



Teachers' experiences of mental health in the classroom

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Introduction

- **School mental health interventions are increasingly studied as a viable option in preventing mental health problems early in development (Hoagwood et al, 2007).**
- **School teachers are in a position to deliver such interventions in a cost effective and sustainable way (Han and Weiss, 2005).**
- **For teacher-led interventions to be effective, it is critical that we fully understand teachers' experiences, viewpoints and needs (Kidger et al., 2010).**
- **The proposed study aims to look closer at the experiences teachers have had of mental health difficulties in pupils. A qualitative approach enables an in-depth, participant-driven exploration of teachers' experiences, beliefs and needs around mental health.**

Method

- One on one interviews were held with 7 state secondary school teachers by the lead author.
- Interviews lasted between 30-75 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.
- Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to understand teacher experiences and find emergent themes (IPA; Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997). IPA is an analytical framework methodological approach that focuses on obtaining an in-depth understanding of individual's personal experiences.
- Transcripts were coded and themes were extracted based on interpretation and discussion amongst the lead researchers.

Discussion

- Clear direction is needed within schools on mental health referral routes and the teacher-pupil relationship.
- Mental health training is needed for teachers in a way that accounts for their work and time restrictions.
- Teachers should not be expected to take the role of therapists.
- Future research should examine teachers' opinions about mental health training.

Having a parental role

Provide stable and trustworthy environment

"we are a stable environment for her. We're somewhere where she can come and get the support and have the family relationship that she needs"

Empathy for parents

"I teach other people's children in the way that I would like my own to be taught so I would like to think that if my children were suffering in a similar way that there would be somebody who would reach out to them"

Satisfaction from caring

"I said to my daughter in the car on the way home it was the right thing to do. I just felt elated that y'know he was coming out the other end"

No clear guidance on boundaries

Teacher-pupil relationship difficult to navigate

"I think you need to have boundaries and I think it's very tempting and i do see other teachers do it y'know who want to be their friend and want to be able to solve their problems and that's not my position"

Have to act independently

"now we have a code where she comes in and it's not good she'll go miss it's a black dog day and I know ok she needs some space"

Difficulty in spotting symptoms

"I kind of wish I'd known a bit more I wish I, but I don't know had I known whether I would have done anything different because he wouldn't have spoken to me"

Overwhelming and helpless

Lack of training

"if the teachers similarly hasn't received the right training you take that baggage away as well ... you go home to your own family. You're still carrying that concern away and that can be a huge worry and add to your anxiety and your own stress and strain and feelings of frustration"

Work and time restrictions

"I felt frustrated as well because if I couldn't fix this in five to ten minutes then well then I couldn't fix it because I had to be somewhere else because that's the school timetable is so rigorous"

Pressures on the rise

"I think that's one of the difficulties that um we face in schools with peer evaluation being so important to young people now they they will mask things"

Frustration at external bodies

Lack of service from CAMHS

"I understand the cuts that they've gone but it doesn't stop still when you've got a young person in front of you crying out for help that you want to help them and I think you then pick up those frustrations"

Poor communication between schools

"we didn't have a flowchart to refer to as staff we didn't have a flowchart for how we would communicate with parents how we would engage with them"

Nowhere to refer pupils to

"Initially there was nothing there was nothing I could do there was nowhere I could send her there was no referral there was nothing"

References

1. Hoagwood, K., et al. (2007). Empirically Based School Interventions Targeted at Academic and Mental Health Functioning. *Journal Of Emotional And Behavioral Disorders*, 15(2), 66-92.
2. Han, S. & Weiss, B. (2005). Sustainability of Teacher Implementation of School-Based Mental Health Programs. *Journal Of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 33(6), 665-679.
3. Kidger, J., et al. (2010). 'Part and parcel of teaching? Secondary school staff's views on supporting student emotional health and wellbeing'. *British Educational Research Journal*, vol 36., pp. 919 – 935.