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Mental Health in Adolescents and Young People: the *Konsulta'm* Project

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Mental health is a priority by the Barcelona City Council, especially among the young and adolescent population, due to the collected data about the mental well-being of these groups. As a result of the Barcelona's first Mental Health Plan, the City Council has launched the *Konsulta'm* programme, aiming for the detection and early intervention in mental health problems in adolescents and young people aged between 12 and 22. Therefore, the programme is there to guide the communities' professionals of mental health who work with young and adolescent population, and to listen to adolescents and young people who need a specialised, dynamic and immediate response to their suffering by clinic professionals of the mental health public network. This article describes the data in relation with mental health of the city's young people and shows how this municipal programme has become an appropriate and necessary resource to deal with this social reality.

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which the individual is conscious of their own abilities, can deal with the usual tensions of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is capable of contributing to their community (World Health Organization, 2013a). Since it is estimated that approximately 15% of the population will suffer from some kind of mental illness over the course of their life, mental health has been incorporated as a priority in the programmes and policies of European countries. For this reason, the member states of the European region of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2005), the European Commission and the Council of Europe signed the Mental Health Declaration for Europe in 2005 in Helsinki. This document recognises the promotion of mental health and the prevention and treatment of mental disorders as fundamental objectives for the protection and improvement of the well-being and quality of life of the entire population.

In this context, within the framework of Barcelona City Council's health policies, in 2016 the first Barcelona Mental Health Plan 2016-2022 was drawn up and approved at the Municipal Plenary (Barcelona City Council, 2016). This is a shared city strategy to encourage a framework that can provide for the promotion, prevention and care for the mental health of the citizens. This plan is in alignment with the policies and recommendations promoted by other institutions, such as the Catalan Government (Comprehensive Care Plan for People with Mental Disorders and Addictions and the Master Plan for Mental Health and Addictions. Generalitat de Catalunya, 2017) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020) (WHO, 2013b).

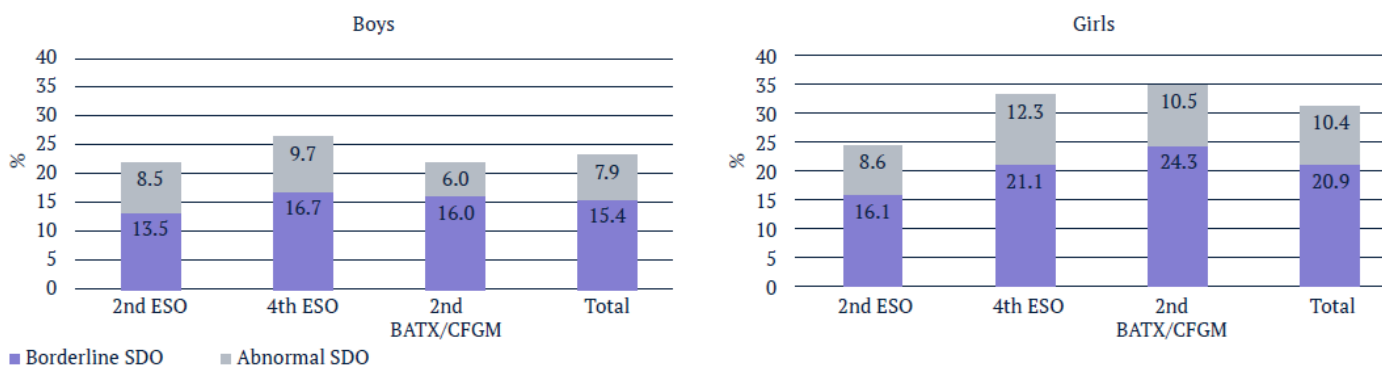
This plan was created with the impetus and leadership of Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Public Health Agency, but it also involved and continues to involve the voices of municipal political groups, various sectors of the City Council (health, employment, housing, education, social services, etc.), organisations providing mental health services, professional and scientific organisations, and other institutions such as the Barcelona Public Health Agency, the Barcelona Health Consortium, the Barcelona Education Consortium and the Catalan Ministry of Health. The Barcelona Mental Health Plan 2016-2022 consists of four strategic lines, 11 objectives and 111 action plans, encompassing activities designed for the promotion of psychological well-being in residents of Barcelona, the provision of high-quality accessible services for people suffering from mental illness, as well as assistance in carrying out life projects to the highest possible satisfaction and in the struggle against stigma and discrimination.

Given the unanimous consensus on the urgency and necessity of focusing efforts on care during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, the plan prioritises care for people at this stage of life. With this priority in mind, efforts have been focused on the stage of adolescence, a stage of life in which many physical, social and emotional changes take place, to which we must continually adapt and adjust.

The data indicate that, in Europe, between 15% and 20% of adolescents present a psychological or behavioural problem, and these have a higher risk of continuing into adulthood and even becoming chronic (WHO, 2005). It is estimated that almost half of the mental health problems presented in adulthood began during adolescence (Kessler *et al.*, 2007; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick and McGorry, 2007).

The report *Mental Health in Barcelona 2016*, which the Barcelona Public Health Agency (ASPB, 2017) carried out within the framework of the plan, highlights the presence of psychological problems in 7.9% of boys and 10.4% of girls, while those that would be at the boundary represent 15.4% and 20.9%, respectively (graph 1). In all age groups, there is a higher proportion of girls with psychological problems than boys. Moreover, the symptomatology shows a tendency to worsen over time in girls, which was not observed in the same way in boys.

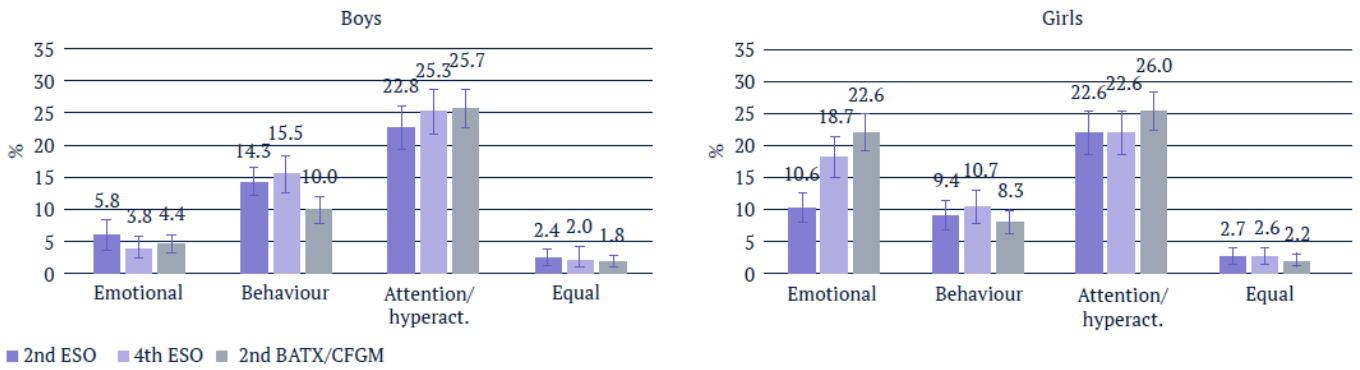
Graph 1. Prevalence of psychological problems by size of the SDQ in adolescent schoolchildren, according to sex and year group. Barcelona. 2016



Source: Barcelona Public Health Agency, 2017.

In reference to the types of problems, according to the results of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) included in the report, attention and hyperactivity difficulties have a higher prevalence in all age groups, in both boys and girls (graph 2). In girls, emotional problems stand out, and in boys, it is behavioural problems.

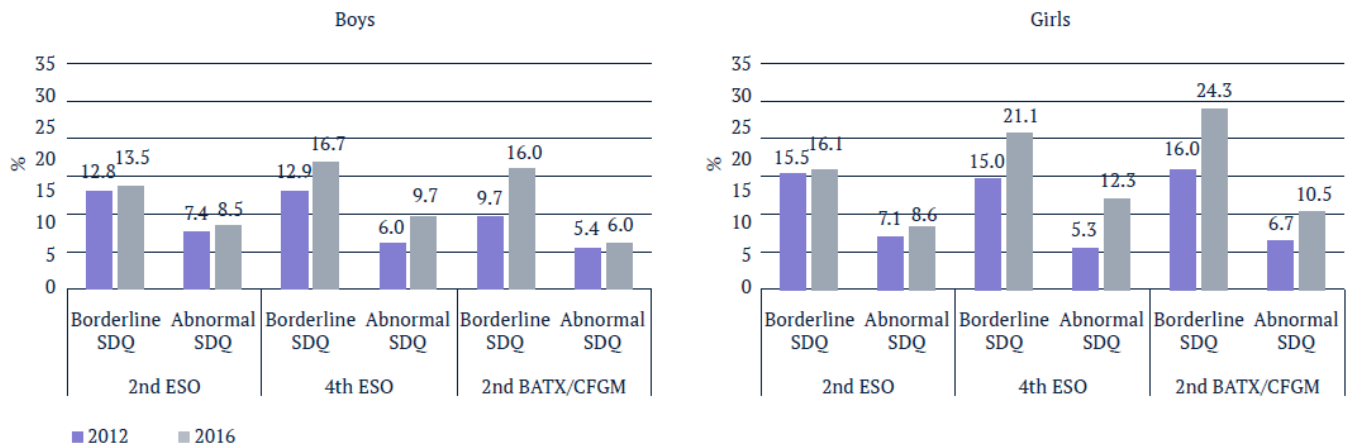
Graph 2. Prevalence of psychological problems by size of the SDQ in adolescent schoolchildren, according to sex and year group. Barcelona, 2016



Source: Barcelona Public Health Agency, 2017.

On the other hand, this report also highlights an increase in the prevalence of psychological problems in 2016 versus 2012, specifically among boys aged 15-16, and girls aged 15-19 (graph 3).

Graph 3. Prevalence of psychological problems in adolescent schoolchildren, according to sex and year group. Barcelona, 2012-2016



Source: Barcelona Public Health Agency, 2017.

Although there can be a genetic predisposition in the development of psychological difficulties, we must also take into account the environmental factors that have an impact. In this respect, a higher prevalence was recorded among schoolchildren in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in comparison with the population of neighbourhoods with a higher average income.

To draw up the plan, a qualitative analysis was carried out of the mental health needs that were detected in Barcelona city. A result of this analysis was the document 'Challenges, Facts and Proposals' of the Mental Health Plan (Barcelona City Council, 2016), which presents two challenges related to adolescence. On the one hand, the need to generalise the emotional and social learning necessary in adolescence and provide new listening, counselling and support services for this group. From this challenge arises the proposal to identify and promote new listening, support and counselling services for adolescents, with new formats: the right people, at the right place and time (for example, incorporating guides in the places where adolescents relate to each other). On the other hand, the need to provide earlier, more intensive, higher quality care to children and young people with the greatest mental health difficulties. Providing training and knowledge in these subjects (for example, learning to observe children's behaviour and interpret it) for professionals working in child care services is proposed, especially of those who work with groups at higher risk.

From both the data presented previously and the needs detected in the participatory process of the Mental Health Plan set out in the document 'Challenges, Facts and Proposals' detailed above, the plan prioritises care for children, adolescents and young people. This priority is being put into action with the development of various actions on the part of different parties. For example, the ASPB's emotional education project for children aged 3 to 5 in Barcelona schools called '1,2,3, Emoció!', the 'Escoles enriquides' ('Enriched Schools') programme from the Barcelona Education Consortium and the Neighbourhood Plan, which consists of support from different professional profiles, such as the social educator or the emotional education technique, in the city's high complexity schools, and the support service 'Aquí t'escoltem' ('We listen you here'), for adolescents and young people from the City Council Department for Young People.

With reference to early detection and preventive intervention in difficulties relating to mental health that can appear in adolescence and young adulthood, as has been mentioned earlier, it is important that it is carried out in the proximity of the young people themselves, both in the spaces in which they live their daily lives, for example youth centres, as well as training professionals and volunteers who are in permanent day-to-day contact with this group.

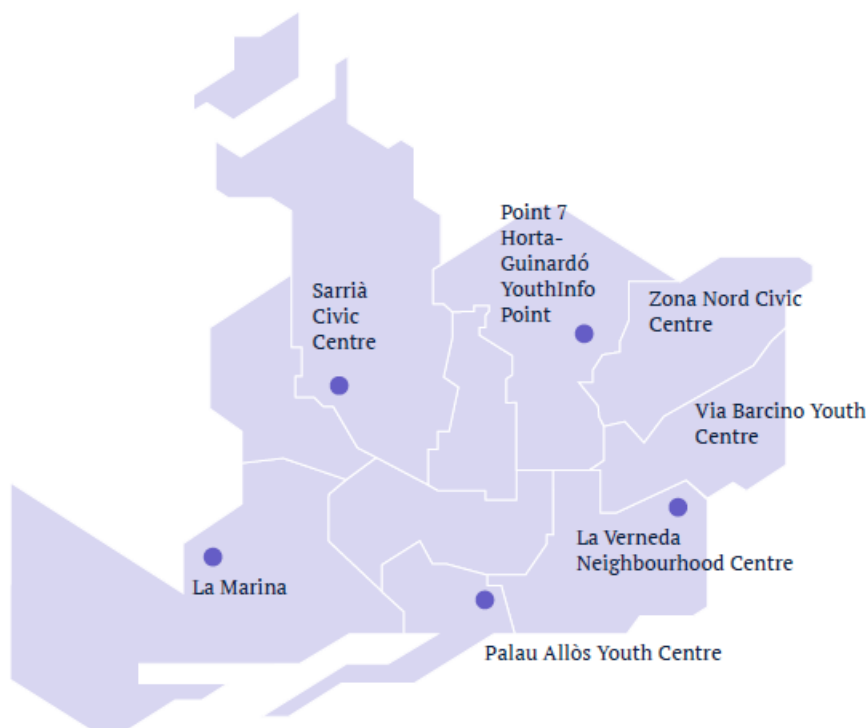
In order to take advantage of the spontaneity of young people who need an immediate response to their emotional problem or specific issue, it is necessary to try to provide a response as quickly as possible, without prior appointment. The complementarity of the community programmes and resources designed for young people and the networking of professionals are also important.

One of the projects promoted as part of the Mental Health Plan aimed at adolescents and young people in order to respond to the above criteria is the *Konsulta'm* programme, with the goal of detection and early intervention in mental health problems in adolescents and young people aged from 12 to 22. The programme consists of the following: one evening a week, in a youth centre or similar facility, without prior appointment, a clinical psychologist and a social educator or nurse from the mental health centre for children and young people (CSMIJ) or for adults (CSMA) offers a listening service for children and young people who need a specialised, rapid and immediate response to their problem, and provides tools to deal with distressing personal situations. If necessary, they offer specialised counselling and support for families and, if it appears necessary to carry out a specific clinical evaluation or intervention, they accompany the adolescent and their family to the referral mental health service. The most interesting aspect of the programme is that it is made available to professionals and voluntary workers in the area who work with adolescents and young people (in open centres, youth clubs and other leisure facilities, in education centres, etc.). It offers advice and guidance on specific cases or situations that can be found during the course of their daily professional work, as well as intervention in the natural environment and training exercises, when required.

The *Konsulta'm* programme was launched at the Palau Alòs Youth Centre in the Santa Caterina neighbourhood in June 2018 and, so far, various different points have been opened. Seven points have now been launched, and it is forecast that by the end of 2019 there will be a total of nine points covering the whole city. Their distribution is shown in figure 1.

In the period 2018-2020, the programme is in its pilot phase, during which the basic elements of the model are being developed, using a working group formed of various professionals who manage the programme in each area and also those who work with adolescents and young people in the community. The evaluation will be carried out later. This programme must involve a change of perspective and way of working in the different professional fields, as well as the articulation and joint work of the mental health network and the community network, putting the adolescent or young person at the centre of the intervention and reducing the disjointed approach.

Figure 1. Distribution of Konsulta'm points



For the year 2019, two more points are pending.

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