

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS IN SCHOOLS

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Introduction: The prevalence of psychiatric disorders in the general population in Portugal is estimated to be 30%. It is already known that many patients who present a psychiatric disorder do not seek a medical doctor, in part because they do not recognise their illness but also because of stigma associated to these disorders. Mental health promotion programs for schools are believed to help overcome these difficulties.

Objectives: To analyse the knowledge on mental health issues and psychiatric disorders of Portuguese school students from the 7th to the 12th grade, and to assess their contact and interactions with patients who have a psychiatric disorder.

Methods: Five students from each class at Pedro Alexandrino high school were selected and they were asked to answer to a questionnaire. Data collected from the questionnaires was then statistically analysed.

Results: The sample collected for this study included a total of 145 students, 60% male and 40% female, with a mean age of 15years-old. Global knowledge about mental health and psychiatric disorders among students was poor and it was primarily acquired through the media. A comparatively high percentage of students in our sample (46%) knew at least one patient with a psychiatric disorder, and in most cases those patients were from their family group or circle of friends.

Conclusions: Education on mental health and psychiatric disorders should be implemented at schools and within the context of health education, in order to promote mental health and also to help reduce stigma usually associated to psychiatric disorders.