

Message from Issue Editor



Nurturing Mental Health for Children and Youth: Individual Interventions, Family Work and Technology Assistance

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“There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.”
— Leonard Cohen

The mental health of children and youth is significant as it impacts their overall physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and academic performance. The longitudinal study of Brown, Davis and Wilson (2022) shows a positive relationship between mental health and the physical health of children. Children and youth with better mental health show better concentration, problem solving skills, decision-making abilities and academic performance (Kidger et al., 2012; Owen et al., 2007; Petal et al., 2007; Wickersham et al., 2021).

The issue theme is mental health for children and youth. Six papers were collected to discuss mental health of children, youth and their family carers with research and clinical practice in Hong Kong, mainland China and oversea.

In Hong Kong, children and youth’s mental health is related to the pressure to achieve academic excellence. In this issue, Angela Siu and her research team reported their study of 804 primary and secondary school students who were reported by their schools as ‘high academic achievers’. Psychological distress was found significantly and positively associated with fixed mindsets towards mental health. The study also identified gender differences in young participants’ scoring of depression, somatization, and mindsets towards depression.

During and after COVID-19, children and youth show increased anxiety, stress, problems of social isolation, increased screen time and online risks. Excessive screen time increases the risks of children and youth in sleep disturbance, cyber bullying, and exposure to harmful content (Choi et al., 2023). A recent local

survey (Wong et al., 2023) revealed that depression is the most diagnosed mental disorders in Hong Kong aside other mental disorders such as anxiety, panic disorder, bipolar disorder, and psychotic disorder. Winnie Yuen and her collaborators reported in this issue a strength-focused, youth-driven, and co-creative mental health prevention programme, which aimed to train adolescents to increase their awareness of mental health issues and implement their own community mental health educational activities. The programme is to reduce stigma and promote mental health and mental wellbeing among the youths in the community. Their pilot study of 46 youth trainees showed that the programme not only reduced stigma, but also cultivated a more positive attitude towards mental illnesses, and more self-understanding.

Psychological interventions for children should not be separated from close work with their families. An experienced counselling psychologist Cheung Yim shared her year-long work with families in the article “Unrevealed Truths About Normal Families”. She pointed out four types of family vulnerabilities in Hong Kong, including only children’s families, overly closely attached families, immigrant families, and families with maritally unhappy mothers. A case study was provided to illustrate how parents and families can reconcile the family rupture and restore the mental health of children. The paper points out the importance of enhancing parents’ awareness and helping them to recognize their influence on their children.

Caring for children with special educational needs can be challenging and demanding. A study by Davis and Carter (2008) found that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) showed higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety than other parents. Tang, Chunjiao and her research reported about the “Rehabilitation Needs of Parents of Children with

Autism Spectrum Disorder in Hubei Province". They conducted a survey among 186 parents of children with ASD in Hubei Province, which is in the middle of mainland China. The study shows that the parents of children with ASD suffered from great stress. They are in urgent need of psychological support.

Children are vulnerable to psychological trauma. Gong Xiaowei and his colleagues reported how sandtray play was used to help Chinese children undergo psychological trauma recovery in Wuhan city. Using four cases, they illustrated how to use sandtray play to work with children, who suffered from autism spectrum disorder, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or mental retardation. The study categorized four dimensions of psychological trauma recovery process, including emotions, social interaction, mental development, and personal growth and elaborated the five stages in the psychological trauma recovery process.

Similar to Hong Kong, one of the most prevalent mental health issues of young people in Australia is depression. Maria Rae and Judi Parson pointed out that Virtual Reality (VR) application could provide some easily accessible assistance despite the under resourced and mental health system. Using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (REF), they searched several databases systematically and organized data into Context-Mechanism-Outcome (C-M-O) configurations and contextualised within the framework of the Therapeutic Powers of Play (TPOP). Their paper shows that the use of personalised avatars, immersion and presence, enjoyment and accessibility could be the strength of VR to assist reducing symptoms of depression. We hope that their study can be inspiring for our readers in helping professions to design and test technology-involved safe psychotherapy projects for children and youth to improve their psychological well-being.

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