

### Nation wide monitoring of adolescent mental health in Sweden – preliminary results from 2009

*Docent Curt Hagquist, föreståndare för Centrum för forskning om barns och ungdomars psykiska hälsa, Karlstads universitet*

*Docent Sven Bremberg, Statens folkhälsoinstitut*

In the autumn of 2009 all students in Sweden in grades 6 and 9 were targeted in a mental health survey. The purpose of the study was not just to provide epidemiological data about the distribution of mental health problems among young people in Sweden but also to provide support and incentives for prevention work and health promotion measures in municipalities and counties.

The data collection was carried out in schools by Statistics Sweden. In all 172 298 students completed a questionnaire. The response rates in grades 6 and 9 were 86 and 80 percent respectively.

The questionnaire included three instruments intended to tap information about different aspects of mental health: Kidscreen – an instrument about health-related quality of life among children and adolescents, SDQ – the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire and the PSP-scale – the PsychoSomatic Problems scale. Based on psychometrical analyses of these instruments five different dimensions of mental health problems were selected for the further analyses and reports on mental health distributions. These dimensions comprise psychosomatic problems, concentration problems, emotional problems, psychological wellbeing and impact of mental health problems on everyday life in different contexts.

Local data on mental health is expected to support benchmarking, both between schools and between municipalities. Thus, every municipality has received results about the mental health of adolescents in comparison to other municipalities. Also, the feed-back of local data is intended to support reflections about possible explanations of local and regional variations in mental health problems. Preliminary observations indicate that mental health problems are more common in municipalities with a weak labour market and where many studies fail to graduate junior high school.

Nation wide descriptions of the mental health situation based on the entire data set have not yet been reported. Preliminary analyses confirm similar patterns as previously reported in local and regional studies with respect to gender and age: Mental health problems are in general more common among girls than boys, and among older adolescents compared to younger. Interestingly, the results show only small, if any, differences in mental health problems as regards community type. The prevalence of mental health problems is about the same among young people in big cities as in rural area. Also, only small differences can be found connected to the children's and their parents' country of birth. In contrast there is a clear association between mental health problems and the children's family situation. Children who live with both parents report less mental health problems compared to those who alternate between their parents or live just with one parent. Children who are not living with any of their parents (a small group) report mental health problems most frequently.

The current data collection provides a snapshot of adolescent mental health in Sweden, but also a baseline for recurrent monitoring in the future.