FINDING SPACE TO MENTAL HEALTH
– Promoting mental health in adolescents (12-14 year-olds):
  Preliminary results of the pilot study

Luísa Campos1,2,3, Filipa Palha1,3, Pedro Dias1,2, Elisa Voiga1,2 & Ana Isabel Duarte1

1 Faculty of Education and Psychology, Sport & Physical Activity, Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon, Portugal.
2 Centro for Studies in Human Development, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon, Portugal.
3 FNCTR/TRFSE – Association to Support People with Special Needs, Lisbon, Portugal.

Introduction

The lack of information and stigma associated with mental disorders are major obstacles to the promotion of mental health (Petiford, Stuart, Thorncroft & Arbolaeds-Fibres, 2005; Stuart, 2006). Young people are an important target population for mental health promotion (Richwood, Deane, Wilson & Garrow, 2005; WHO, 2010) and stigma reduction (Corrigan & Watson, 2007) for three main reasons: (1) natural risk of developing a mental disorder; (2) adolescents will experience a mental disorder (Patel, Fisher, Hetrick & McGorry, 2007); (3) most of the mental health problems are developed in the youth (Kelly, Jorm & Wright, 2007; Patel, et al., 2007); (4) stigma associated with mental health problems seems to arise from the age of 5 (European Commission & Portuguese Ministry of Health, 2010). Adolescence is considered a stage where attitudes and perceptions can be changed (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). The "Finding Space to Mental Health" is a 3 years project that aims to develop a school-based intervention to promote mental health literacy (Jorm, 2000, 2012) in young people.

Design and Method

During the first year of the project a pilot study was carried out focusing on the development of an assessment instrument and a mental health promotion intervention.

Mental Health Literacy questionnaire

The assessment instrument comprises a social-demographic form and 49 items focused on mental health literacy.

Data from 239 Portuguese students aged between 12 to 14 years-old (M=12.65; SD=0.68), 116 of them male and 99 female, were used for psychometric analysis.

Mental health promotion intervention

70 Portuguese students aged between 12 to 14 year-olds (M=13.11; SD=0.81), 39 male and 28 female participated in the intervention.

The intervention includes 2 sessions, 90 minutes each, one-week interval. Sessions focus on mental health literacy – knowledge and beliefs about mental health disorders which aid their recognition, management and prevention (Jorm, 2006) –, and follow an interactive methodology, using group dynamics, music, videos, group discussions and disclosure.

The study of the intervention's effectiveness was conducted through a pretest-posttest design using the assessment instrument developed - Mental Health Literacy questionnaire.

Additionally, a focus group was carried out with students to discuss intervention methodologies and obtain students feedback.

Results

Mental Health Literacy questionnaire's exploratory factor analysis revealed the existence of three factors: (1) knowledge, (2) first aid skills & help seeking and (3) self-help strategies. Preliminary results concerning internal consistency showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 in knowledge, 0.82 in first aid skills & help seeking, and 0.65 in self help strategies.

The post intervention assessment showed a significant increase in knowledge (pre: M= 3.92, DP=0.30; post: M= 4.29, DP=0.230; p=0.000), first aid skills & help seeking (pre: M=4.19, DP=0.59; post: M=4.44, DP=0.45; p=0.000) and self-help strategies (pre: M=4.19, DP=0.59; post: M=4.65, DP=0.41; p=0.000).

Conclusions

Cronbach's alpha regarding sections of the Mental Health Literacy questionnaire stated satisfactory levels of internal consistency.

In what concerns to the mental health promotion intervention, results suggest the adequacy of the methodology used. According to student's opinion, intervention's strategies were dynamic and appealing, which are essential elements to the success of mental health promotion interventions.

Although the questionnaire and the intervention developed appear to be adequate to the proposed goals, improvements of both the assessment instrument and the intervention will be discussed.

References


