



## **International Network for School Social Work**

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### **Promoting Mental Health in Schools**

#### **Prevalence of Mental Health Problems in Children and Adolescents**

School social workers in every country work with pupils with emotional and psychological problems. What is the global prevalence of mental disorders among children?

Worldwide 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders. Half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and three-quarters by mid-20s. Neuropsychiatric conditions are the leading cause of disability in young people in all regions. If untreated, these conditions severely influence children's development, their educational attainments and their potential to live fulfilling and productive lives. Children with mental disorders face major challenges with stigma, isolation and discrimination, as well as lack of access to health care and education facilities, in violation of their fundamental human rights.  
[http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/maternal-child/child\\_adolescent/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/maternal-child/child_adolescent/en/)

#### **Mental Health Services for Children and Youth in 15 European Countries**

This snapshot of policies, programs and infrastructure for mental health promotion, mental disorder prevention and care in fifteen European countries provides the kind of data about mental health policies and infrastructure that are important for developing school mental health programs. [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/mental/docs/camhee\\_infrastructures.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/docs/camhee_infrastructures.pdf)

**Norway** has a model program for promoting good mental health in schools: "Mental Health in School" is a school-based national intervention initiative to prevent the development of emotional and behavioural problems in adolescents. The program started in 2000, and is financed and driven by the Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Affairs in cooperation with Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and five NGOs in the field of mental health. The main goals are: To provide both students and staff with basic knowledge on 1) issues related to mental health, 2) how to cope with their lives, 3) where to get help and support, 4) how they can contribute in supporting others and 5) how to be a good friend.

P.127 [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/mental/docs/camhee\\_infrastructures.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/mental/docs/camhee_infrastructures.pdf)

## Research

The European Union DataPrev project **Mental health promotion and problem prevention in schools: what does the evidence say?** reviewed mental health in schools.

The characteristics of more effective interventions included: teaching skills, focusing on positive mental health; balancing universal and targeted approaches; starting early with the youngest children and continuing with older ones; operating for a lengthy period of time and embedding work within a multi-modal/whole-school approach which included such features as changes to the curriculum including teaching skills and linking with academic learning, improving school ethos, teacher education, liaison with parents, parenting education, community involvement and coordinated work with outside agencies. Interventions were only effective if they were completely and accurately implemented: this applied particularly to whole-school interventions which could be ineffective if not implemented with clarity, intensity and fidelity. [http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/content/26/suppl\\_1/i29.full.pdf+html](http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/content/26/suppl_1/i29.full.pdf+html)

### Evidence Based Prevention in Schools

What are the characteristics of effective programs in schools? Here is a summary of findings from the study **Mental health promotion and problem prevention in schools: what does the evidence say?** [http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/content/26/suppl\\_1/i29.full.pdf+html](http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/content/26/suppl_1/i29.full.pdf+html)

- Start early, with younger children, with well designed interventions
- Teach emotional and social skills, such as problem-solving and social awareness
- Use active interventions in a positive, holistic approach
- Embed interventions for pro-social behavior with whole-school involvement
- Promote a school culture of positive interactions and youth involvement
- Include parents rather than focusing solely on child's behavior
- Use a sound theoretical base, complete implementation and define desired outcomes

### School social work role

Emotional problems show up in school in many ways, such as poor school performance, anxiety, refusal to attend school, aggression, depression. Maladaptive behaviors indicate that the child is having trouble coping with school and with how he or she thinks, feels and acts. School social workers help evaluate the problem including school and family factors that are contributing to it, and develop a plan involving child, family and school. Among the professionals that work in schools, social workers are the most likely to examine family, school and community factors that contribute to the pupil's difficulty and to use interventions that involve significant others, rather than just the child. It is common among helping professionals to use a medical model for mental health. The school social work view is different: good mental health is seen as functioning well socially, emotionally and educationally, rather than as absence of a medical condition. This interpretation is a good fit in a school setting and agrees with studies of effectiveness of preventing mental health problems and providing early intervention. School social work can help improve school functioning and the well-being of the child without invoking the medical model.

### Some Resources for Developing School Mental Health Programs

- <http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org>
- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>