Book reviews

Positive Mental Health – A Whole School Approach

A "Whole School Approach" has various meanings; although it is not specified exactly what the authors mean, the Introduction sets out the main theme, namely mental health in schools (primary and secondary). Some readers may understand "Whole School" as including a wide range of outdoor activities, including those focussing on nature.

The book is written for teachers, which does not seem to embrace most concepts of a "Whole School Approach". However, perhaps 120 pages are not enough to address other members of the school community. Parents and pupils/students are central to most of the chapters, but there is very little mention of support staff; the school nurse is referred to only a few times. There is recurrent theme around teachers' roles and school organisation.

Chapter 1 outlines "common needs which you may notice in primary schools" (Conduct Disorder, Anxiety and Attachment Disorder) and in secondary schools (Depression, Self-harm and Eating disorders). I did not find the latter three areas dealt with in a satisfactory way. The ten lines on Depression, including symptoms such as loss of appetite and withdrawal, also offer "physical activity, social activity and a healthy diet" – if only it were that simple! The same is echoed in the 30 lines on Eating Disorders; although mostly in perspective, it concludes "the science curriculum will introduce children to the importance of a healthy balanced diet". This is as useful as a health and safety talk on knives to prevent Self-harm. Self-harm is given 15 lines. It is recommended that teachers are "observant, and listen to children, so as to be aware of their problems". Another part of the approach, which comes up several times in the book, is administering psychometric questionnaires, once a term. For a primary school examples are a "Resilience Survey" and a "Feelings Survey". The idea is to, in some cases, identify children with specific needs and also as a monitor of the wider state of mental health.

The authors point out that there is no national curriculum framework for mental health, and that "schools should use this as an opportunity". I would add that, for the child, mental health problems may be the hardest thing they have ever faced, but they can be an opportunity for moving forward. Looking up "stigma" in the index, the only section referred to deals with stigma towards parents with problems. Children's stigma does, however, come top of a list of reasons why they do not ask for help. This is the recommendation for tackling stigma (from Chapter 3, Targeted Interventions):

> […] teaching students that […] e.g. it is OK not to be OK; mental health can fluctuate and is shaped by our interactions with others; everyone has mental health.

Also suggested are interventions, such as termly one-to-one well-being conversations.

There are results showing that educative methods are effective (Kosyluk *et al.*, 2016). Educative methods would include, e.g. presentations to dispel myths about mental illness with facts. However, a more interactive and sustained programme is likely to promote a better understanding (Fukuo *et al.*, 2019) With regard to cyberbullying, the authors suggest developing digital resilience (there does not appear to be any guidance on this) and education about the potential impact. This could often be a case of shutting the proverbial stable door.

Each chapter is structured like a well-planned lesson, starting with "Chapter Objectives", with "Critical Questions" for the reader and ending with a checklist of what the chapter covered. This makes it user friendly, particularly if you are a teacher. The book is readable, but I would sum up by saying that by focussing so much on the teacher's point of view, it neglects that of others in the school community. However, it can help "teachers

and school leaders to create a school culture which enables everyone who is part of the school community to talk openly about mental health" (Introduction).

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References

Fukuo, J., Maroney, M. and Corrigan, P. (2019), "Pilot of a consumer based anti-stigma mentorship program for nursing students", *Journal of Public Mental Health*, doi: 10.1108/JPMH-02-2019-0020.

Kosyluk, K.A. *et al.* (2016), "Challenging the stigma of mental illness among college student", *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 59 No. 3, pp. 325-31.

The Inner Level

This book carries the subtitle "How more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve everyone's well-being", so I eagerly awaited practical tips for the reader on mental health promotion. The authors' previous book had been full of interesting, international observations on various impacts of inequality (Caan, 2011). Four years ago, the Institute of Health Equity at University College London prepared a very helpful report on the social determinants of mental health (World Health Organization and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2014) including recommendations for action across the lifecourse, at both local and national levels.

The new book by Wilkinson and Pickett has 325 pages with 512 references, but after page 110 and "Myths of human nature, meritocracy and class" began, I found little of interest for mental health professionals. Most of the evidence relates to income inequalities across American states or OECD member countries. The underlying theory seems to be that social anxiety related to "status" leads to illness in individuals and societies, and that may well be reasonable in relation to the pathogenesis of some clinical disorders. The essence of the whole book is summarized in one sentence in a chapter on "Self-doubt": "The reality is that inequality causes real suffering, regardless of how we choose to label such distress".

The authors have many elegant turns of phrase, for example "in a society of strangers, outward appearances and first impressions become more important". However, as a mental health educator, I became exasperated by their conflation of everyday distress, isolated symptoms, survey ratings and psychiatric diagnoses into one "huge burden of unhappiness and mental illness". Having researched the diverse antecedents of both clinical depression and alcohol dependence, the shallow views given here on the roots of "depression" or "addiction" really grated. This book reaches a nadir in a section "Narcissism Trumps good leadership" in which the authors, whom I assume are neither authorities on personality disorder nor closely acquainted with the US President, speculate wildly on his mental functioning.

For all its 512 references, there seems to be only one point where the book considers any evidence that is contradictory to its claims. My old colleague Derek Summerfield (2011) is disparaged for doubting the validity of the reported prevalence measures the book plots against International income data. Dr Summerfield worked as a Psychiatrist across diverse cultures, nationalities and languages, so perhaps his concerns do merit serious consideration? One of the blind spots in the book is its failure to see a possible reverse relationship between inequalities and mental illness. Perhaps improved mental health care might improve income, housing, social relationships and even "status" as opposed to stigma. Improved prevention of mental illness through better antenatal care, child protection, parenting programmes, community development linked to education or community safety, and better workplace environments, all appear likely to impact on "well-being" – what would that do to inequality in the population? That sounds like a case for evidence-based mental health promotion!