

Children and Young
People's Mental
Health and Wellbeing
ECIE5009

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Identify and critically explore the issues that can have an impact on the Mental Health and Well-being in children and young people.

Introduction

Mental health and well-being are crucial to children being able and ready to learn. Children need to be ready for learning and a significant part of that is to do with how they are feeling. Children need to be engaged and have all their basic needs met before they can indeed begin to learn. Mental Health has been defined as a state of well-being in which an individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community. Well-being is a broader concept that encompasses not only mental health but also physical, emotional, and social aspects of a person's quality of life. It often refers to a positive state where individuals feel satisfied, function well, and thrive across various areas of life (WHO, 2025).

Children and young people have the right to be safe, to have their well-being and mental health protected as well as having solutions and strategies available to help them. The UN Convention on Children's Rights includes Articles 6,19, 24,27 aims to protect the well-being and mental health of the children. Despite this there are several factors which can have an adverse effect on children's learning and for some 'the hurdles are made greater by adversity, whether poverty, physical learning or development disability, trauma, immigration, asylum seekers or refugee status (Claveirole, 2010).

Over recent years the Welsh government has pledged to develop new programmes to support children and young people with their health and well-being and their mental health. The New Curriculum in Wales focuses on a learner's being 'healthy, confident individuals. The Area of learning for Health & Well-being will help learners explore the connections between their experiences, mental health and emotional well-being. By being provided with opportunities to explore the complexities of these connections, learners can be enabled to recognise that feelings and emotions are neither fixed nor consistent (Welsh Government, 2019).

Family engagement, abuse and neglect, bullying, academic pressure, social relationships, trauma, socioeconomic factors, physical health, parental mental health and substance abuse are all issues that affect and effect how children are able to engage with learning in school and how they behave. As teaching practitioners, it is important for us to be able to recognise and escalate any concerns regarding a child's mental health and well-being. Children's well-being affects their learning. If children have a poor sense of self and low confidence, this affects their progress in the curriculum (Glazzard, 2018). This essay will discuss the various factors that have an impact on the mental health and well-being of children and young people.

Socioeconomic Factors

A recent study concluded that irrespective of the long-term impact of poverty, growing up in impoverished households directly impacted on the wellbeing of children and young people. Children who were poor were more likely than those who were not poor to have a more difficult home life, have negative attitudes towards school, to feel isolated and anxious and to engage in antisocial and risky behaviour (Estyn, 2021). Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, deprivation and housing have a direct correlation with children and young people having low well-being and developing mental health issues. If children are not fed, kept warm and subjected to poor living conditions these can all have an everlasting effect on a children or young person who is then not able to engage in learning. In Wales the Bevan Foundation found 13% of people struggled to afford the essentials of life often or always. A further 31% had gone without heating in their homes, and 24% had to cut back on meals to get by. Worries about finances affected 44% of people's mental health and impacted their ability to work. The report found living standards in Wales had not improved since 2023, and that struggles with money were seen by many as a 'new normal' (Mind, 2024). This again illustrates how as Maslow's theory shows that each layer has to be achieved before unlocking the next one until you reach your goal. Children and young people need to feel safe and secure and have their basic needs met and be regulated before any meaningful learning can take place. Lower wellbeing scores were noted for people living in material deprivation (40.8), for younger age groups, and for people with poor physical health (39.1) (Mind, 2024).

Family Dynamics

Family Dynamics including parental mental health and domestic violence are extremely difficult issues for children and young people to have been involved with and can have a lasting effect on their own well-being and mental health if intervention is not sought to help them. Children and young people that are exposed to domestic violence can become withdrawn, isolated and terrified by these traumatic events. This can also be said of those children and young people who are growing up with a parent or parents with a mental health issue which again h=can have an immense impact of the child resulting in a change in their behaviour. Both of these traumatic events can provide immense difficulties for those children who have been exposed to these events resulting in a dis-engaged learner and in some cases sporadic attendance. Crisis event rates were also strongly patterned by socioeconomic deprivation, with children and young people living in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales having almost double the rate of crisis events compared with those living in the 20% least deprived areas (Public Health Wales, 2022).

If you consider Maslow's and Bowlby's theory it really depends on the relationship the child has with themselves and the caregiver, if this is affected or damaged the evidence shows that it dismantles the

foundations and structure for children and young people who are then highly likely to go into the face more challenges in later life.

Educational Pressures

Bullying in childhood has been classified by the WHO as a major public health problem and for decades has been known to increase the risk of poor health, social and educational outcomes in childhood and adolescence (Armitage, 2021). Stress and Bullying can have long-lasting effects on children and young people and result in them becoming withdrawn, isolated and in severe cases they take their own lives - suicide. Children and young people experiencing these issues will be unable to engage with learning or participate due to their mental health and well-being being so low due to what is happening to them.

Children can exhibit a change in behaviour become withdrawn, isolated and refuse to get involved. They may appear to be sad, more anxious and may not take part in lessons when they previously had done. These actions again completely devastate the child and their ability to learn and engage with lessons and their peers. This is yet another example of whereby the school is taking responsibility for the child and trying to access the correct medical help for them in order to help them and get them back to learning.

Social Media and Technology

In recent years the use of social media and technology has become an increasingly concerning issue with regards to children having access to this technology and social media platforms. There is so much concern about these platforms that many parent groups are looking at making it illegal for children to have a mobile phone and access to social media platforms until they are aged 16. Evidence has suggested that excessive social media use is associated with behaviours, such as poor sleep, increased social comparisons, impact on learning, and exposure to cyberbullying and negative content, that could contribute to the worsening of depressive symptoms (Hopkins Medicine, 2025). Again, the role of schools is to educate and help learners engage in positive behaviours that have good outcomes for them and help them recognise their emotions and strategies they can use to help. The school is there to educate on the role of how to use social media and technology and equip learners with the skills and tools to be able to navigate them safely and provide them with the strategies of what to do when things are not safe.

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

If children have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) within their childhood this can have a detrimental effect on their ability to engage with education and leave them vulnerable to experiencing addictions to drugs, alcohol, depression and anxiety. Prior studies have consistently shown that child abuse and neglect are strong predictors of adult depression in both general

populations (Crandell et al, 2019). These traumatic experiences completely consume and leave the children and young people with severe issues which will need counselling, therapy and a constant help. Without intervention these issues will escalate beyond repair. Bowlby's attachment theory focus's heavily on the early relations hip the child has with their caregiver and if this is affected by an ACE then the child can go onto have issues with attachment later in life. Based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 2005), empirical studies have consistently shown that individuals with experiences of child emotional abuse and neglect are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles (Crandell et al, 2019).

Cultural and Identify Factors

Discrimination and Identify factors are also issues that can affect the mental health and well-being of children and young people today. As children and young people develop and grow and discover who they are there may be difficulties coming to terms with this from themselves, family and friends. This can cause an immense amount of stress and pressure. Facing daily discrimination during adolescence, whether it is denied access to services or bullying or assault, for example, has been shown to increase cortisol levels – the body's primary stress hormone, which can lead to further health problems including fatigue, headaches, anxiety or depression and increased blood pressure (UNICEF, 2022). The evidence is clear and apparent that any form of discrimination can lead to severe challenges for children and young people earl yon or later on in their life. We should be working together to eradicate these forms of discrimination and protect those children who need it. Discrimination profoundly affects the mental health of children and young people. Whether it's based on race, gender, disability, or other factors, discriminatory treatment can lead to severe mental health challenges (Care Learning, 2024).

School and Mental Health and Well-being

Schools have an important role to play in supporting pupils' long-term health and wellbeing needs, as well as their present needs. For example, good education outcomes, including good literacy and numeracy skills, are strongly associated with good adult outcomes in health and wellbeing (Estyn, 2019). Whilst it appears that we have clear definitions of what well-being and mental health are and how vital they are to our children. It is clear that without the foundations in place children will be unable to engage and learn due to the traumas and events that they have experienced. Repeated traumatic experiences in childhood can have a devastating impact on the stability of the foundations of a child's development (Brooks, 2019). This supports the argument that a child's foundations are their core and if their needs are not met then they are unlikely in particular to engage with learning in a school environment. That is not to say that they will be defined by these experiences with the right intervention and support they can continue to have a very fruitful and engaging life but without the

support they may slip into the behaviours associated with severe trauma including addiction, depression and anxiety.

Maslow's theory of hierarchy depicts this so aptly by defining that a person's basic needs need to be met in order to be completely fulfilled and reach your full potential. This includes for example, being safe, warm and having enough food, feeling secure and being emotionally aided and helped. You cannot progress without each stage being met first and only then can you progress to the final stage of self-actualisation. There are five levels in Maslow's pyramid. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love and belonging needs (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow asserted that so long as basic needs necessary for survival were met (e.g., food, water, shelter), higher-level needs (e.g., social needs) would begin to motivate behaviour. (Macleod, 2024). Some would argue that Maslow's model did not intend for each level to be completed before moving onto the next one to reach the self-actualisation however there is significant evidence of the model being used in this way. Bowlby's attachment theory suggest that the primary caregiver has an instrumental relationship with the child and should this be affected then this could result in the child having attachment issues later on in life and also not being able to trust adults depending on what traumatic event had happened to them.

Schools need to ensure that they have an holistic and integrated to mental health and well-being within their settings. This includes the children and staff. There must be consistent and practical approaches and solutions to ensure that children feel they have a space safe and can build relationships with the adults who can help them. In a school setting there are several ways in which the school can support and provide interventions for those children we are finding it difficult to engage with learning. For example, all schools should have a Health and Well-being policy for children and staff. All schools have a domestic violence policy and safeguarding policy which all staff are trained on. This could be linked to School development plan dependant on the objectives set by the school. Schools have an ALNCo, Health and Well-being Lead for the AOLE and in some areas ELSA's although this is dependent on training and support from the local authorities. Schools are at the epicentre of providing support and interventions for these children and providing awareness of mental health issues for instance in **(School A, 2025)** they provide an enrichment timetable which covers health and well-being as topic, health and well-being questionnaires are sent to pupils and parents as well as pupils being able to take part in Pupil Voice Groups to express their opinions and views on a range of topics and issues. Health & well-being is taught as a separate topic so for example this term all children are covering emotional regulation and how to recognise their emotions and what strategies they can use to help them if and when they need it for example if they are angry or sad where can they go, who can they speak to and what they can do themselves to help independently. Schools have long been viewed as a natural setting in which to deliver student mental health initiatives and programs. This view has

largely been born from the twin observations that youth mental health represents a major public health issue (Shute and Slee, 2016).

(School A, 2025) provides information to all parents on Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) and this can be found on the school website and school notice boards as well as in the school newsletters (Appendix 2). This again provides evidence to show how schools are supporting their learners with their mental health and well-being issues to try and support them back into the classroom and learning again. Health and well-being are a current priority on the school development plan this demonstrates a clear and holistic approach to delivering health and well-being within the school and ensures that leadership team are driving the changes needed to support their learners. Some would argue that this is just a paper exercise however these objectives are checked and monitored by the school governing body, challenge advisor and Estyn (Appendix, 3). School A also provides sensory areas where children can go and take time to reflect on and regulate their emotions in a calming and safe space (Appendix, 1).

Conclusion

It is apparently clear that there are several issues that impact children and young people's Mental health and well-being. These issues are complex and intertwined with many others making it expertly difficult at times to navigate for all parties concerned. However, what is abundantly clear is that schools are at the forefront of dealing and escalating these issues. Whether its providing breakfast clubs, snacks and school meals, funding for school trips or providing pre-loved uniform to those families that need it, to engaging with external agencies such as Exchange Counselling, CAMHS and Early Help Hub to get those children and young people who are suffering the right intervention to help them on the road to recovery and to a place where they can begin to engage with learning again. Schools are providing some would argue the social care aspect more and more in light of the overstretched NHS services and exceptionally long waiting times children and parents are having to wait to be able to access a mental health professional and the treatment that they need. The analysis reveals that across the UK, the number of children and young people experiencing mental health problems is growing. Mental health services are expanding, but not fast enough to meet rising needs, leaving many children and young people with limited or no support (Public Health Wales, 2022).

Funding and resources continue to be a crisis points in schools across the country with the need for more interventions and support rising each year with an already stretched and overworked services. Schools are picking up these issues and having to become creative in ways of accessing the support for their learners. This can take months and more often years. The question we should be asking is what are we doing to equip our school staff to deal with these issues? We're currently in the middle of a mental health crisis. The scale and severity of mental health need is spiralling, but too many of us aren't getting the help we need. A lack of funding and resources, financial insecurity, racism,

discrimination, stigma – they're all playing a part in the problems many of us are facing. The system is at breaking point and without urgent action things will get worse. This would be a catastrophe for people and their communities (Mind, 2024).

Schools are at the forefront, and some would argue breaking point of dealing with the rising mental health and well-being challenges which as evidence shows are rising year on year. However, if more funding and resources were made available, and investment was made into training primary and secondary staff on some of these issues this could provide a solution to the current pressures in the system, but it has to be a balance and not a one-way system. The children need to be at the centre of these priorities and by not acting now to invest and train teachers and staff we are doing them a disservice that could prove costly in their later life. Schools and colleges can promote and protect children and young people's mental health. They can do this by building mental health literacy, creating supportive and inclusive environments and offering early and targeted mental health support (Estyn, 2019). Isn't it about time we changed?

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Sensory Area used by children needing a quiet space to reflect and regulate.



Appendix 2 – ELSA Information is available on the school website. The ELSA programme is described for parents and gives them more information on the ELSA role.

The screenshot displays the ELSA website interface. At the top left, the URL 'primary.co.uk/elsa' is visible. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- ELSA's can help with...**: A list of topics including Loss & bereavement, Self-esteem, Social skills, Understanding and recognising emotions, Friendships, Anxiety & worries, Relaxation techniques, Emotion regulation, and And much more! A cartoon bee character is positioned below this list.
- What are the benefits?**: A section explaining that children learn better if their emotional needs are addressed, allowing them to attend and concentrate in school. It also states that ELSA sessions can help learners to:
 - Develop coping strategies and communicate their thoughts and feelings.
 - Interact with others.
 - Develop greater self-awareness.
 - Manage school better and feel better about themselves.
- ELSA Emotional Literacy Support Assistants**: A large heading with a sub-heading 'A Guide for Parents' below it, accompanied by a graphic of a tablet.

At the bottom of the page, there is a photo of Mrs Stephanie Blakemore, an ELSA Trained TA. To her right, text describes her role: 'Mrs Stephanie Blakemore is our ELSA Trained TA, she holds sessions on a regular basis with our children providing extra support, reassurance and emotional coaching.' Logos for 'Cynor Abertawe Swansea Council' and 'ELSA NETWORK REGISTERED' are located at the bottom right.

Appendix 3 – School Development Plan

	Knelston Primary School	'Dream, Believe, Achieve Together'	
School Development Priorities - Jan 2025 - Jan 2026			
IA 1 – Teaching and learning	1. To enhance the curriculum to ensure clear skill development and personalised learning through high-quality teaching. • To review the mapping of skills and provision across the school, to ensure effective coverage and progression. • To develop and create flexible maths learning groups. • To consistently deliver high-quality teaching. • Establish a consistent approach to marking and feedback to ensure that it scaffolds learning and helps pupils to progress • To create clear assessment practices that track skill development, providing regular feedback and adjustments to teaching for ongoing progress. • To further develop Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision and wellbeing.		
IA 2 – Wellbeing, care, support and guidance	2. To continue to establish strong, engaging links with our school community. • To provide opportunities that strengthen home/school partnerships. • To strengthen links with wider school community. • To support and enhance staff well-being. • To increase pupils' exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences.		
IA 3 - Leading and improving	3. To continue to embed, monitor and evaluate changes to our curriculum, ensuring that evaluations focus clearly on the impact of actions taken. • To continually refine and strengthen monitoring and evaluation strategies • To strengthen the impact of pupil voice in driving school improvement initiatives.		

Dream, Believe, Achieve Together.



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