

MENTAL HEALTH OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN CHERNOBYL TRACE REGIONS: LOW DOSES RADIATION AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS FACTOR

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Introduction: The mental health impact of Chernobyl is regarded by many experts to be the largest public health problem to date, as the people continue to live in a contaminated area. With respect to stress-related symptoms, the rates of depressive, anxiety, and medically unexplained physical symptoms are two to four times higher in Chernobyl-exposed populations compared to controls.

Objectives: To assess the impact of combined radiological and psychological stressors on mental health of the school children in Chernobyl trace regions.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional quantitative descriptive and cross-correlated study with a sample of 327 school children at the age of 6-7 and 10-11 years living in Chernobyl trace regions of Russia. It was compared to a control group of 154 children from uncontaminated areas. The examination included clinical psychological investigation, intellectual assessment, and ECG-testing of children.

Results: We found a relative increase in psychological impairment in the exposed group compared with the control group, with increased prevalence in cases of intellectual working incapacity ($p > 0.01$) and emotional disorders ($p > 0.05$). The IQ level of children was relatively equal in both samples. The ECG-results testified to the signs of functional regulatory system retardation in the exposed group. We noticed a positive moderate correlation between IQ of children, intellectual working capacity and emotion stability.

Conclusions: Combined radiation and psychological environmental stresses are suggested as exacerbating the initiation and/or intensity of emotional disorders of the school children. The effect thought to be mediated by having good quality psychological support.

PROMOTING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN INSTITUTIONALIZED

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Introduction: The decision to institutionalize children in foster homes has generated great controversy and some researchers hypothesized that this may generate many risks especially for healthy and mental stability of children.

Objectives: The present study aimed to analyze the implications of a positive and balanced educational relationship, focusing on the promotion of personal and social skills, while protective factors and resilience of children living in residential institutions.

Methods: We constructed and validated a questionnaire administered to 43 teachers from Primary School who teach in classrooms with children who live in foster homes. It was also applied a socio-demographic questionnaire and the Healthy Kids Resilience Assessment Module (adapted by Martins, 2005) to a sample of students who live in institutions and attending the 3rd and 4th grade (N = 27).

Results: The results show that teachers implement strategies to promote the development of personal and social skills in these students, but simultaneously they negatively evaluate their capacities for resilience. However, when comparing the data

obtained from the teachers, with the result of the application of the Resilience Scale directly to students, it appears that the information gathered suggests that these students are developing a resilient way of life, showing significant internal and external resources that seem to contribute to overcoming the difficulties and setbacks that life brings.

Conclusions: The study concludes that the implementation of strategies for developing personal and social skills by teachers have positively influenced Educational Resilience of these children.

CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON BEING A HEALTHY PERSON

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The study presented is part of a wider research project, aimed to understand the characteristics of children's concepts of health and illness, its specificities, determinants, and consequences for designing health education programs and for organizing psychological services for ill children.

Objectives: To analyze the specific themes emerging from children's concepts about health.

Methods: This is a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) study with a sample of 175 school children aged 9 to 12. Participants were asked to write what it meant to them to be healthy. A category system previously validated (inter-rater agreement of 93%) was used to examine the structure of children's health concepts along 5 categories.

Results: Based on content analysis, a total of 625 descriptive units were derived from children's writings and coded. The most frequently used categories to define health were "engagement in preventive activities" (51%) and "positive feelings" (21.6%). Moreover results revealed the relative importance of the various sub-themes within each category, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of children's concepts of health.

Conclusions: Globally children provided complex and holistic definitions of health, including, in addition to physical and behavioral aspects, descriptors of psychological well-being. The results are useful for the development of health education programs by evidencing the importance of including psychosocial dimensions. In addition the results allow health professionals to adjust interventions to the views previously held by children.

PREVALENCE AND PREDICTORS OF TOBACCO, ALCOHOL AND SELF-INJURY BEHAVIORS AMONG HEALTHY WEIGHT AND OVERWEIGHT ADOLESCENTS

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Introduction: The association of overweight with risk behaviors may operate through multiple psychological mechanisms.

Objectives: To assess differences in risk behaviors between groups according to weight status and to examine the cumulative role of certain psychosocial variables as potentially influencing factors on the presence of risk behaviors.