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6. Maternal Mental Health and Poverty: The Impact on Children's Educational Outcomes

At A Glance

This paper provides an 'at a glance' summary of the sixth Report of the Children and Youth Programme (CYP) which adopts a rights-based approach to examining the impact of maternal mental health on children's educational outcomes in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Using the General Measures of Implementation as an elementary tool for good policy (CYP, 2011) together with the principles of best interests and voice of the child, the objectives of the Report are to:

1. explore the relationship between poverty and mental health, particularly maternal mental health;
2. consider the dual impact of poverty and mental health on children and young people's educational experience;
3. identify existing community and school based provisions for affected children and young people in Ireland and Northern Ireland;
4. identify exemplars of interventions, nationally and internationally, that support access to, and enjoyment of, education for affected children and young people;
5. make recommendations for policy development and implementation.



Parents, particularly mothers, with poor mental health have particular needs to enable them to support and care for their children. The research evidence suggests that these children are an under-represented group: their needs are little understood and are only beginning to be afforded serious consideration in the legal, policy and practice context. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) identifies children's rights to enjoy access to education, as well as, the responsibility of the State party to provide familial, administrative and service support to ensure this can happen.

Key Conclusions

Drawing on the evidence the following key conclusions have been identified.

1. There is a need for better prevalence data on the number of children who have a parent with a mental health problem.
2. There is a need for further child-centred research to better understand the relationship between maternal mental health, poverty and children's educational outcomes.
3. Joint protocols between health and education can improve educational outcomes for children and young people.
4. Staff training and appropriate educational interventions within schools are crucial to enable children to enjoy access to a full educational experience.
5. Targeted interventions for families experiencing mental health problems should be slotted into existing parental programmes.

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The Children and Youth Programme

The Children and Youth Programme is an independent collaboration between the two UNESCO Chairs in Ireland at the University of Ulster and NUI Galway.



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