

EVALUATION OF 'ZIPPY'S FRIENDS', AN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Principal Investigator: Professor Margaret Barry
Researcher: Ms Aleisha Clarke
Funders: HSE Population Health, National Office for Suicide Prevention, Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences

Background

Zippy's Friends is an international school-based programme designed to promote the emotional wellbeing of children aged five to seven years old. In February 2008, the *Zippy's Friends* programme was introduced into Irish primary schools on a pilot basis as part of the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. With the support of the Department of Education and Science and the Health Service Executive, the programme was piloted in 30 designated disadvantaged schools (DEIS) in the West of Ireland. An evaluation of the pilot implementation of the programme was undertaken.

Research Aims

The aims of the evaluation study are to:

- Determine if an international evidence-based programme could be adapted and successfully implemented in the local context of disadvantaged primary schools in Ireland
- Assess the immediate and long term impact on the pupils' emotional and behavioural wellbeing and coping skills
- Examine the process of implementation and the relationship between this process and the programme outcomes.

Methods

The study employs a randomised controlled design, with data collection from teachers and pupils before, during, after and at 12 months post-implementation. A total of 730 pupils and 42 teachers from 41 designated disadvantaged schools were randomly assigned to control and intervention groups. The evaluation is comprised of a range of both structured questionnaires and qualitative methods, including children's participatory workshops and the draw and write technique, designed to assess the process of programme implementation and the programme effects on the children and teachers.

Results

Analysis of the baseline, interim, end of programme and follow up data is complete. The end of programme findings indicate that *Zippy's Friends* was successfully implemented in Irish primary schools and lead to significant improvements in the children's emotional literacy and coping skills, reduced hyperactivity levels and improved relationships in the classroom. Twelve month follow-up data revealed that improvements in the intervention groups' emotional literacy skills were maintained.

Dissemination

Clarke, A.M. & Barry, M.M. (2010). *An Evaluation of the Zippy's Friends Emotional Wellbeing Programme for Primary School Children in Ireland*. Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway.

Clarke, A.M., O'Sullivan, M., & Barry, M.M. (2010). Context Matters in Programme Implementation. *Health Education*, 110(4) 273-293.

