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# Mental health in schools

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## Interventions to combat the stigma surrounding mental illness

One in ten British secondary school children suffers from a mental health disorder. Prejudice from peers influences these children's self-esteem, delaying recovery and dissuading them from seeking appropriate medical advice. Policy-makers increasingly emphasise the importance of mental wellbeing in schools, yet little is known about how to intervene to improve young people's knowledge about, and attitudes towards, mental illness.

Professors Elizabeth Meins and Alex Wade from the Department of Psychology developed the Mental Health in Schools intervention ([mhislive.com](http://mhislive.com)) to increase knowledge and decrease stigma about mental illness. In collaboration with The Co-operative Academies Trust, the intervention is being delivered to over 20,000 children in over 30 schools across the North of England.

## The research

The original 'Mental Health in Schools' intervention was administered to around 2,000 secondary school children in North Yorkshire as part of their Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education curriculum. Pre-intervention data revealed significant negative correlations between teenagers' knowledge about mental illness, and both prejudice against people with mental illness and perceiving them to be dangerous. Lack of knowledge and prejudice were highest in boys, and in schools located in socially and economically deprived areas.

## The outcome

'Mental Health in Schools' led to a statistically significant increase in teenagers' knowledge about mental illness, and a statistically significant reduction in prejudice. After the intervention, teenagers knew more about mental health disorders and reported fewer negative views about those who suffer from them. No such effects were found in the control groups of children, who had received the standard PSHE curriculum.

In the current phase of the project, researchers have worked directly with teachers and teenagers to explore ways in which the 'Mental Health in Schools' resources could be made more relevant and appealing to those groups of children showing the least knowledge and most prejudice (boys and disadvantaged children). The new adaptation of 'Mental Health in Schools' has also been trialled in schools in inner city areas with more ethnically diverse populations. It is anticipated that the resources will be used nationally as part of the PSHE Education curriculum, to tackle misunderstanding and prejudice in relation to mental illness.



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