



Symposium 5 – 2018 Nordic Implementation Conference

Implementation Theory and Practice in Child Welfare

Presenters: Pekka Kettunen, Olli Kiviruusu & Päivi Santalahti (Abo Akademi University, Turku, Finland); Päivi Santalahti, Eeva Huikko, Leena Kovalainen, Minna Torniaainen-Holm (THL, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland)

Presentation 1: IMPLEMENTATION THEORY REVISITED (Pekka Kettunen)

Research on implementing public policies has long roots (Pressman & Wildavsky 1974; Hill & Hupe 2014), however, during the last decades there seems to be a declining interest. One potential reason to explain this is the rise of governance research, which more or less covers the same issues discussed earlier in the implementation literature (Hill & Hupe 2014). Looking at the models of policy implementation one can draw a conclusion that the current understanding of the implementation process is more analytic and nuanced compared to the earlier explanations. Context, for example, is emphasized much more than earlier. A realistic perspective of evaluation (Pawson & Tilley 1996) recommends a deep-going understanding of the environment, in which an intervention is supposed to impact, and through an analysis of different mechanisms and factors affecting the targeted behaviour or action, the likelihood of increased effectiveness is higher.

Furthermore, it has been asked (Kettunen 2016) whether correct implementation covers only the process, or the impact as well. It makes sense to claim the latter, as the purpose of interventions is to bring about change. However, it has proved difficult to generalize findings from one case study to a larger context. Also, public policies and interventions vary a lot when it comes to certainty over the impact. This seems to be connected to the degree of control there is in the implementation of the intervention, the more, the better chances there are to predict the outcome. The presentation summarizes and critically examines the implementation theory, its assumptions, perspectives and recommendations.

Presentation 2: Implementation related factors and effectiveness of the “Together at School” intervention program on school-children’s socio-emotional skills (Olli Kiviruusu & Päivi Santalahti)

For an intervention program to be effective it has to be carefully implemented. Recent research suggests modest effects (at most) of universal school-based intervention programs aimed at improving children’s mental health, with some null, or even negative, findings. A key question is whether and how factors relating to implementation affect the effectiveness of school-based intervention programs.

Aim

To analyze how implementation related factors contribute to the effectiveness of a universal school-based intervention program to promote mental health.



Methods

The Together at School (TGS) intervention program is based on a whole school approach and designed to support socio-emotional skills among primary-school children to promote mental health. To analyse its effectiveness a cluster randomized controlled trial was organized. Participants were some 4 000 children attending 1st to 3rd grade classes in 79 Finnish primary schools (40 intervention and 39 control schools).

The outcome measure for psychiatric symptoms was the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and for social skills the Multisource Assessment of Social Competence Scale (MASCS) measured at baseline and 18 months later.

Implementation related factors included school size, percentage of teachers per school participating in the TGS program and turnover of teachers in the intervention classes. In addition, intervention dosage (i.e. how much a teacher used TGS methods at class) was measured by the frequencies a teacher used the six central components of TGS.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary results indicate that in many schools only a required minimum of two teachers participated in the program. It seems, however, that this (small number of teachers) did not affect the intervention dosage used by them. Contrary to the intended protocol there was a 21 % teacher turnover

in the participating intervention classes. Preliminary analyses indicate further that the intervention dosage tended to drop in the second school-year studied in the RCT. In our presentation we will report how these and other dosage related factors affected the effectiveness of the intervention program. We will discuss our findings in the context of importance of implementation on the effectiveness of school-based intervention programs.

Presentation 3: Diffusion of treatment practices at child psychiatric services in Finland (Päivi Santalahti, Eeva Huikko, Leena Kovalainen, Minna Torniainen-Holm)

The epidemiological research during the last decades have shown that mental health problems are common among children and that majority of the psychiatric disorders among adults have started during childhood or adolescence. The better understanding of mental health problems of children and reduced stigma has contributed to increasing numbers of referred children to specialized mental health services. Effective treatments are developed but not available for many children even if they are referred to services.

Aim

To find out which treatment methods and how widely they have spread across Finland at child psychiatric services. To investigate numbers of children referred to specialized child psychiatric services in different hospital districts. Number of patients, visits and periods of inpatient treatments and diagnoses will be compared between the hospital districts.

Methods

All chief physicians (n=20) in Finland at central hospital's child psychiatric clinics were interviewed in spring 2017 with semi-structured interview and asked about the different methods used in the



treatment. Numbers of patients, visits and periods of inpatient treatments and diagnoses will be studied based on information of the Finnish hospital discharge register (HILMO).

Results and Discussion

Variations and similarities between numbers of patients and diagnoses and care practices in different hospital districts will be presented. The results will be discussed considering the health care structures and policy in Finland as well as considering the geographical realities.