

Children and Young People's Mental Health

Mental ill health is one of the greatest health challenges of this decade for all age groups, with approximately one in four people in the UK experiencing a mental health problem each year; for children and young people, it is estimated that at least three students in each classroom will struggle with diagnosable conditions during their time at school.

Research commissioned by the NHS in 2017 demonstrated a rise in diagnosable mental health conditions for this age group, with one in eight 5 to 19-year olds (12.8%) receiving such diagnoses. Data from this survey reveals a slight increase over time for 5 to 15-year olds, rising from 9.7% in 1999, 10.1% in 2004, to 11.2% in 2017.

The mental health charity Mind has found that three in five young people have either experienced a mental health problem themselves or are close to someone who has, and the Local Government Association has recently published figures which show that cases of children identified as having a mental health issue were up 54 per cent from 2014/15 to 2017/18.

The current CAMHS crisis

The findings from this research support the current figures that indicate specialist

mental health services for children, young people and families are over-stretched, with many referrals to CAMHS, for example, not meeting the threshold. NHS services simply do not have the capacity to meet rising need.

The number of referrals to specialist children's mental health services has increased by 26 per cent over the last five years with as many as one in four children (24.2%) referred to specialist mental health services being rejected in 2017/18. It is estimated that there were at least 55,800 children not accepted into treatment in 2017/18.

The most common reason for rejected referrals was that children's mental health conditions were not serious enough to meet the eligibility criteria for treatment.

The picture is still not good for those who do pass the threshold and are accepted for treatment. The average waiting time for children in 2017/18 was 34 days to receive an initial assessment and 60 days to receive treatment. Current waiting times are significantly longer than the Government's standard of four weeks, set out in the recent Green Paper on children's mental health.

Many children still face unacceptably long waiting times, and there are great

disparities across providers. The longest wait for treatment reported by mental health service providers in England ranges from 188 days, to just 1 day.

School-based counselling and CAMHS

Experiencing a mental health problem in childhood is one of the biggest barriers to achieving wellbeing, and yet only one quarter of children affected receive specialist help.

Counselling in schools has been shown to be a highly effective support for tens of thousands of troubled children and young people who are experiencing emotional difficulties. School-based counselling is one of the most prevalent forms of psychological therapy for children and young people in the UK. However, provision is inconsistent and many children in England do not have access to a counsellor in their school – a situation that has failed to be adequately addressed by the Government’s proposals in the Green Paper.

Research indicated that school-based counselling is perceived by children and pastoral care staff as a highly accessible, non-stigmatising and effective form of early intervention for reducing psychological distress.

There are a number of ways in which counselling may be used in schools, including to complement and support other services. Counselling may be used as a preventative measure, as an early intervention measure, as parallel support alongside specialist CAMHS, or as a tapering intervention when a case is closed by CAMHS.

School-based counselling has also been shown to minimise pressure on CAMHS services. The Welsh Government’s evaluation of school-based counselling services showed that, of the 11,558 children and young people who received counselling services in 2016 to 2017, 85% did not need an onward referral after completing their sessions.

Data from Wales indicates each young client has on average five sessions of school-based counselling at a total cost of £170-£235. This compares to an average cost of £240 per contact in Tier 1-3 CAMHS according to a 2013 report by NHS Benchmarking.

Digital services

Young people are often choosing to access on-line provision in a number of areas in England and Wales, currently paid for by CCGs. One such service, Xenzone, accredited by BACP, offers a counselling service, ‘Kooth’ to 11-25-year olds. Of the tens of thousands of young people who use the service each year they refer only around 8% into offline services, helping to increase access to mental health support whilst removing pressure on traditional NHS services.

Recommendations

- BACP is calling for a national joined-up strategic approach for those children and young people who would benefit from counselling at a point of referral, or who have been rejected from CAMHS, to be directed to counselling agencies and private practitioners who are already working to high standards with children and young people, with evidence-based outcomes.

- BACP is calling for all children and young people of school age across the UK to have access to professional, qualified counselling services in their schools.
- BACP recommends that children and young people who prefer not to access services in school, and those who are not in school, should have a choice of alternative provision with community or other settings.