Knowledge & Library Services (KLS)
Evidence Briefing

Does training teachers in mental health literacy improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of school pupils?
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30th January 2018
Does training teachers in mental health literacy improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of school pupils?

Question

This briefing summarises the evidence on interventions to train school teachers in mental health literacy, from 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2011 to 23\textsuperscript{rd} January 2018

Key messages

- A new mental health and wellbeing training programme for teachers will be implemented in all primary and secondary schools in England, delivered by Public Health England (PHE) and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England.

- One randomised trial and two evaluations have been conducted on MHFA training courses for teachers in schools – these showed an increase in knowledge, attitudes and confidence of teachers, but did not measure the effect on school pupils’ mental health and wellbeing.

- A systematic review assessing the effectiveness of teacher training interventions to promote health and well-being in schools found mainly weak study designs which varied in the content and delivery of training, a tentative positive impact on teachers, but no assessment of impact of training on pupils themselves.

- A number of UK and international primary research studies evaluating mental health training interventions (other than MHFA) for school teachers showed the duration, content and design of the interventions to be very different.

- These primary research studies showed that after the mental health training, the knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy and emotional competence of teachers increased; very few of these studies measured student wellbeing and mental health.

- Two interventions that did demonstrate an effect on student mental health and wellbeing were: the integrated approach from Mental Health Association of East Tennessee (MHAET) which has trained 3,000 teachers, and led to an increase in the number of youth referrals made to a local mental health centre and a decrease in student depression; and the FRIENDS for life programme, which showed a decrease in students’ anxiety levels.

- Mental health training interventions specifically for pre-service teachers found an increase in teacher knowledge, attitudes, confidence and communication skills, but no studies measured the impact this had on students’ wellbeing.
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Background

In 2017 Theresa May announced that a new programme to advise teachers on how to deal with mental health and wellbeing issues will be implemented in all secondary schools in England, due to be extended to primary schools by 2022 (1). PHE and MHFA England will aim to deliver these basic mental health “first aid” skills to up to 1 million people (2).

Is there any research evidence that shows whether training teachers in MHFA, or teachers receiving other mental health literacy training, directly improves the mental and emotional wellbeing of school pupils?

MHFA training courses

MHFA training courses were first developed in Australia in 2000 and were launched in England in 2007 https://mhfaengland.org/. A summary of evaluations for all their courses was published in 2017 and shows that MHFA improves participant’s attitudes to mental health: https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/research-and-evaluation/summary-of-evaluations/. There is currently only one randomised trial and two evaluations (one yet to complete) that have been conducted specifically on MHFA youth training courses for teachers and pupils in schools:

- randomised trial of mental health first aid training for high school teachers (3) – the training had positive effects on teachers' mental health knowledge, attitudes and confidence, but no effect on teachers' individual support towards students with mental health problems or on student mental health
- North East England Youth MHFA evaluation (4) – participants (unclear if they were all teachers) reported increased levels of knowledge and confidence after the training, and that they intended to use the newly acquired skills at work when supporting young people experiencing mental distress
- Wellbeing in Secondary Education (WISE) project (5) – a pilot of six schools randomised to receive MHFA or control; MHFA trainees (secondary school teachers) gained in knowledge, confidence and awareness regarding their own mental health, and a peer support service was established in all intervention schools and was perceived to be helpful in raising the profile of mental health. 25 schools from Bristol and South Wales are taking part in a larger study and results will be available in 2019 https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/research-and-evaluation/wise-project/

None of these studies appear to have measured or shown (yet) an effect on school pupils’ mental health and wellbeing, only on the knowledge, attitudes and confidence of teachers.
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Other training interventions

Secondary research

A systematic review looked at the effectiveness, and barriers and facilitators, of teacher training to promote health and well-being in schools (6) (7). Although published in 2016, the search only covered research up to May 2011. The authors found:

- 20 studies mainly from the UK and Australia
- 12 studies assessed outcomes
- the evidence base was diverse, with studies varying in the content, delivery and duration of training
- it was not possible to make definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of training on teachers’ knowledge, confidence and skills at this time due to the weaknesses of the study designs used
- tentative evidence suggests a positive impact for teachers but none of the studies assessed the impact of training on pupils themselves

A literature review on promoting mental health literacy among educators states that there are training interventions being developed at the school level in Canada to help teachers deal with mental health issues, but the effectiveness of these have not been evaluated (8). The authors also state that “…although teachers may gain knowledge and understanding of mental health issues as a result of their participation in a particular program, how this affects their future actions within the classroom has yet to be determined” p65.

Primary research

- a one-hour, teacher-led educational program (which included the viewing of an animated film) for mental health literacy (MHL) in Japanese teens, showed that knowledge and attitudes of the students about mental health were significantly improved immediately after the session (9)
- a medical training pilot event for school staff in April 2016 at Canterbury Christ Church University, comprising of workshops delivered jointly by health and education academics, was rated as useful by the school staff and indicated that there is a demand for a multi-professions approach to developing knowledge of child health and wellbeing (10)
- an initial teacher education course in Scotland focused on the application of attachment theory to the role and identity of the teacher, in supporting children vulnerable through experiences of trauma and adversity – this appears to be a narrative description only (11)
- a school mental health 2½ day training session for teachers in rural Haiti where the curriculum was organised around a framework of ‘the four Rs’ – recognise, respond, refer and [build] resilience - demonstrated that
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Knowledge and attitudes of the teachers significantly improved between the pre-test and post-tests (12)

- a web-based MHL curriculum resource, the Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide (The Guide) [http://teenmentalhealth.org/product/mental-health-high-school-curriculum/](http://teenmentalhealth.org/product/mental-health-high-school-curriculum/), developed by mental health and education experts and taught by classroom teachers in Canadian secondary schools, showed that educators’ knowledge and attitude scores increased significantly (13), along with the knowledge and attitude scores of the students (14); school teachers in Tanzania were trained on the African Guide, culturally adapted from the above Canadian Guide – this also showed improvements in teacher’s mental health knowledge, a decrease in their stigma against mental illness, and positive help-seeking efficacy for themselves and their students (15)

- this study examined the impact of the FRIENDS for Life programme [https://www.nbss.ie/interventions-and-projects/wellbeing/friends-for-life](https://www.nbss.ie/interventions-and-projects/wellbeing/friends-for-life) (training and coaching teachers with strategies to develop social and emotional skills) on students’ and teachers’ emotional outcomes, in a school from a low socioeconomic status area - it demonstrated a significant decrease in students’ anxiety levels and an increase in teachers’ resilience levels (16) (17)

- Mental Health 101 and Typical or Troubled? is a two-pronged integrated approach from Mental Health Association of East Tennessee (MHAET) to reach students and teachers - more than 3,000 teachers have received training and as a result, the number of youth referrals made increased substantially (to Helen Ross McNabb Center’s Children and Youth Division in Knoxville, grown 453% since 2008); the number of students who meet diagnostic criteria for depression has decreased by 13% since 2005 (18). The authors state: “There is strong evidence that MHAET’s implementation of these two programs has saved lives” pe10

- an evaluation of a 2 hour professional development program designed for teachers regarding the impact of anxiety and depression on student learning, showed that teachers sense of efficacy and knowledge, and engaging the learning of students with anxiety and/or depression improved, but it was difficult to determine if these improvements would be maintained in the long-term (19)

- an evaluation of a psychoeducational strategy to develop Brazilian public school teachers’ capability of identifying children and adolescents who needed mental health evaluation, demonstrated that the training increased knowledge among teachers who before training could not identify and refer the cases that were described in the vignettes, and among teachers that had difficulty in distinguishing between normal and abnormal adolescent behaviour (20)
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- another intervention in Brazilian public schools involved teachers attending six sessions of educational videos covering basic concepts of mental health, and showed that the teachers showed a decrease in stigma and an increased knowledge in how to proceed when a student had a mental disorder (21)
- an evaluation of two training programmes to improve personal and social wellbeing, one targeted at teachers and the other at pupils, showed a significant improvement in the emotional competence of both teachers and pupils at the end of the intervention, together with a better relational climate in schools (22)
- the implementation of a mental health consultation model (MH consultants work closely with childcare teachers at school) and its impact on early childhood teachers’ efficacy and competence was examined in Louisiana – this suggested that a model of MH consultation is associated with an increase in teacher self-efficacy, and the teachers’ reported that the MH consultation increased their competence in specific areas related to children’s socioemotional development (23)

**Pre-service teachers**

- this pedagogical approach involved school students helping to "teach the teachers" within pre-service teacher education - participants found that this enhanced their belief in the possibility of positive student-teacher relationships; the teachers reported greater confidence in communicating with young people about student engagement and wellbeing, and the students reported that they were more willing to use teachers as a source of help (24)
- an online mental health course organised around learning objectives in Canada found that mental health literacy for pre-service teachers must include knowledge about common mental illnesses, contextual experiences of students who may be at risk of developing a mental illness, evidence-informed strategies, an understanding of their own mental health and an opportunity for self-reflection (25)
- a teacher training course known as NAMI Parents and Teachers As Allies [https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Parents-Teachers-as-Allies](https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-Parents-Teachers-as-Allies) proved that it was an inexpensive, relatively short training session that positively affected pre-service teachers' knowledge, personal beliefs, and attitudes about students experiencing emotional and behavioural disorders and mental illness (26)
- a Health Day (one component of the health and well-being education curriculum of post graduate teacher training) for pre-service teachers in Southampton has equipped over 1000 primary and secondary teachers over 3 years with knowledge, awareness, skills and confidence that have facilitated positive attitudes towards their teaching of PSHE education (27)
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- this small study in England investigated the extent to which PGCE students come across pupils with mental health problems on teaching practice and how effective a one-day training course can be in preparing them for this role – there were significant differences in attitude between PGCE students and more experienced teachers in relation to their role in child and adolescent mental health (28)

**Ongoing research**

- systematic review looking at the effectiveness of any form of education, taught/session led intervention delivered by teachers that discusses mental health and wellbeing within schools - outcome measures will be depression and anxiety scores in adolescents (29)
- testing the efficacy of computer-based training for the most common mental health problems to elementary school teachers - outcome measures will be the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes of teachers to mental health (30)
- randomised controlled trial of the Incredible Years teacher classroom management (TCM) course - aims to determine if the course influences child and teacher mental health and well-being in short and long term (31)
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Endnote database matrix showing the highly relevant papers with key information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of single 15-minute and school teacher-led program for m...</td>
<td>Olfo</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>one-hour, teacher-led educational program for MHL.</td>
<td>Knowledge about mental health/life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness of child health and wellbeing needs through co-led...</td>
<td>Le Moine</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>a medical training pilot event for school staff in April 2016 by the multi-profession...</td>
<td>This was stimulated from discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives of ‘Doing, Knowing, Being and Becoming’: Examining the Imp...</td>
<td>Kearns</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>focus on the application of attachment theory to the role and identity of the tea...</td>
<td>We capture students’ “real time” fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health training for secondary school teachers in fictitious...</td>
<td>Eustache</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>a single training session lasting 2½ days that included didactic presentations, inte...</td>
<td>Mean scores of knowledge and attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers to get specialist training</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Over the next three years, 3,000 staff in all secondary schools in England will be ...</td>
<td>A total of 20 studies met the inclusion criteria:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Teacher Training to Promote Health and Well-Being in Schools...</td>
<td>Shepherd</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>a systematic review of effectiveness, barriers and facilitators of initial teacher training...</td>
<td>the use of a classroom-based resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school mental health literacy curriculum resource training approach...</td>
<td>Katcher</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Secondary school teachers in Kansas were trained on the African Guide (AG) ...</td>
<td>Participants found that workshops were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pilot cluster randomized controlled trial of a support and training in...</td>
<td>Kiddle</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid (MHA) training. Six schools were randomly assigned to an inter...</td>
<td>Participants found that workshops were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning with and from: Positioning School students as Advisors in Pre-S...</td>
<td>Cahill</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>pedagogical approach within the “Learning Partnership” program in which school...</td>
<td>Participants found that workshops were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service teacher education for mental health and inclusion in schools</td>
<td>Atkins</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>online mental health course organized around five learning objectives and deliver...</td>
<td>Participants found that workshops were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of teacher-delivered mental health interventions</td>
<td>Sheley</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>any form of education, taught/learned intervention delivered by teachers ...</td>
<td>Depression and anxiety scores in adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Application of a Canadian Mental Health Curriculum Resource...</td>
<td>Katcher</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>a curriculum resource, the Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide. ...</td>
<td>Outcome to classroom exposure to the health promotion strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Evaluation of the FRIENDS for Life Program on Students’...</td>
<td>Brake</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>examined the impact of the FRIENDS for Life program on students’ and teachers’ ...</td>
<td>At the end of the intervention, state ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of teacher training on primary teachers’ knowledge, personal...</td>
<td>Mockabee</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Social Media and Teachers to Train Teachers on Mental Health Literacy. ...</td>
<td>Results of the study indicate the ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Award Student outreach and teacher training to ensure prevention...</td>
<td>Harrington</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee (MHAET) – a two-pronged intervention ...</td>
<td>Participants found that workshops were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Mental Health Training for Teachers Identifying and Supporting...</td>
<td>Woods</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>an evaluation of a professional development workshop for teachers, measuring ...</td>
<td>The training helped increase knowledge of ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating the effectiveness of a training program that builds teachers’...</td>
<td>Vicente</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>to evaluate the effectiveness of a psycho-educational strategy intended to develop ...</td>
<td>Students’ social-emotional outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A combined intervention targeting both teachers’ and students’...</td>
<td>Brucke</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>The FRIENDS program has been extensively tested and has shown promising results ...</td>
<td>The Health Day has helped to equip o ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising the profile of health and well-being education in teacher training...</td>
<td>Dewhurst</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>a Health Day for pre-service teachers, including the effects on their confidence ...</td>
<td>The Health Day has helped to equip o ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Mental Health Literacy among Educators Critical in School...</td>
<td>Whitty</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Factors facilitating and constraining the delivery of effective teacher training...</td>
<td>A total of 23 publications (28 studies) ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors facilitating and constraining the delivery of effective teacher training...</td>
<td>Shepherd</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>a two-stage systematic review comprising a descriptive map of the characteristics ...</td>
<td>Significant increases in both knowledge ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator mental health training: A programme evaluation of the teacher...</td>
<td>Katcher</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Mental Health Training for Elementary Teachers Through Tele-education. ...</td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid Training, England. ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Training for Elementary Teachers Through Tele-education...</td>
<td>Eusepe</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Evaluation of Youth Mental Health First Aid Training in the North-East of...</td>
<td>almost all participants reported increases ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the emotional competence of teachers and pupils in school...</td>
<td>Porres-Escoda</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>This paper describes the evaluation of two training programs, one targeted at a...</td>
<td>The results showed a significant improvement in the educational ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health training for elementary school teachers</td>
<td>Pereira</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>six sessions of educational videos covering basic concepts of mental health...</td>
<td>Thirty-nine elementary teachers of all ages attended. ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting teachers and children in schools: the effectiveness and cost...</td>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Ongoing research.</td>
<td>Analyses support the assertions that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of a mental health consultation model and its impact...</td>
<td>Helmer</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>This article details the initial launch of the MHL consultation program to childcare...</td>
<td>Analyses support the assertions that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Wait until Qualified? The Shortfalls and Experiences of Undergraduate...</td>
<td>Bastock</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Investigates the extent to which PGCE students come across pupils with mental...</td>
<td>Analyses support the assertions that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health first aid training for high school teachers: a cluster random...</td>
<td>Jamison</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>in one week.</td>
<td>Analyses support the assertions that ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This database can be obtained on request.

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References

14. Kutcher S, Wei Y, Morgan C. Successful Application of a Canadian Mental Health Curriculum Resource by Usual Classroom Teachers in Significantly and Sustainably Improving Student Mental...
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https://search.proquest.com/docview/1552714334.

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