

Pilot Study of Stigmatization of Mental Health Problems in the Ukrainian Educational Environment

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Introduction. Ukrainian society today faces problems of discrimination, stigmatization of mental disorders. This problem is especially relevant in the educational field where we deal with poor awareness of both students and teachers of the causes, manifestations and resources of the development of children and adolescents with mental disorders. The high level of discrimination of children and adolescents with mental disabilities reduces their capacity for community adjustment. Reduced adjustment ability and cases of bullying interfere with implementation of inclusive educational system.

Purpose. The general purpose of our scientific development is raising the awareness of the population of the problems related to the development of children with mental health disorders, reducing the social stigma and promoting the inclusion of children with mental disorders in the system of inclusive education and other areas of public life. In this abstract we are studying the perception about pupils with mental disorders with the aim of establishing the causes and mechanisms of stigmatization. We expect that this pilot study will distinguish the directions and subjects of educational trainings.

Research Design. We have designed a questionnaire that studies the awareness of the population on the issues mental disorders, emotional filters, barriers as well as knowledge of the personal qualities of people with mental disorders. Modification of the measurement of social distances (E. Bogardus, 1925), semantic differential (C.Osgood, 1964), closed questions and evaluation grids were used to develop the questionnaire. Survey results were subjected to frequency and qualitative analysis and interpretations. The pilot study was attended by 346 people.

Results. We found out that the vast majority of investigated persons (86.3%) said that they understood the term "mental health". At the same time, only about 75% could give some definition. Mental health is associated with a variety of indicators (figure 1).

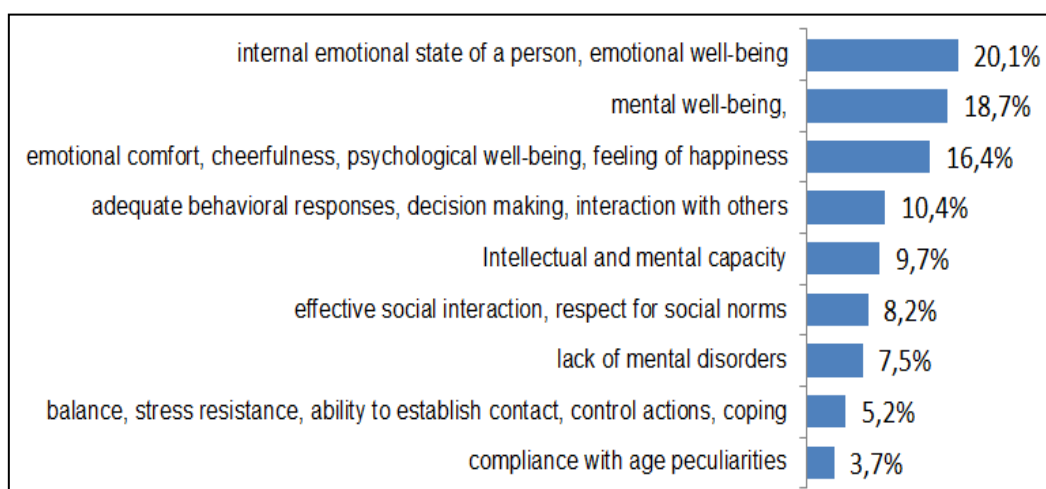


Figure 1. Understanding the concept "mental health" by participants of the educational process

We also studied the awareness of mental health problems. It turned out that the population is quite well oriented in the main mental disorders, they can correlate the names of disorders with their main characteristics. At the same time, there is a better awareness of developmental disorders such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome. PTSD prevails among other mental disorders due to the situation in the country and the large-scale efforts of numerous colleagues in the direction of overcoming stigmatization of post-traumatic stress effects. We also should notice slightly distorted understanding of autism, anxiety, ADHD.

As for the emotional perception of some disorders, the most common emotions are compassion, sadness, and partly fear – this applies to all disorders. Almost absent are anger, abomination, aggression – these emotions are under taboo in the Ukrainian society, so this result can be explained as socially desirable and should be further explored. The respondents demonstrate some indifference to intellectual disorders, hyperactivity, anxiety and PTSD (which is rather strange, due to the prevalence and social aspects of these problems).

An interesting point for analysis is people's ideas about the ability of people with mental disabilities to participate in various spheres of life (table 1).

Table 1. The respondents' perceptions of the ability of people with mental disabilities to participate in different spheres of life

	intellectual disabilities	cerebral palsy	ADHD	autistic spectrum disorders	anxiety
family	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
bringing benefits	☑	☑	☑	?	☑
household	☑	?	?	?	☑
learning	?	☑	☒	☑	☑
working	?		☒	☑	☑
governing the state	☒	☒	?	☒	☑
teaching others	☒	☒	?	☒	☑

We also studied the characteristics of the social distance between general population and people with mental disorders. It turned out that they are quite easily accepting such people as neighbors, citizens of the country, users of common services (such as cafes or transport). But it is unacceptable to let these people closer to the family (there are some difficulties in accepting them as friends or classmates of own children, as well as close relatives). The greatest difficulty is acceptance of people with mental disorders in the workplace. The personal qualities of people with mental disorders were evaluated by respondents (table 2).

Table 2. The respondents' perceptions of the personal qualities of people with mental disorders

	Positive qualities	Negative qualities
Cerebral palsy	Kind, dutiful, clever, communicable, adequate, controlled	Dependent on others
intellectual disorders	Unmanageable, stupid	Independent
ADHD	communicable, self-determined	Unmanageable
autistic spectrum disorders		Avoidant
Down syndrome	Kind, docile	Dependent on others
Anxiety disorders	Independent	Aggressive, evil, unmanageable, avoidant, dangerous for others

Limitations and strengths of the study. Socially desirable answers and missing or insufficient communication experience of respondents with mentally disordered people are limitations of the study. Strengths of the study are that the obtained results allow to explain the main mechanisms of readiness/unpreparedness of the population to implement the ideas of inclusive education.

Practical value. Formation of adequate representations of pupils and teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of pupils with mental health disorders improves mutual adaptation and bullying prevention in the school environment.

Originality. Complex questionnaire for the study of cognitive, behavioral and emotional components of attitude towards children with mental disorders was first created.

Conclusions. Stigmatization of mental disorders in Ukrainian education is related to long-term isolation of mentally disordered people in special schools. This leads to a low level of awareness and the accumulation of negative emotions by all participants of the educational process. Thus, educational trainings for teachers and pupils may be directed to the formation of adequate representations about strengths and weaknesses of mentally disordered children, awareness and tolerance of emotions, finding common ways of their adaptation in pupils' groups.

Keywords: mental health, mental illness, mentally disabled, discrimination based on disability, child care, child protection.

References.

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