

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE

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Purpose is to present comparative analysis of mental health services for children in residential care in European Union.

Design/methodology/approach. Qualitative research design was used in order to find out similarities and differences of mental health services for children in EU. Semi structured qualitative interviews with professionals working in both systems were done in six EU countries: Denmark, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Scotland, and Spain. Content analysis revealed several topics; two of them are discussed in this presentation: competencies, responsibilities and authority in relation to other professionals in connection with professional identity; interprofessional collaboration and main obstacles working in child protection and mental health services.

Findings. Data shows that competencies, responsibilities and authorities of different professionals (doctors (psychiatrists), psychologist and social workers) are clearly understood and separated, also interconnections are found, however, these interconnections reflect not only different professional identities but hierarchical relations as well. Research data shows that there is interprofessional cooperation inside and outside mental health and child care organizations. Lack of communication, organizational restrictions, imperfection of health care system and personal factors were mentioned as the main obstacles for a good practice. The key challenge is the collaboration at tertiary level when a child is hospitalized. Both sides: mental health and child care services providers see the problems concerning communication, interconnection and continuation of services. Data reflects not only problems of interprofessional cooperation between mental health and child care organizations but also not good regulations of information flow between professionals, as information could be provided only from the same professional to the same professional. It is not

clear in child care system how other professionals like social workers, group teachers - supervisors could receive this information. Usually it varies from case to case and depends on regulations of specific child care organization or personal interest of professional.

Research limitations/implications. The main challenge in this research is comparability of qualitative data – different contexts, variations in health and social services systems in the countries cause difficulties in comparison of qualitative data.

Practical implications. Analyzed data could be used for formulating recommendations to practitioners in both systems. The idea is to develop continues education course for professionals in mental and social services fields.

Originality/Value. This is one of the first research in the Europe concerning interconnection of mental health and social services in residential child care therefore it naturally will lead to further scientific investigations.

Keywords: residential child care, mental health services, interprofessional cooperation.

Research type: research paper.