

Case report and example of good practice from North Macedonia

Workshop on "MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS"

designed for students of 13 and 15 years from the elementary school "Kuzman Josifovski - Pitu" and the elementary school "Krume Kepeski" from Skopje, held on 4 February 2020 in the elementary school "Kuzman Josifovski - Pitu"

In line with the need for continuous monitoring of adolescent health in the Republic of North Macedonia in order to improve it, for about 30 years, international projects have been implemented - HBSC study and the Network of schools that promote Health in Europe (SHE - School for Health in Europe Network).

The School-based Behavioral Health Study is an international study providing information and data on the health, well-being, social environment, and health behaviors of boys and girls aged 11, 13 and 15 years. It is implemented in about 40 countries in Europe and North America covering about 220,000 students. Data focus on social context (family, peer and school relationships), health outcomes (physical, mental health, obesity and injury), health behavior (dietary frameworks, dental hygiene, physical activity) and risky behavior (tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use, sexual behavior, violence with fights and bullying) relevant to the health and well-being of young people. Also in the study are new topics such as family and peer support, migration, social media violence and serious injuries. The study uses a questionnaire for students and a questionnaire for school management at the school level.

The subject of the workshop was mental health. What is mental health? You might say that it is the person who is happy. But our lives are made up of diverse and rich experiences, experiences that cannot be reduced to happiness. People with a high degree of emotional health not only experience positive emotions, but also a whole range of negative emotions, such as sadness over loss, personal failure ... Mental health is not the absence of mental illness.

The purpose of the workshop was to identify the types of behaviors and emotional reactions of boys and girls in school, family, community, using data from the Survey of Health Behavior in School Children.

The workshop was attended by 22 students from 7th and 9th grade in two schools in Skopje - Primary School "Kuzman Josifovski - Pitu" and Primary School "Krume Kepeski". Students responded to the question, "What am I doing for my health?" Answers were given to how boys and girls behave in school, in the family, in the community towards their health? The students recorded the behavior separately for boys and girls. Every idea was written down authentically. Students in groups debated and needed to write more solutions on how to deal with negative emotions at school, at home, in the community.

Student statements:



Boys behave	Girls behave	The boys feel it	The girls feel it
most are silent	neat	feeling of less value due to height or weight	under pressure for appearance
temperamental	get things done faster	sadness	responsible
kept secret	better in learning	good luck	superior
better friends	resourceful	lazy	persistent
disappoints failure	honest	saving	ready
sports types	more intelligent	aggressive	confident
they are better at running, sports, getting better	they look in the mirror every day	confident	emotional
patient	share with others	depressed	depressed
keep an eye on the weight	cry in the WC		
slowly express their feelings	conversational		

RESULTS OF GROUP WORK AND STUDENT PRESENTATION:

- Students feel that the family needs to communicate and share common events more. Students are of the opinion that communication in the family at the age of 13 and 15 is reduced. They share their problems with their peers and do not always receive adequate support or advice
- More mental health discussions should be organized at the school
- Allow more time with friends
- Reduce the time on social networks
- Introduce a special subject on mental health
- To balance learning time with leisure time. (Children should be in company with peers, but due to many subjects and assigned learning tasks this is not possible)
- To reduce the pressure for learning by parents and teachers
- Lead a healthy life
- Classes start at 11am. Excessive learning engagements lead children to study later in the night, staying awake for the next school day
- Provide free treatment for all
- No primary school grades, students are under pressure for grades, which discourages them

- Organized leisure time
- Build more sports facilities (think of terrains and places where you can play and recreate), bring students together and lead to healthier thought and life
- Studying for free - parents are worried about grades and hence the pressure
- More youth counseling centers - able to access at any time
- Help for the homeless - leave a sad picture of the environment
- Organize a meeting with parents because we feel that they too are to blame for their children's mental state
- Organized group session where children will express their problems
- Have psychologist classes in the school at least once. Required!
- No stereotypes and prejudices, more discussion of problems and respect for others
- Remove rules that discriminate on the basis of gender, ethnicity and nationality
- No prejudice based on the financial ability of families
- To have respect for oneself and for others (self-image, I in the eyes of others)
- Implement projects with adults and students in which the topics will be realized

Conclusion: The World Health Organization for Mental Health says that it is “a state in which every person expresses his or her potential, a person who is able to transcend life situations, work productively and effectively and contribute to the community”. Every person has the strength and qualities to deal with life's problems, but we cannot say that it is necessary for one to have those qualities. Some of the traits that make a person mentally healthy are: optimism, a positive self-image, self-esteem, confidence in others and the world, emotional competence, harmonious interpersonal relationships, a sense of life. **ONE OF THE WAYS THAT CAN WORK TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH IN THE SCHOOL IS TO DEVELOP EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE.**



Student evaluation:

“The three hours spent with these kids were really interesting. I met new friends, heard many other attitudes and opinions, discussed topics that concerned teachers, parents, children. I hope that this collaboration will happen again because I really liked the atmosphere that was between us. The ideas we gave I think can really change something”. **SIMONA K.**

“This workshop was another experience, meeting new friends, debating a topic not so familiar to people, and coming up with solutions for it. I felt great and relaxed, but also ready to work. I felt great. I met many friends with whom we shared many different opinions. The workshop was creative and interesting, and through the game we got a lot of new information”. **EMILY Z.**

“I felt great. I learned many things that will be important to us later. I listened to everyone's opinions and expressed my own. It was well organized and I really liked it”. **MILA T.**

“The workshop really impressed me, I created new memories that I would carry with me for life. We heard new opinions, and we made new friendships”. **PHILIP B.**

“The project or the open debate I had in Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu had a big impact on me and made me think. A very important topic has been debated which is a major problem for juveniles (children) nowadays. Adolescence is the topic we discussed with other children in school. All that we said was very disturbing and unexpected. We realized that some of the children had suicidal thoughts and even more depression. That touched me a lot and made me think of a solution to it. I have learned that in order not to belong to that statistic, I have to think not of others, but of doing what I personally want to do. Now I only see my own opinion and that of my closest relatives (my parents and brother). So I think I'll be the happiest and not think too much and have easy solutions. It will not mean that I will not be responsible for my own actions, myself and others, but that I will think of becoming a more independent, responsible and better person”. **PETROVSKI I.**

“Several students from our school participated in the project that was in the elementary school “Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu”. The project was about the harmful health of children, adolescence, the percentage of children with suicidal thoughts and so on. We all discussed and shared our opinions, some children recounted some life events related to this topic. I was most surprised and amazed by the percentage of children who want to commit suicide. We all need to live for ourselves, to love ourselves, because if we do not love ourselves and do not have our own attitude and confidence, then others will not love us”. **PASKOSKA I.**

“This project involved children from 2 elementary schools where we debated the mental health of children and teenagers. The discussion was very instructive and amazing, we learned new things to apply in our lives. The truth is, the data was disturbing because most of us didn't think that our peers could face difficult problems and suicidal thoughts. So we have to choose our words and watch what we do, because we do not know what s / he is in and maybe even the slightest criticism will hurt him. Put yourself in the skin of the other and have empathy for others”. **IVANOVSKA P.**

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