

TO ENOC and The French Ombudsman for Children

Response to questionnaire from the Ombudsman for Children in Finland

About the questionnaire

The European network for the Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) and the Ombudsman for Children in France have asked for contributions on the yearly theme of ENOC, Mental Health.

The Response

Organising of Mental Health work

In Finland the Mental Health issues are regulated mainly by Mental health act. Mental Health is in the field of the Ministry of Social affairs and Health. The six Regional state administrative agencies have regional responsibilities in planning, supervising and promoting of mental health services. National Institute for Health and Welfare and the National Supervisory authority for Welfare and Health are the expert government bodies.

Mental Health services, as all Health services, are mainly organized by the over 300 municipalities or their alliances. The Preventive care is in responsibility of the municipalities. There are also Mental Health services specially dedicated to school pupils and students in schools. Special mental health services are provided by 21 hospital districts and it includes care in hospital and outpatient care.

Nationally KELA (National agency for social security and services) can give funding for psychotherapy if it is needed to keep up or return the ability to work or study.

The Ombudsman for Children can't handle individual complaints. The complaints concerning the Mental Health care are dealt by the Finnish Parliamentary Ombudsman or Regional state administrative agencies. Mental Health in School Health promotion study

The National institute for Health and Well-being organizes a biannual survey (School health promotion study) on school pupils in grades 4-5, 8-9 and upper secondary students in grades 1-2. Of pupils in grade 4-5 12,6% answered that they have had problems with their mood during the last two weeks. 51,2% said that they are feel often happy in school and home.

The older pupils and students were asked more question. When asked about if the children had medium or difficult problems with mental health. Of pupils in grades 8-9 18,4% of girls and 8,4% of boys answered yes. Of students in general upper secondary education grades 1-2 5,2% of boys 18% of girls answered yes. Of students in vocational training of boys 4,9% and of girls 18,8% answered yes.

They were also asked about if the respondent has been concerned about their mood. Of pupils in grades 8-9 12,6% of boys and 40,8% of girls answered yes. Of students in general upper secondary grades 1-2 18,6%



of boys and 47,2% of girls answered yes. Of students in vocational training 28,1% of boys and 45,6% of girls answered yes.

A special study was made of students in grades 1-2 that don't identify as straight. They were in general upper secondary education 14% of girls and 6% of boys and in vocational training 7% of boys and 15% of girls.

Of not-straight girls about 1/3 had medium or difficult anxiety, double to straight girls. Of non-straight boys 16% had medium or difficult anxiety, whereas in median for boys the figure was 4%. Non-straight students had more often no close friends, faced more bullying, faced more violence and had more problems with their parents than straight students.

In 2014 in special non-institutional mental health care there were 249,4 (65,3) care visits of children aged 0-12 / 1000 children of age 0-12 in general and 973,4 (154,2) visits of children aged 13-17 of 1000 children in general. (1994 figures) In 2015 there were 0,7% of children ages 0-17 that received medication for depression whereas in 1994 it was 0,1%.

Difficulties and remedies

In 2009 the National audit office of Finland made an audit about the Mental Health act and how it works in practice. The study found that there are severe problems with the law. The law is too general, too general and fragmented. The aims of the law are not achieved. The co-operation between social welfare and health care system doesn't work. The Office proposed that the law should be rewritten to make the system more coherent.

In 2012 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health found that there are no established practices in psychiatric care of children in child welfare facilities. Psychiatric special care relies on medical needs while the children's welfare facilities take care of upbringing.

In 2012 The National audit office of Finland noted that children that need psychiatric care sometimes end up being taken into custody, even if they don't have such need. The Ombudsman for Children has stated in 2017 that this is still a problem and it is a severe mishandle from the Finnish government.

In 2018 the National federation of municipalities published a research that the entry to Children's Mental Health care services has worsened and children are often put into institutional welfare care because the mental health care services were not available otherwise.

In 2014 OECD recommended that Finland should pay attention to regional differences concerning the entry to Mental Health care. OECD noted that the suicide rate had fallen but was still high. OECD made research that from 2000 to 2010 there was a big shift from hospital based care to community-based care.

OECD reported that Finland has had some good examples of promoting Mental Health. Regional variations in mental health service supply and delivery remain a challenge. However, Finland has responded to regional disparities by introducing innovative programmes such as consultation via video link, which has been used to support primary care physicians in remote areas.

Finland has also put in place targeted child and youth-based programmes, including child welfare clinics and mental health education in schools. A large-scale programme on bullying – the Kiva-school programme – funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education, has been found to reduce self and peer-reported bullying and victimisation.

In 2016 the Ministry of Social affairs and Health published a memo about the renewal of Mental Health care and intoxicant patents act. The Ministry published an estimate that half of the people needing Mental Health care were able to get it and 1/3 of people needing help to intoxicant problems got help to their problems. In the memo the Ministry game the fragmentation of the system as a key problem.

The Ombudsman for Children gave an opinion about this memo. In the opinion the Ombudsman emphasized the importance of preventive care. It would give help when needed and save future costs. The availability of the Mental Health services should be made better.

The current government has proposed a big reform of the Social welfare and Health care system. They will be given to 18 regional counties that have popular elections every four year. Also the people would have more freedom to have a private service provider. It will be seen if the parliament will accept the new legislation for the reform. The reform would make the system more coherent and put social welfare and health care services closer together.

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