

An Ecological Approach to Mental Health Promotion in Learning and Care Communities

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Abstract

There are recognitions that mental-health problems are increasing in society, with considerable increase in psychosocial disorders of young-people being reported in nearly all developed countries particularly in relation to suicide, depression, substance use, addictive and offending behaviour. Vulnerable groups of young-people more likely to experience mental-ill-health compared to general populations are those with an identified learning disability; within the youth justice system; in custody; experiencing a chronic/serious illness; teenage-mothers; from various ethnic groups; in local authority care or residential care. The purpose of this research is to explore what adolescents imagine schools would be like if they were promoting mental-health. The rationale is embedded in concerns about adolescent vulnerability depicted in high incidence rates and associated mental-ill-health in teenage populations. Schools are considered places that have a significant influence on the development of young-people and are considered good settings for promoting mental health. A flexible design, using self-contained focus group methodology explores views of 26 adolescents (81% male, (19%) female: from a variety of cultural backgrounds and vulnerable groups. A funnel-approach structured the five focus groups, each consisting of between three-eight adolescents (12-19 years). An interpretive paradigm is used within this research from social constructionist conjectures. A Constructivist Grounded Theory analysis saw the emergence of ten categories and three overarching conceptual elements as important factors to promote mental health in learning settings, generating the Ecological Model for Mental Health Promotion in Learning Communities using a systems approach. Conclusion and Significance of the research is that in order for schools to promote mental health, society and school communities need to provide active listening cultures and an inclusive ethos to embrace mental health promotion at a variety of levels. A need arises for adults to have knowledge and understanding of adolescent identity; development; and the importance of relationships reflected in attachment theory. The Ecological Model for Mental Health Promotion identifies factors at differing levels that can explain general development of mental health outcomes. The considerations of system interactions, contextual factors and environment interaction also places support in a social context.



Biography:

Hermione Aston has her expertise in promoting mental health in learning and social settings, with passion for improving wellbeing and inclusion in communities. Hermione's ecological approach to mental-health promotion emerged from social constructionist grounded theory to reflect the views and opinions of young-people. This research has been used to develop a Mental Health Charter for Schools and Care Settings, which comprise of self-audit tools to develop action plans for creating more mentally healthy organisations. Hermione is a practicing psychologist, trainee Integrative Art Psychotherapist and works with children, families and organisations to empower people to have a voice, be included and develop emotional wealth at a variety of levels

Speaker Publications:

1. "Developing a Tool to Support Communication of Parental Concerns When a Child is in Hospital Healthcare (Basel) . 2016 Jan 13;4(1):9. doi: 10.3390/healthcare4010009.

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