Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: A short evidence briefing

ScotPHO
Public Health Information for Scotland

Why is this issue important?

Mental health problems are influenced from an early age by social environment. Half of all lifetime mental health problems start by the mid-teens and three-quarters by the mid-twenties.[1] Adversity and multiple disadvantage in childhood, as well as abuse and neglect, poor parenting and parental mental health problems are some of the factors associated with an increased risk of mental health problems in both childhood and adulthood.[2,3]

It is estimated that one in 10 children and young people have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem, although recent surveys suggest that this figure may be greater.[4] In the 2015 Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS), about three in 10 young people reported possible or probable emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. In particular, 15-year-old girls reported suffering poorer mental health and wellbeing than other groups. The rate of possible or probable emotional difficulties in this age group rose from 28% in 2010 to 41% in 2013.[5]

Are there inequalities to consider?

Particular groups of children and young people are at increased risk of developing mental health problems including: children living in the most socially disadvantaged places; those with caring responsibilities; individuals who are or have been looked after by the local authority; and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI).[5]

Recent surveys suggest that adolescent girls are more at risk of mental health problems and self-harm than other population groups of children and young people. Boys are more likely to report conduct or hyperactivity problems.[5]

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Challenges and solutions

Interventions in the early years, and throughout childhood and adolescence, can have a significant impact on future mental health and wellbeing. Interventions should support good maternal mental health, promote good parent–child relationships, prevent mental health and behaviour problems and promote readiness for school, particularly among vulnerable groups.[6]

These include:

- actions to reduce the impact of child poverty
- prevention and early detection of child abuse and neglect
- early detection and support for antenatal and postnatal mental health
- early years support and coaching for parents, particularly from disadvantaged groups
- early identification of, and intervention for, childhood emotional, behavioural and learning problems
- targeted early childhood education and childcare for vulnerable children
- creating safe environments, in places such as schools, which nurture and encourage young people's sense of self-worth and reduce the threat of bullying and violence.

Examples of positive action

- **Aberlour Perinatal Befriending Support Service** in Forth Valley matches women who are pregnant and suffering from anxiety and/or depression with trained volunteer befrienders. They offer emotional support to help tackle mental health problems and promote healthy parent–infant relationships.
- **Pathways to Confidence** in South Lanarkshire supports children aged 8–14 years and their families who are facing challenges such as mental ill health, poverty and isolation, and lack of confidence and self-esteem. The aim is to build supportive relationships, allowing confidence to grow and removing barriers so that the young people are able to achieve their true potential.
- **Place2Be** is a national UK children's mental health charity which provides school-based support and training programmes to improve the emotional wellbeing of pupils, families, teachers and school staff.

Main indicators†

- Mean mental wellbeing score for S4 pupils (CYP).

- Mean total difficulties score for S4 pupils (CYP).

- Deaths from suicide in young people (CYP).

Linked indicators

- Children in low-income families (CYP, HWB).

- Proportion of S4 pupils who are regular smokers (CYP).

- Proportion of S4 pupils who are weekly drinkers (CYP).

- Proportion of S4 pupils who use drugs monthly (CYP).

- Young people in prison (CYP).

- Population prescribed drugs for anxiety/depression/psychosis (HWB).

- Patients with a psychiatric hospitalisation (HWB).

- Deaths from suicide (HWB).

Resources

- **Early Intervention Foundation Guidebook.**

- NHS Health Scotland. **Mental health. Inequality briefing 10**; 2017.

- NHS Health Scotland. **Tackling the attainment gap by preventing and responding to adverse childhood experiences**; 2017.

- NHS Health Scotland. **Evidence summary: Reducing the attainment gap – the role of health and wellbeing interventions in schools**; 2017.

- **NHS Health Scotland. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**

- NHS Health Scotland, ScotPHO. **Scotland's mental health: Children & young people**; 2013.

- NHS Health Scotland. **Briefing on attachment**; 2012.

- Murphy R. **Child and adolescent mental health – trends and key issues. 16/76 Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe)**; 2016.

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† The letters in brackets indicate the profile the indicator can be found in: CYP = children and young people's profile; HWB = health and wellbeing profile.

- Public Health England. **Rapid review to update evidence for the Healthy Child Programme 0–5**; 2015.
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. **Social and emotional wellbeing for children and young people. Local government briefing 12**; 2013.
- Scottish Government. **Common core of skills, knowledge & understanding and values for the "children's workforce" in Scotland**; 2012.
- ScotPHO. **Children and young people: key points**.
- ScotPHO. **Mental health: key points**.

References

[1] Jones PB. **Adult mental health disorders and their age at onset**. British Journal of Psychiatry 2013; 202: s5–10.

[2] FryersT, Brugha T. **Childhood determinants of adult psychiatric disorder**. Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health 2013;9:1–50.

[3] Couper S, Mackie P. **'Polishing the diamonds'. Addressing adverse childhood experiences in Scotland**. Edinburgh: Scottish Public Health Network (ScotPHN); 2016.

[4] Murphy R. **Child and adolescent mental health – trends and key issues. 16/76** Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe); 2016.

[5] Scottish Government. **Scottish schools adolescent lifestyle and substance use survey (SALSUS) 2015**: **Mental wellbeing report.** Edinburgh: The Scottish Government; 2017.

[6] NHS Health Scotland. **Good mental health for all**. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2015.