

Mental health promotion for children of mentally ill parents. Assessment and promotion of teacher mental health literacy in order to promote child related mental health (Teacher-MHL)

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Introduction: Over 3 million children, about one quarter of all students, experience at least one parent with mental disorder in Germany every year. Children of mentally-ill parents are at considerably higher risk of developing serious mental health problems. The different burden patterns and coping attempts often become manifest in children's school lives. In this context, schools can have an important protective function, but can also create risk potentials. In reference to Jorm, pupil-related teachers' mental health literacy (Teacher-MHL) includes the ability to recognize change behaviour, the knowledge of risk factors, the implementation of first aid intervention, and seeking professional help. Although teachers' knowledge and increased awareness of this topic is essential, the literature provides little information on the extent of teachers' abilities. As part of a German-wide research consortium on health literacy, this project, launched in March, will conduct evidence-based mental health literacy research during a period of three years. The primary objective is to measure Teacher-MHL in the context of pupil-related psychosocial factors at primary and secondary schools (grades 5 & 6), while also focussing on children's social living conditions.

Methods: The project includes 3 research modules. (1) A systematic literature review in different databases (i.e. Pubmed, Cinahl) is currently underway to identify papers with regard to Teacher-MHL. Based on these results, an interview guide will be developed. (2) This module includes a qualitative pre-study to inductively survey the general profiles of teachers (n=24). (3) The findings will be translated into a quantitative teacher survey (n=2070 in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia) in order to assess the extent of socio-analytical skills of teachers as well as in relation to institutional and individual characteristics. The results will inform the development of an intervention programme to improve Teacher-MHL and capacity in the context of providing help to their students.

Results: A first screening of the literature (current phase) highlights a lack of information for Teacher-MHL and their skills, especially related to high-risk-groups like children of mentally ill parents. The national and international literature is limited to a few studies only. According to these, teachers are not good at identifying children with mentally ill parents, and if they identify those children they don't know how to handle the situations in school. They are not sufficiently trained to deal with these children, especially there are great uncertainties in dealing with the teaching situation. Institutional means and resources are missing as well. Such a mismatch can result in insufficient support and use of opportunities for children at risk.

Conclusions: For the first time schools will be addressed as a setting where children are especially "accessible" for measures of health promotion. Addressing Teacher-MHL gives reason to expect high effectiveness. Targeting professionals' abilities for dealing with this high-risk-group leads to a discharge for

teacher themselves to handle those situations and increases school health promotion. In view of the fact that only 10-30% of such high-risk families accept offers of therapy and assistance, this will be the first primary preventive and health-promoting approach to protect the health of a yet unaffected, but particularly burdened, high-risk group.