



Mental health promotion

Practices and resources of school health care staff in North Karelia, Finland and the City of Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia, Russia

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Background

- School healthcare plays a central role in promoting health and well-being of school-age children.
- The discussions between the school nurse and pupils often cover healthy nutrition and guidance related to overweight, encouraging physical activity, limiting screen time, questions related to substance use as well as sexual health.
- The emotional health of schoolchildren should also be monitored in the health check-ups.
- According to previous research findings, school nurses
 - come daily across with problems related to mental well-being of pupils
 - feel the need for further training in this field
 - emphasize the preventive nature of their work
 - stress the importance of professional help in more serious cases.

Study aim

- This study investigated the practices and resources of school health care workers in relation to mental well-being of pupils in North Karelia, Finland and in the Republic of Karelia, Russia.



The study was a part of the Addressing challenging health inequalities of children and youth between two Karelias (AHIC) 2013-2014 project, which was administered by the Department of Nursing Science at the UEF and co-financed by the Karelia ENPI CBC Programme.

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Research questions

1. Do the school healthcare workers consider **mental problems as threats** for pupils' well-being?
2. **What kind of resources** do the school healthcare workers have for promoting mental health and well-being of pupils?
3. How do the school healthcare workers **promote the mental health and well-being** of pupils in practice?

Methods

- Structured questionnaire was based on previous research findings.
- Questions related to
 - content of work with pupils, families and fellow professionals,
 - health threats to children and adolescents now and in the future, and
 - training needs.
- In the North Karelia, Finland 30 school nurses (response rate 57 %)
- In the City of Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia 33 feldshers or general nurses working for school health services (response rate 97%)
- The data was analyzed with descriptive statistical methods. Open questions were analyzed by using content analysis.

School nurse training

In Finland

- Public health nurse: 4 years + optional specialization studies in universities of applied sciences
- Recognizing and preventing risks and illnesses, first aid, health check-ups, monitoring the school environment
 - Emphasis on **promoting the health** of pupils and their families

In Russia

- Feldsher (фельдшер), 3 years 10 months
- Nurse, 2/3 years 10 months
- Organization of and assistance in health check-ups carried out by doctors, first aid, monitoring the school environment

Results

Comparisons between North Karelia, Finland and
the Republic of Karelia, Russia

School healthcare staff similar on both sides of the border

North Karelia, Finland

- Females
- Average age 46 years
- 63 % had worked in school healthcare for more than 10 years
- 43 % worked full-time in school health care
- Over half (53 %) had one or two workstations

Karelia, Russia

- Females
- Average age 47 years
- 54 % had worked in school healthcare for more than 10 years
- 86 % worked in school healthcare 19,15-38 hours/week
- 97 % had one or two workstations

Older pupils more vulnerable for mental health problems

- **Mental health problems** were seen as a threat for primary school-aged children by 17 % of Finnish and by 42 % of Russian respondents
 - 27 % of Finnish respondents considered **bullying** as a threat
 - 67 % of Russian respondents considered **excessive school stress** as a threat
- In secondary school age **mental problems** worried even bigger shares of respondents (47 % and 55 %, respectively)
 - 61 % of Russian respondents considered **excessive school stress** as a threat



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Finnish school nurses discuss mental health issues with pupils more often

- Topics often covered in both countries in discussions between the school healthcare worker and pupils included the **importance of sleep, rest and physical exercise, and daily rhythm**
- Differences
 - 90 % of Finnish nurses discussed **social networks and relationships** *often*, while 42 % of Russian respondents handled these issues *seldom or never*
 - 87 % of Finnish nurses discussed **worries** *often*, while half of Russian respondents handled these issues *seldom or never*
 - 72 % of Finnish nurses discussed **bullying** *often*, while 55 % of Russian respondents handled this *very seldom or never*
 - 63 % of Finnish nurses discussed **pupils' self-esteem** *often*, while 55 % of Russian respondents handled this *very seldom or never*.

Lacking time for mental health promotion?

- The school healthcare workers in Republic of Karelia were responsible for bigger groups of pupils than school nurses in North Karelia.
 - 93 % Finnish nurses had less than 600 pupils in their responsibility
 - 66 % of Russian respondents had more than 600 pupils in their responsibility
- Working time is spent mainly on health check-ups and paperwork in both countries.



Lacking skills / competences

- training needed about mental health issues

- Further training is needed especially in **helping pupils with multiple problems**, about **mental health problems of children and adolescents**, and **early intervention**.
- Finnish respondents' expressed needs for thorough further training
 - 35 % needs training about **helping pupils with multiple problems**,
 - 31 % needs training about **mental health problems of children and adolescents**
- Russian respondents' expressed needs for thorough further training
 - 46 % needs training about the **mental problems of children and adolescents**,
 - 40 % needs training about **early intervention**

Conclusions

- Survey revealed both differences and similarities between the countries.
- Both Finnish and Russian school nurses consider mental problems as threats especially in higher grades and more in Russia.
- In practice issues related to mental health are not always covered in the health check-ups and other discussions between pupils and the school health care worker, which may be due to
 - Lack of time (too big groups of pupils; working time spent on health check-ups, paper work and first aid)
 - Lack of knowledge / inadequate skills (emphasis on aspects of physical health in the health counseling discussions, expressed need for further training, reliance on other experts).

Recommendations

- Reasonable size of groups of pupils and adequate working time.
- Providing further training for school health care staff about the mental well-being and mental disorders of children and adolescents.
- Including mental health issues in the regular health check-ups.
- Main focus of the school health care on promotion and prevention, directing serious mental health problems to special health care.
 - Improving multi-professional collaboration between school healthcare and special health care (child and adolescent psychiatry)
 - Developing distant consultation systems.

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Thank you!



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