspring. Nevertheless, studies consistently emphasize that many affected families are restrained from utilising child welfare or preventive interventions for different reasons. This 'prevention dilemma' is the starting point of our research. The term MHL will be introduced as one element of mental health promotion and primary prevention. Knowledge about and attitudes towards mental illness, risk and services are considered major determinants of families and professionals actual mental health-related behaviour.

Contribution 2: NePP - Needs for Primary Prevention in Families with Mentally Ill Parents

P. Wahl, Prof. A. Lenz (Catholic University of Applied Sciences of North Rhine–Westphalia, Campus Paderborn, Germany)

Children of mentally ill parents have a heightened risk to develop a mental illness themselves during their lifetime. Nevertheless their parents often do not take preventive programs into account. It is important to understand the preconditions and processes taking place in the families when (not) seeking help. MHL seems to be a helpful concept to approach the questions: What are the needs of families with mentally ill parents? How can their help-seeking behaviour be described? What are their subjective illness theories? And which influences do gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status have?

We are implementing an explorative research design to answer these questions and to get an impression of the families' MHL levels. We are planning to interview 25 families via guideline-based qualitative interviews. We include families in which one (or both) parents are suffering from mental disorder and a child between 7 and 14 years old lives with them in the same household. First results will be presented during the symposium.

Our aim is to determine factors inducing the prevention dilemma and to give recommendations for development and/or adaption of preventive programs regarding the subjective needs and wishes of the families. We want to take the families subjective views into account instead of an often dominant "professional" view when developing preventive interventions.

Contribution 3: PROVIDER-MHL - Parents Suffering from Mental Disorders and Their Unaffected Children in Municipal Child and Youth Services. A Multi-level Survey on Professionals' and Providers' Skills

K. Schulze¹, M. Rehder, PhD, Prof. F. Kessl (University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany)

Professionals in the field of child and youth welfare and health services, who work with families with mentally ill parents articulate challenges concerning the work with the target group on the one hand and the development and retention of organisational interrelations on the other hand. The project is interested in both dimensions and assesses a) the underlying understandings of health and illness that become visible when professionals talk about the needs of children of mentally ill parents and that are related to the institutional framework and the operational work with affected families. Another focus lies on questions of organisational interrelations. Children of mentally ill parents as a target group of different systems of support are focused as an intersection and area of conflict on which (inter-)professional and organisational claims of jurisdiction and interpretations are getting negotiated (b). The project is realized in a multilevel survey. The first explorative phase is a qualitative design including expert-interviews and focusgroup-interviews in organisations that differ along the analytical categories of disciplinary provenience, organisational setting, professional concepts and interrelational factors. The qualitative results are the basis for developing a standardized survey questionnaire (n = 270). The third phase of the project is the creation of reflection offers for professionals and organisations working with the target group on the base of the insights and knowledges from phase one and two.

**Contribution 4: TEACHER-MHL - Health Promotion for Children of Mentally Ill Parents.
Assessment and Promotion of Teacher-specific Mental Health Literacy**

D. Bruland, P. Pinheiro, MD, Prof. U. Bauer (Bielefeld University, Faculty of Educational Science, Centre for Prevention and Intervention in Childhood and Adolescence (CPI), Germany)

Different burden patterns and coping attempts of families' health situations often manifest in children's school lives. Although schools can have an important protective function there is no information on the extent of teachers' abilities to handle school situation concerning children of mentally ill parents. The objective is to measure Teacher-MHL in the context of pupil-related psychosocial factors at primary and secondary schools (grades 5 & 6).

A systematic literature review revealed the international literature is limited to a few studies only. Review results and first impressions of an exploratory qualitative teacher survey (n=24, end in March 2016) indicate that teachers are generally stressed with handling the situations of burdened children and report substantial needs for support. Institutional means and resources are lacking as well. Such a mismatch can result in insufficient support and use of opportunities for children at risk. These findings will feed into the development of a quantitative teacher survey, to be performed in autumn 2016 with the aim to assess teachers MHL in the target group (n=2500).

It is expected that targeting professionals' abilities for dealing with this high-risk group leads to a decrease in burden for teachers themselves to handle those situations and an increase of school health promotion. If this is confirmed by the quantitative survey, a demand-orientated training module for teachers will be developed.