

Are Mental Health Needs of Irish Primary School Children Being Met?

From the perspectives of 356 Irish primary teachers
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Introduction:

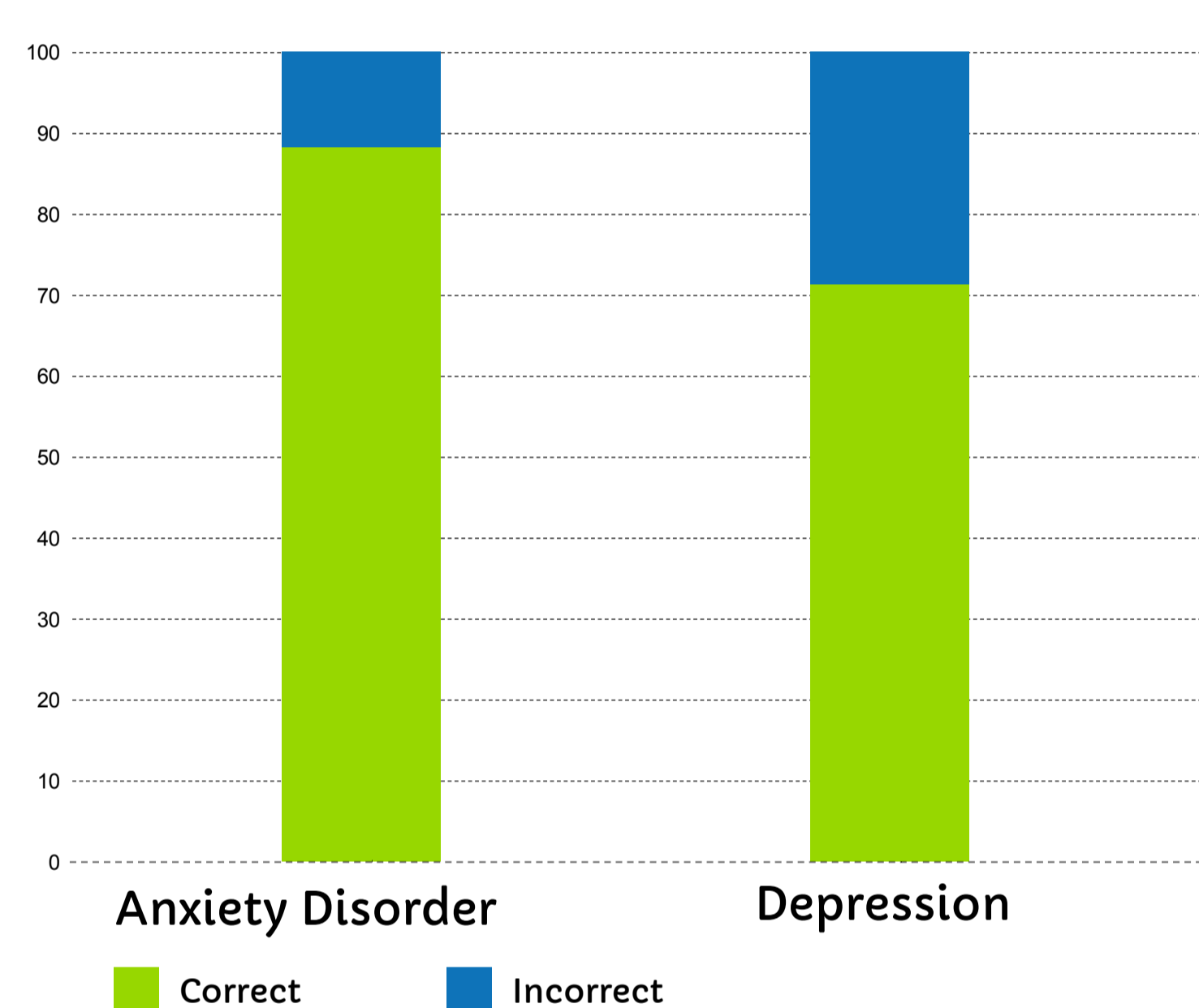
- ✓ 1 in 8 Irish children experience an anxiety disorder and 1 in 7 experience a depressive disorder by the age of 13 years.
- ✓ Teachers can play a crucial role in preventing, identifying and responding to children's mental health difficulties.
- ✓ Higher levels of mental health literacy have been shown to increase help-giving responses towards children with mental health difficulties.

Methods:

- ✓ Primary teachers (N = 356) responded to a questionnaire, composed of three vignettes: a non-clinical control vignette and two clinical vignettes, one describing a child with generalised anxiety disorder and another describing a child with depression.
- ✓ Mixed-methods questioning was used to assess teachers' ability to recognise internalising disorders as well as their perceptions of how to support children showing symptoms indicative of an internalising disorder.

Results:

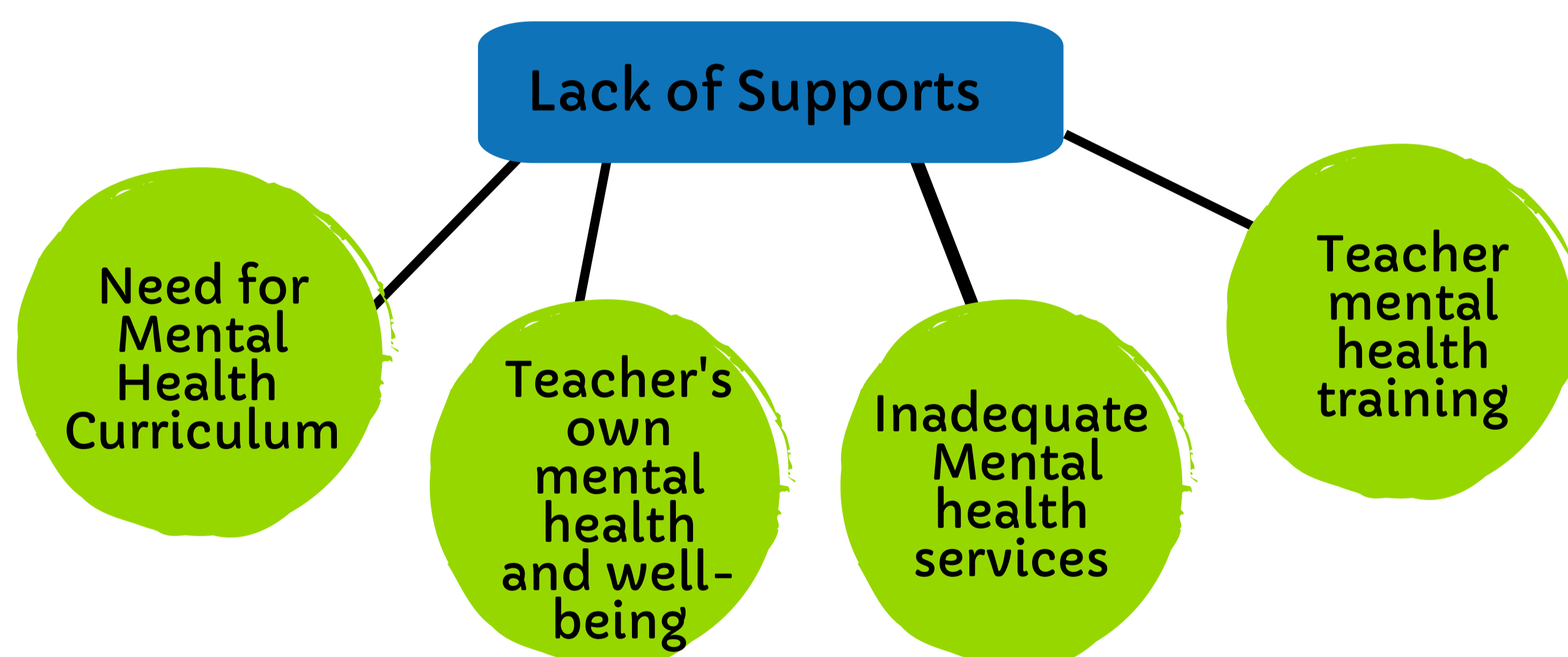
Teacher ability to recognise children with an internalising disorder



12% did not recognise a child with anxiety

1 in 4 did not recognise a child with depression

A Lack of supports is impeding teachers in helping children with mental health disorders



95% of teachers do not feel adequately trained to support children with mental health difficulties

"I know several wonderful teachers who are taking medication for stress and anxiety which is 99% school related"

"Jam packed curriculum means that SPHE is often pushed to the side"

"Parents and I looked for help for a pupil three years ago and the child has not yet been seen once by a professional"

"It's the white elephant in the room, too often dismissed as only affecting teens and adults, training and supports are urgently needed"

Findings suggest that while most teachers have good knowledge of internalising disorders, they are impeded in their ability to respond effectively due to a lack of training, work-related stress, curriculum content and inadequate external mental health services.

What needs to happen?

- 💡 Training for Irish primary teachers to increase knowledge of specific mental health disorders.
- 💡 Training should focus on educating teachers on the types of help-giving responses available.
- 💡 External mental health services need to be increased to cater for the growing prevalence of issues.

- 💡 Primary teacher mental health and well-being needs to be addressed in order to empower them to help children in need.
- 💡 Need for development of new SPHE curriculum which includes specific mental health promotion content.

References:

- 1) Cannon, M., Coughlan, H., Clarke, M., Harley, M., & Kelleher, I. (2013). The Mental Health of Young People in Ireland: A report of the psychiatric epidemiology research across the lifespan (PERL) group.
- 2) Department of Education and Skills, Health Service Executive, Department of Health. (2015). Well-being in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- 3) Jorm, A. F. (2012). Mental health literacy: Empowering the community to take action for better mental health. *American Psychologist*, 67(3).