

Mental Health Surveys on Community and Organizational Levels: Challenges, Issues, Conclusions and Possibilities

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Abstract : In addition to the fact that mental health bears great significance to a particular individual, it can also be regarded as an organizational, community and societal resource. Within the Szeged Health Promotion Research Group, we conducted mental health surveys on two levels: The inhabitants of a medium-sized Hungarian town and students of a Hungarian university with a relatively big headcount were requested to participate in surveys whose goals were to define local government priorities and organization-level health promotion programmes, respectively. To facilitate professional decision-making, we defined three, pragmatically relevant, groups of the target population: the mentally healthy, the vulnerable and the endangered. In order to determine which group a person actually belongs to, we designed a simple and quick measurement tool, which could even be utilised as a smoothing method, the Mental State Questionnaire validity of the above three categories was verified by analysis of variance against psychological quality of life variables. We demonstrate the pragmatic significance of our method via the analyses of the scores of our two mental health surveys. On town level, during our representative survey in Hódmezővásárhely (N=1839), we found that 38.7% of the participants was mentally healthy, 35.3% was vulnerable, while 16.3% was considered as endangered. We were able to identify groups that were in a dramatic state in terms of mental health. For example, such a group consisted of men aged 45 to 64 with only primary education qualification and the ratios of the mentally healthy, vulnerable and endangered were 4.5, 45.5 and 50%, respectively. It was also astonishing to see to what a little extent qualification prevailed as a protective factor in the case of women. Based on our data, the female group aged 18 to 44 with primary education—of whom 20.3% was mentally healthy, 42.4% vulnerable and 37.3% was endangered—as well as the female group aged 45 to 64 with university or college degree—of whom 25% was mentally healthy, 51.3 vulnerable and 23.8% endangered—are to be handled as priority intervention target groups in a similarly difficult position. On organizational level, our survey involving the students of the University of Szeged, N=1565, provided data to prepare a strategy of mental health promotion for a university with a headcount exceeding 20,000. When developing an organizational strategy, it was important to gather information to estimate the proportions of target groups in which mental health promotion methods; for example, life management skills development, detection, psychological consultancy, psychotherapy, would be applied. Our scores show that 46.8% of the student participants were mentally healthy, 42.1% were vulnerable and 11.1% were endangered. These data convey relevant information as to the allocation of organizational resources within a university with a considerable headcount. In conclusion, The Mental State Questionnaire, as a valid smoothing method, is adequate to describe a community in a plain and informative way in the terms of mental health. The application of the method can promote the preparation, design and implementation of mental health promotion interventions.

Keywords : health promotion, mental health promotion, mental state questionnaire, psychological well-being

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