ENGAGING STUDENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The issue of education, especially nowadays, raises many questions regarding its role in school, at home, in society as well as the ability of the educational process to keep up with the unprecedented changes in society, in human life in general. The leap of scientific knowledge has caused an unprecedented evolution of technology, which has entered human life with the aim of improving important aspects, but we also see its negative impact in many ways. The values of the past seem to be somehow overtaken by the new social challenges! Time has become a precious gift; modern man no longer has enough time either for himself or for those close to him. Everything happens at a pace that affects human life as a whole, disrupting family and social relationships. All this is reflected in the man's ability to adapt to new challenges, and thus education that equips the individual with those capabilities that make him able to face these unprecedented challenges is necessary. The emotional and somatic impact is mainly reflected in mental health. That is why the school and the educational system have the role of paying more attention to the field of mental health, raising awareness of the dangers that can lead to the installation of mental imbalance, prevention being the prophylactic basis. In our study, we will emphasize the importance of studying the field outside specialized schools, identifying certain deficiencies in education regarding mental health, as well as some important directions to be followed.*

Key words: *education; prophylaxis; mental health; social skills; state of well-being.*

1.Education and mental health

Mental health has recently been an increasingly sustained concern of specialists trying to combat the causes that contribute to its establishment. Sustained effort is directed towards prevention and prophylaxis. The concern for intensifying efforts to raise society's awareness of the incidence of mental illnesses also comes from the increase in the number of cases of depressions, suicides, strange behaviour, and the cases of drug consumption which are increasing (Kanj M, Mitic W., 2009). In addition to the external factors that determine the expansion of the number of cases of mental illness, numerous other aspects come to join the relatively constant factors such as: mental and psychiatric pathology (Quillerou B, Bouchard J-P., 2013). That is why an educational intervention is necessary from the youngest ages to educate and train preventive behaviour. We should start protecting the youngest earlier about this aspect of their health, even from the moment they were born to the last moment of their lives. Mental health is what best defines human beings and its loss has severe consequences upon the individual (Kelemen Gabriela, and all, 2015). Mental health gives the individual the ability to harmonize daily activities with desires, interests, feelings and personal consciousness. Mental health also means tranquillity and peace of mind, it means acceptance, job satisfaction and the joy of living. However, mental health is not only a strictly personal problem, a person affected by a mental illness is a factor of concern for all those with whom s/he interacts, from several perspectives: affective, professional, social and economic (Corbière, M., & Lanctôt , N., 2011). Thus, we find out that mental health is a major problem in the European community and a target pursued with particular attention. The notion of mental health has different connotations and is marked by ambiguities, that is why mental health is part of a multidisciplinary intervention system through theoretical and practical means that aim to protect, preserve and strengthen mental health, but also prevent and eliminate suffering, respectively increase the quality of life and implicitly the well-being of the individual (Sara Pinto, Laís Fumincelli, Alessandra Mazzo, Sílvia Caldeira, José Carlos Martins, 2017). Generally, the concern must be directed towards the care for mental health, but attention must be directed towards the causes that lead to the establishment of mental illnesses, with a view to their elimination (Hadlaczky G, Hökby S, Mkrtchian A., 2014). When we discuss mental health, we must identify the preventive dominant, which involves finding strategies to stimulate protective factors. There are numerous intervention strategies, which are based *on a multidisciplinary system of*

theoretical and practical means intended to defend, preserve and strengthen mental health, mental well-being, respectively positive mental health (Kate Memish, Angela Martin, Larissa Bartlett, Sarah Dawkins , Kristy Sanderson, 2017).

Called by specialists, health management, it involves well-designed health-mental services that contribute to prophylaxis and prevention, but also in the form of services that provide support in the event of a mental illness. Mental health is an important component of the individual, the quality of mental health depends on the way individuals get along and integrate in the family, in the group of friends, in the community, they become dependent on (Reavley NJ, Jorm AF., 2011). So we could define mental health as representing the individual's ability to maintain a balance between all mental, intellectual and emotional functions, so that they can easily adapt to the challenges of social life. Specialists mention that, ultimately, mental health represents that state of well-being that manifests itself in three particularly important situations: feeling good about yourself, feeling good with the others and being able to fulfil your everyday duties

2. Educational directions for the prevention of mental illness

2.1. Objectives at an European level
The supreme forum, the World Health Organization, drew the attention of member states to the need to develop short- and long-term policies and programs to prevent the establishment of mental illnesses (Melissa Stormont, Wendy M. Reinke, Keith C. Herman, 2010). National mental health policies and programs must take into account international principles on mental health.
An important objective is the development and implementation of educational programs at the level of each education cycle for awareness, prevention, but also the formation of appropriate behaviour regarding mental illnesses (Evans-Lacko S, Little K, Meltzer H, et al., 2010). It has been found out that people who have mental problems hide these problems from their relatives out of modesty or because they are not aware of the seriousness of the problem they are facing, waiting for it to pass by itself. However, for an informed person there are warning signs, which can be easily identified if certain symptoms are observed[2].

But in order to have the ability to identify such signs, it is necessary for each individual to be informed about the symptomatology and the manifestation of

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[2]

mental imbalances. Thus, by observing the look, facial expressions, walking and body language in general, each individual can identify certain imbalances (Reavley NJ, Jorm AF., 2011).

2.2.National objectives
We believe that education and school have an important role in forming appropriate behaviour towards the mentally ill and the sick. It is very important to find in the health education school curricula objectives that combine interdisciplinary theoretical and practical knowledge: medical, pedagogical, psychological, communication, which lead to the formation of health skills (Melissa Stormont, Wendy M. Reinke, Keith C Herman, 2009). Starting from these directions, it is possible to reach a quality training of young people in the field of mental health by perfecting the skills of using conceptual language, training the capacities to apply concepts and paradigms related to mental health, forming a prosocial attitude (Petra C .Gronholm, Elizabeth Nye, Daniel Michelson, 2018). The educational approach will aim not only at the theorization of concepts, but especially at the practical use of theoretical elements regarding prevention, improvement and optimizing intervention in the field of mental health (Prof Celso Arango MD, and all, 2018).
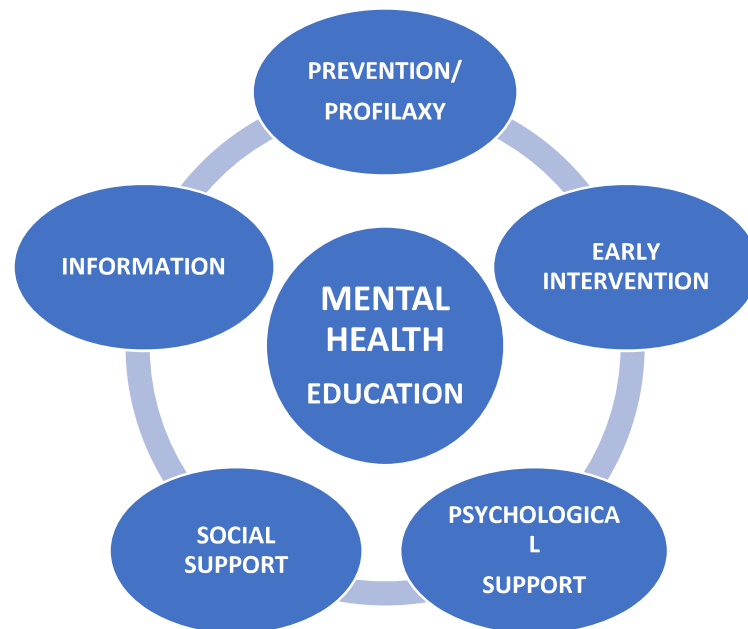

Figure no1. The role of education in preventing mental health illness

By improving the educational curriculum (Jungrim Moon, Anne Williford, Amy Mendenhall, 2017) with a multidisciplinary character: pedagogic, psychological, sociological, the emphasis is placed on optimizing the specialized skills and transversal skills of the learners, focusing on:
- reducing social risks at the individual, family, group, community and society level;
- development, implementation of health education projects with an emphasis on prevention;
- prevention and elimination of prejudices against mental illness sufferers;
- the ability to understand and intervene in the case of people suffering from mental illnesses

(Mc Luckie A, Kutcher S, Wei Y, et al. 2014).

It is important to insist within educational programs on the development of certain transversal skills necessary in social life:
- Formation of critical, creative thinking, and of the ability to interpret scientific information;
- Development of applied competences through the development of autonomy and responsibility;
- Knowledge of and respect for moral principles and norms, based on value options;
- Formation and development of communication skills for various social interactions in a globalized, diverse and multicultural world;
- Development of cooperation and effective teamwork skills;
- Objective and theoretical debate on some problem situations with the purpose of identifying effective solution in compliance with social values and principles;
- Familiarization with the main currents and approaches in the socio-medical field and the main aspects of the provision of medical-social assistance.

All these skills lead to the improvement of young people's education, to the development of new skills in the field of mental health, with an emphasis on respecting moral and social values and principles (Moscovici, S., 2011). The general mission of the school is to form future generations better prepared for social and professional integration, to reduce social inequalities, to combat poverty and social exclusion (Jorm A., 2012). Education aims at a good quality of life for all, respecting fundamental social rights, social protection, campaigning for the creation of quality social services, including services for the most vulnerable groups, protecting health through prevention/prophylaxis and defending the rights of all, including individuals with mental disorders,

thereby promoting social progress (Jungrim Moon, Anne Williford, Amy Mendenhall, 2017).

Methodology

The study was carried out by students from our faculty, from the master's programs between 2021-2022 on a sample of 300 respondents, from different age categories: school-children, young people, adults and elderly persons, 100 each from three counties: Arad, Timisoara and Caraș-Severin. The people surveyed come from different backgrounds, urban and rural areas, have different levels of education and are of different genders.
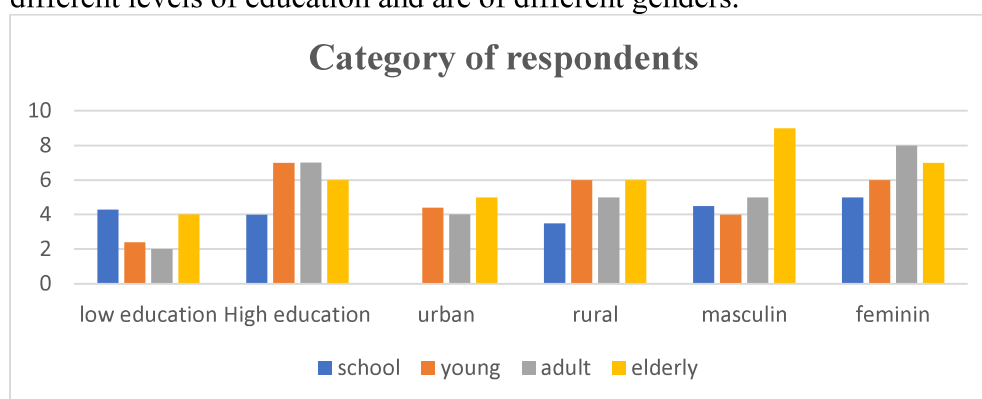
Graphic no.1. Categories of respondents

The respondents, volunteers chosen randomly, had to answer a number of 10 questions, with Yes or No.

1. Are you familiar with the concept of mental health?
2. Can sanity be recovered?
3. Can you name some conditions that fall under the mental health field?
4. Do you think it is absolutely necessary to go to a specialist when we feel that our mental state is suffering?
5. Would you discuss your mental illness with your family or friends?
6. Do you think that society stigmatizes a person with mental health problems?
7. Do you think that people with mental illnesses are a threat to society?
8. Does stigma affect the lives of people with mental health problems?
9. Can a mental illness be cured?
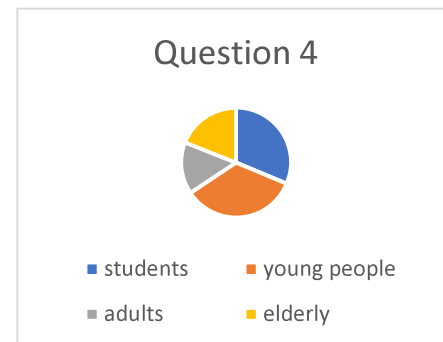10. Are entrepreneurs open to hiring a person with mental health problems?
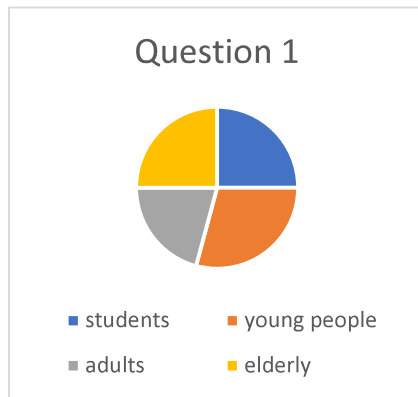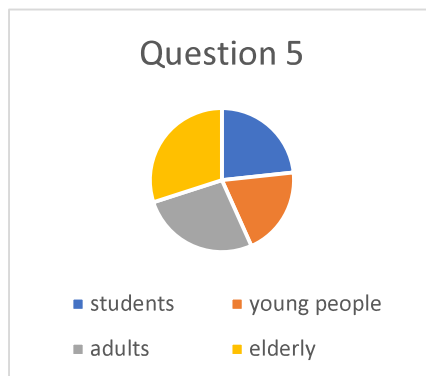
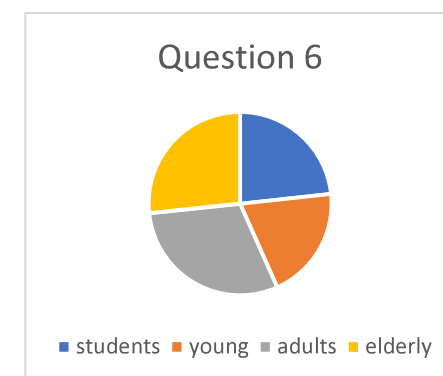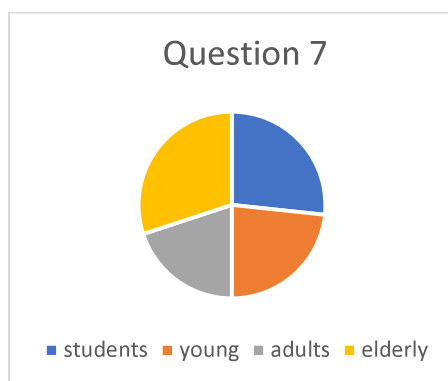Graphic no.2 Question1.   Graphic no.3 Question 2.
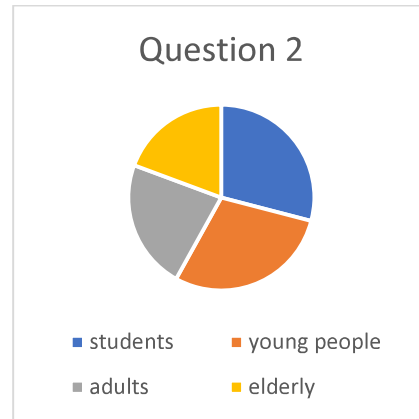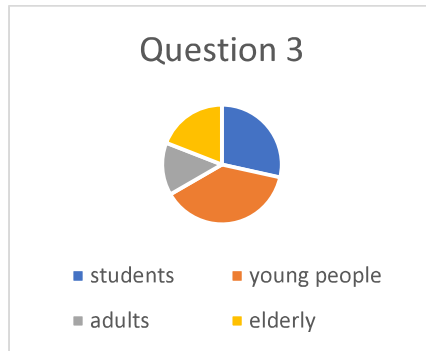
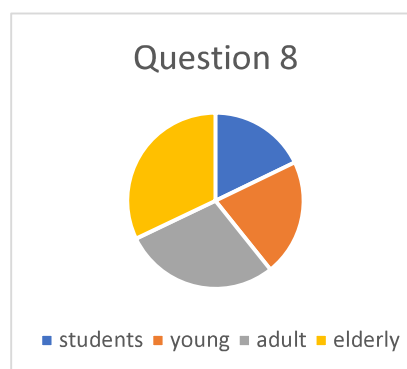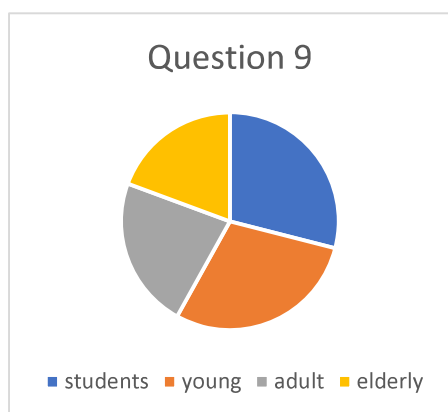Graphic no.4 Question 3.   Graphic no.5 Question 4.
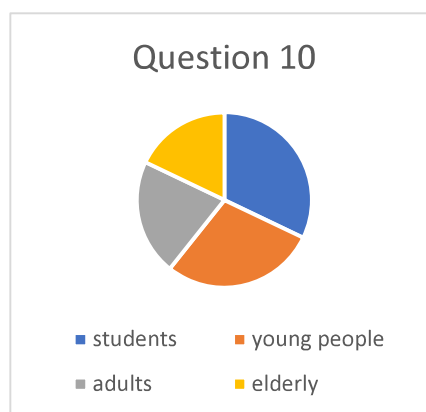

Graphic no.6 Question 5.   Graphic no.7 Question 6.

Graphic no.8. Question 7.

Graphic no.9 Question 8.

Graphic no.10 Question 9.

Graphic no.11 Question 10.

Results

We find out that the respondents gave similar answers, however there are some differences that we want to point out. For questions 1 and 2 the answers were very close, on the other hand for questions 3 and 4 young people and students have more information and show more confidence in the medical system and are more aware of the need to call on medical services.

In questions 5 and 6, differences can be observed. If students and young people are more reserved in discussing the problem of mental health, considering that they will be stigmatized by society, with adults and the elderly these fears are lower. For question no. 7, the differences between the answers given by the 4 groups are similar. In question 8, students and young people are more convinced than adults and the elderly that stigma contributes to professional and social dysfunction.

From the answers to question no.9 we find out that young people and students are more confident in curing these conditions (with professional help) than adults and the elderly who are more sceptical.

For question no. 10, we again find differences between the answers of students and young people who trust the professional integration of people suffering from various ailments, while adults and the elderly are less confident.

We can say that there are gaps in the knowledge of aspects related to mental health, of the correct attitude towards people suffering from a mental illness, of the knowledge of citizen's rights and obligations.

Conclusions

It is necessary to inform the population as widely as possible in order to form a prosocial attitude, to avoid prejudices and to form a supportive and empathetic behaviour. School, education can do many training activities through information campaigns, through extracurricular activities, through volunteering activities, projects focused on mental health education. Improving the quality of life of people who have acquired a mental illness is a major objective that can be achieved by activating educational, social, demographic, psychosocial and biological factors. Poverty, social isolation, loss of independence are causes that lead to the deterioration of the mental health of vulnerable people. Promoting mental health involves creating conditions for people who have gone through an episode of mental illness so that they can enjoy life, their personal qualities and talents, carry out a productive activity, or actively participate in social life.

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