In EENet’s efforts to expand the reach of research, we asked people who represent different perspectives in the system to review selected journal articles relating to mental health and/or addictions and provide us with their views on what the research means to them.


Below you will find Deana Ruston’s perspective from youth with lived experience; Michelle Bates’ summary from the service provider perspective; and Lorena Brady and Raija Begall’s perspectives from the Ontario mental health and addictions nurses.

Please note that the opinions in the reviews are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of EENet or its members.

If you have any feedback, questions, or comments, or if you’re interested in writing for Out of the Ivory Tower, please contact eenet@camh.ca.

**Article:**


**Abstract:**

School mental health programs from developed countries demonstrate that both the practice and research are becoming more important to policy makers, educators, health providers, parents, and other stakeholders. Some United Nations agencies and other international organizations have begun work to advance school mental health internationally. School-based mental health programming needs to be considered as part of usual child and youth mental health policies and plans, whether those are national or other jurisdictional in nature. Currently, a paucity of evidence-based and cost effective child and youth global mental health policies/programs exist, limiting school-based mental health programs being developed, implemented, or sustained.

**About our reviewers:**

Deana Ruston is a student studying at Western University. She is a youth with generalized anxiety disorder and dysthymia, but notes that she doesn't let that define who she is. She volunteers with mindyourmind.ca, is involved with Mobilizing Minds, and also is involved in the...
Ontario government’s Systems Improvement through Service Collaboratives initiative and the Service Collaborative Implementation Team in London, Ontario. She also enjoys cooking and baking and loves to play with photo editing programs.

Michelle Bates has been a direct service provider for 24 years (21 years as a school social worker), and for the last three years, has worked at a system level to develop and implement a boardwide mental health strategy. She is currently the mental health lead for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Lorena Brady and Raija Begall are mental health and addictions nurses within school systems in Northwestern Ontario. They provide services and support to youth at both the elementary and high school levels, and connect them to appropriate community agencies and resources.

EENet asked our reviewers to answer questions from their stakeholder perspectives based on their reading of the article. Here are their responses:

What was of most value to you in this article?

Deana Ruston: The content of the article that was of the most value was recognizing that the integration of mental health education and detection in schools is important. I believe this has come a long way from the time I was in school. When I was in elementary or secondary these findings did not exist. I feel as though around the world, but especially in our own backyard, we need to implement mental health education and treatment in schools. That is where the majority of children spend their time.

Michelle Bates: The brief synthesis of the evidence for school mental health interventions, alongside the acknowledgement of local and contextual factors as a determinant of school mental health approaches, was valuable to me as a reader.

Lorena Brady and Raija Begall: As nurses part of a new Ontario government initiative, it was valuable to learn about the various school mental health initiatives in a global context and seeing what other resources are currently available to youth, families and professionals. It was helpful to read the discussion around universal, selective and indicative approaches to issues and what has been proven to be harmful/beneficial."

How do you envision incorporating this evidence into your life or work?

Deana Ruston: As a youth with lived experience, now at age 21, I feel that advocating for the implementation of education and treatment of mental health issues is important for me. I never had the opportunity to receive the help or education. Since the treatment was not offered at school, it was not accessible to me. I went to two sessions with a counselor when I was in 7th grade. Beyond that, I'm finally getting proper help — in university. I feel as though children having access at school will allow many more people to
have access who would normally go without.

**Michelle Bates:** The evidence in this article will impact my decision making relating to the selection (and rejection) of mental health tiered interventions.

**Lorena Brady and Raija Begall:** We will consider what has been successful in other programs and areas when determining how that evidence can be implemented into our local program.

**Do you foresee any challenges to incorporating this evidence into your life or work?**

**Deana Ruston:** I certainly see challenges in incorporating this evidence into my life. I feel as though it is not a priority by the government or the school systems. Children used to receive physical treatments at school such as physical therapy and occupational therapy. Why can't we implement psychiatrists and social workers? School systems are slowly catching on, but only in larger areas, and there are not enough staff to catch as many students as possible.

**Michelle Bates:** The challenge of incorporating this evidence into my work exists at the implementation level. Namely, the local and contextual factors within each board at both the district and school levels (in addition to the local and contextual factors at a community level) influence the school mental health approach that is conceptualized and the mental health interventions that are adopted. For example, where is mental health on the list of priorities for the board of education, and is this shared by all stakeholders and all schools? How is mental health understood? How is the relationship between mental health and school achievement articulated? What happens when community norms or preferences differ from the evidence? These are just a few of many board level considerations influencing the approach to school mental health at a district level.

**Lorena Brady and Raija Begall:** The identified challenge that programs need to be tailored to local population needs makes implementation of any program challenging and also creates difficulty when evaluating programming. We also see potential challenges in developing appropriate evaluation tools specific to local programs but meeting provincial mandates.

**How do the findings presented in this article relate to your experiences?**

**Deana Ruston:** The article confirmed to me that, while I was in elementary and secondary schools, there were not adequate resources for children and youth within the school system with regards to mental health education and treatment. These resources still aren't implemented to this day. I wish when I was in school these services had been available and perhaps I could have received help earlier on. I wonder, but for the future I hope we give our children the best.
Michelle Bates: These findings validated the comprehensive approach to student mental health in Ontario that has been adopted by mental health leaders as supported through School Mental Health ASSIST and the Ministry of Education.

Lorena Brady and Raija Begall: This article validates the need for meeting youth where they are at and establishing appropriate supports in schools so that prevention and early identification can be achieved. It also validates knowledge that integration of home, school, and community into primary prevention and skills-building is the most effective for all ages and that universal interventions aimed at health promotion appear to be more beneficial than selected/indicative approaches.

If you could ask a question or make a comment to the authors, what might you say?

Deana Ruston: I really enjoyed the article, and it brought me back to my days in the provincial school system. I realized I was not able to get the help I needed. I wish I would've been able to get help at school. I'm sure it would've been a great help.

Michelle Bates: While understanding the trend in school mental health approaches is informative, and familiarization with evidence-based interventions is essential, I was left hungry for research relating to board-level local and contextual factors that create an evidence-based, comprehensive approach to school mental health. Does research of this nature exist, or is this an area of inquiry to add to the research wish list?

Lorena Brady and Raija Begall: We are interested in learning more about mental health promotion in developing countries (if basic needs are not being met, then how can mental health be achieved? What impact does this have on the economy but also on the well-being of individuals in these societies?)