

Mental health promotion for children of mentally ill parents in schools. 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 (teacher as gatekeeper). 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 for 3 years, will conduct evidence-based mental health literacy research. 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:

- (1) A systematic literature review in different databases to identify papers with regard to Teacher-MHL (completed).
- (2) Based on these results, an interview guide was developed. This research step includes a qualitative pre-study to inductively survey the general profiles of teachers (n=24). The evaluation will be presented on the conference.
- (3) These findings will be translated into a quantitative teacher survey (n=2500) in order to assess the extent of socio-analytical skills of teachers as well as in relation to institutional and individual characteristics.
- (4) Based on results 1 – 3, developing a training program for teachers.

Results:

The review highlights a lack of information for Teacher-MHL and their skills, especially related to high-risk-groups like children of mentally ill parents. The literature is limited to a few studies only. According to these, teachers are not good at identifying burdened children 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. First impressions from the interviews confirm these results and allow a greater insight in the everyday school-life according to critical life events in families.

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 teachers 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.