



TEACHER-MHL

Health promotion for children of mentally ill parents. Assessment and promotion of teacher-specific mental health literacy (March 2015 – March 2018)

Results of the systematic literature review

The HLCA subproject “TEACHER-MHL” will investigate reliable knowledge of teachers in different types of schools (grade 1 – 6) who are dealing with pupils experiencing a critical life-event such as the mental illness of a parent and thus running a higher risk of health disorders (see [CPI – brief 06/2015](#)).

The first step in our research process was to perform a systematic review on the state of the art of teachers’ knowledge and skills to recognize, deal with, and handle the special situation of children with mentally ill parents in school life. From April to June 2015 in six databases with English and German terms were searched for studies published between 1990 and 2015. We found several articles about mental health literacy of teachers, and about mental illnesses of pupils/children. Although we modified and broadened the search, i.e. by using cross-references, or looking at specific diseases like depression, we only found three studies specifically focusing on teachers and children of mentally ill parents. The authors of these articles have been contacted and they have confirmed the gap we found in the state of the art.

Results from the three studies

It is not easy for teachers to identify burdened pupils. No formal school structures are reported for identifying children with mentally ill parents. In most of the cases, teachers know about parental mental illness through informal interactions with colleagues, although it is not clear why and how these colleagues got to know about the parental mental illness in the first place. The second most reported source of information is communication with the community (relatives or friends of the family). If teachers identify pupils living with a mentally ill parent, they are usually troubled by the situation of the child and the consequences for that child.

A research gap can be discerned. The focus of the studies is mainly on pupils’ mental health problems, but not on the family environment, even though they are closely related. Parents are typically contact persons or cooperation partners to handle behavioral problems of pupils. Conclusion of the review: research on teacher mental health literacy focuses on the expression of children’s problems but overlook mostly a valid reason for pupils’ mental health problems. Own research is necessary. Within the framework of Teacher MHL, the qualitative survey of teachers has already begun at this time.

References:

- Bibou-Nakou I. (2004): Helping teachers to help children living with a mentally ill parent. Teachers’ Perceptions on Identification and Policy Issues. *School Psychology International*, 24 (1), p42-58.
- Brockmann E. (2014): Kinder psychisch kranker Eltern in der Schule. Unpublished doctoral thesis.
- Reupert A., Mayberry D. (2007): Strategies and Issues in Supporting Children Whose Parents Have a Mental Illness within the School System. *School Psychology International*, 28 (2), p195-205.

We are looking forward to informing the audiences around the world on science and research.