

The Conception of the Students about the Presence of Mental Illness at School

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Abstract : In this paper, we analyze the conceptions of high school students about mental health issues, and discuss the creation of mental basic health programs in schools. We base our findings in a quantitative survey carried out by us with 156 high school students of CTISM (Colégio Técnico Industrial de Santa Maria) school, located in Santa Maria city, Brazil. We have found that: (a) 28 students relate the subject 'mental health' with psychiatric hospitals and lunatic asylums; (b) 28 students have relatives affected by mental diseases; (c) 76 students believe that mental patients, if treated, can live a healthy life; (d) depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are the most cited diseases; (e) 84 students have contact with mental patients, but know nothing about the disease; (f) 123 students have never been instructed about mental diseases while in the school; and (g) 135 students think that a mental health program would be important in the school. We argue that these numbers reflect a vision of mental health that can be related to the reductionist education still present in schools and to the lack of integration between health professionals, sciences teachers, and students. Furthermore, this vision can also be related to a stigmatization process, which interferes with the interactions and with the representations regarding mental disorders and mental patients in society.

Keywords : mental health, schools, mental illness, conception

Conference Title : ICSGS 2017 : International Conference on Sociology of Gender and Society

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : June 28-29, 2017