Experiences of Mental Health Treatment among Young Sami in Sweden

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Earlier studies have shown that young Sámi people feel a vulnerability because of experiences of ethnic discrimination and the constant need to explain and defend their existence as a Sámi and the Sámi culture. Anxiety and stress are more common among young Sámi compared with Swedish youth, and Sámi girls and young women report more symptoms and have a poorer self-esteem, than Sámi boys (1). There are subgroups among the Sámi adolescents who report more experiences of suicidal plans and suicide attempts, which is worrying. Young reindeer-herding men report a sense of powerlessness.

Other studies among both Norwegian and Swedish Sámi show that men and women have a lower confidence for personnel in primary health care, psychiatry and social services (2). This can lead to a lower frequency of seeking care early, resulting in disorders becoming more difficult and more costly to treat and the individual has to suffer unnecessarily. Therefore, the Sámi have not to the same extent as the majority population, access to health care on equal terms. A study among Sámi and Norwegian youth shows that there are culture-specific factors affecting the help-seeking process (3). The experiences of seeking care for mental health problems among the Sámi youth in Sweden is unknown. This study will focus on young Sámi people's experience of seeking care and getting treatment in psychiatry in Sweden.

This project will be performed as a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews among Sámi adolescents, 15–30 years of age. The interviews will be transcribed and the text analysed using content analysis with a phenomenological approach. The selection of informants is supposed to reflect the Sámi youth in Sweden, with experiences of mental health care. The adolescence will further be selected based on gender, geographical area and by various Sámi groups such as reindeer herding and non-reindeer herding Sámi.

Preliminary results from this study will be presented at the conference.

References

