
Keynote Presentation: The Epidemiology of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Problems: Implications for Policy and Practice

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Today we face the challenge that although we live in a wealthy and productive country, there is strong evidence that the development of many Australian children and adolescents continues to be adversely affected by mental health problems. For example, the Child and Adolescent Component of the Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being reported that fourteen percent of children and adolescents in Australia have mental health problems. The health-related quality of life of these children was significantly worse than that of other children and only one quarter to one third of those with mental health problems had attended a professional service during the six months prior to the survey to get help for emotional and behavioural problems. There is also evidence from recent studies in Britain that in some areas there has been an increase in rates of mental health problems among young people over the last 25 years. Addressing these problems will require an appropriate balance of clinical, targeted and population-level interventions. This presentation will document the nature of child and adolescent mental health problems. It will also describe approaches which are being taken to bring together education and health services, and non-government agencies, to reduce rates of mental health problems experienced by young people.