Evidence and gap map finds stronger focus on treating than preventing mental health problems of children and adolescents

Most research on child and adolescent mental health and psychosocial interventions is reactive rather than proactive, with a strong focus on treating rather than preventing mental health problems or promoting mental health.

What is this evidence and gap map (EGM) about?
Half of all mental health problems originate early in life. Many are preventable, but most remain unrecognised and untreated. Investment in effective child and adolescent mental health prevention, promotion and care is therefore essential.

This EGM provides a visual overview of the existing evidence on the effectiveness of mental health and psychosocial support interventions for children and adolescents aged 0-19 years in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The interventions are divided into four categories: school-based, community-based, individual and family-based, and digital. These are then further filtered by where, how, for what and to whom they are delivered.

What studies are included?
A total of 697 studies and reviews are captured in the EGM, focusing on 78 LMICs.

What are the main findings of this EGM?
Most records cover lower-middle-income countries, with a few covering low-income countries.

Most of the records examine the effectiveness of interventions among adolescents. Most interventions focus on treating mental health problems rather than preventing them or promoting mental health.

School-based interventions are the most studied, followed by community-based interventions, individual and family-based interventions. Digital interventions are the least researched platform.

Most studies investigated mental health conditions, followed by mental health and early childhood development outcomes. Depression was the most frequently researched outcome.
sub-domain, followed by anxiety disorders, wellbeing, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

What do the findings of this EGM mean?
Research evidence on mental health and psychosocial support interventions for children and adolescents in LMICs is progressively expanding but unevenly distributed among regions and countries and by intervention and outcome domains.

Most of the evidence focuses on treating mental health disorders rather than preventing or enhancing mental health, indicating that current research is more reactive than proactive.

Mental health and psychosocial support research for children and adolescents lacks diversity. It is critical to include certain sub-populations in studies, particularly those that tend to report a higher prevalence of mental health and psychosocial problems and are less likely to have access to mental health care. More evidence is needed on the effectiveness of digital mental health interventions, interventions in humanitarian settings, and interventions for the youngest children.

There are concerns about the quality of the available research. Progress on mental health and psychosocial support is hampered by a lack of investment in robust research on which interventions work to improve child and adolescent mental health.

How up-to-date is this EGM?
All the searches were conducted in December 2021, to retrieve all systematic reviews and primary studies published between January 2010 and December 2021, with no language restrictions.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?
Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews and evidence and gap maps (EGMs). We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

To access the interactive EGM, visit [https://www.unicef-irc.org/evidence-gap-map-child-mental-health/](https://www.unicef-irc.org/evidence-gap-map-child-mental-health/).

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