

RESEARCH

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Young people's proposals for tackling everyday challenges in order to improve mental



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Introduction



Fig. 1 Themes and sub-themes

data. The first author did the coding and organizing into preliminary sub-themes, however the process included recurring discussions with the co-authors to promote reflexivity throughout the process [4]. The codes, sub-themes and shared themes were developed throughout the process of discussions back and forth between all co-authors to reach consensus in the analysis.

Results

The first part of the analysis resulted in four shared themes concerning which actor was responsible for implementing the proposals to tackle everyday challenges: society is responsible, school is responsible, parents are responsible, and I am responsible. The proposals were expressed both as needs for change and as concrete suggestions. Further analysis in the two groups resulted in several sub-themes under each theme (see Fig. 1).

Society is responsible

The need for change and an ambition to find solutions to young people's everyday challenges on a societal level, were present in both groups. Problems in school or in families were discussed as being connected to society, making society co-responsible for problems related to family poverty or chaos in schools. There is, participants asserted, a need for fast changes in society and it was seen as a waste of time that the problems are not addressed by those with power. The participants in both

groups raised the need for societal change to create a more just society, stressing that it is important to learn and gain knowledge about the surrounding society, both locally and globally. However, in the high SES group, the need for *increased awareness of injustices* was discussed as mainly being located somewhere else, in other parts of the world. It was seen as important to feel solidarity with others and to want to make a change in other countries.

"I just think it's important, considering the world we live in right now, that young people get an early view, sort of. And I know, we have the internet and find out fast about things, but to really get to know how serious it is and watch the news at school, or I don't know, something..."

School H1

Both groups discussed the need for society to address criminality. The high SES group again mainly discussed this as something that needs to be done somewhere else, while the low SES group referred to their own neighborhoods and experiences. The participants in the low SES group discussed the need to *create neighborhood safety*, relating this to safety regarding both criminality and poverty. There was optimism in the low SES group, that change could happen and actually is happening for the better, but at the same time there was an understanding that change is very difficult. A solution discussed was for more, as they described them, Swedish people to

move to their neighborhoods, which they described as mostly inhabited by immigrants. They argued that Swedish people are more calm because they have not experienced war, and this would have a positive effect on the neighborhood.

“What I’m trying to say is if Swedish people come here, to this neighborhood, I think it would get a lot more calm. Because you see how Swedish people are,

ere is, participants said, a need for school sta ,

young and that parents need to *understand their children* and their situation today.

“If we talk about going out he always says ‘in my days girls were like this and this.’ Well, it is 2022, it’s not your days anymore.”

School L2

It was seen as difficult to change the attitude of parents who are old-fashioned, and participants discussed that maybe it is better not to tell parents everything, or not be at home too much, since the parents will not understand their children anyway. Participants in the low SES group also discussed that there is a need for their parents to learn about the Swedish school system, but at the same time participants understood that it might be difficult when their parents do not speak Swedish.

The high SES group discussed that adults in general, but especially parents, need to *develop greater understanding for young people* and that it is their responsibility to grow this understanding. Parents also need to learn more about the mental health and self-confidence of children, in order to develop a more relaxed view of mental ill-health, as the participants considered mental ill-health a natural part of everyday challenges for young people.

The participants in the high SES group, similarly to the low SES group, discussed that parents have to understand that society has changed.

“I think you should raise with parents, like teach the parents. Our parents, like thirty or forty years ago, maybe they didn’t have these problems, like in the same way we have with mental ill-health today.”

School H2

One suggestion was to film interviews with young people to show the parents, so that parents could understand that their child is not alone in having the experiences of mental ill-health in question.

Further, the high SES group argued that parents should *take responsibility for their children’s actions*. Participants emphasized the responsibility of the parents to teach their child how to behave towards others, and that bullying, and prejudice, is wrong.

“...then the parents have to teach that. ...at you are often more than what you look like. You have to learn respect.”

School H4

Parents also need to realize that their children might behave differently, that is, worse, when they are not at home.

Participants in the low SES group also discussed parental responsibility and argued that parents should *be more strict with children*. This was discussed as necessary in

order to reduce chaos during school days and improve the school climate for other students. Parents should punish their children so that they can learn and change their behavior, and the need for consequences for bad behavior was emphasized. Even if strict parents could be

Another way to take one's own responsibility discussed by the high SES group was to *take care of your friends*. It could be difficult to know what to do when a friend is not feeling well, they said, but it was still seen as important to take responsibility for one's actions towards friends. Friends should have each other's backs and help each other. But at the same time, it was seen as important to know one's limitations.

"But then you have learnt that you can't affect everyone, how they are against others, unfortunately. So that's just something you have to learn."

School H1

Participants also discussed the importance of letting go of bad friends, and of finding new ones who treat you better.

Similar topics were discussed by the low SES group too, but in the context of to *be a good person* to others in general, to not bully or call others bad names.

"First of all to not say something inappropriate, to not say bad words to each other, because it makes someone feel worse and that's just unnecessary."

School L2

is included helping peers who have gotten into trouble and apologizing if one has misbehaved. Participants discussed that it could be frustrating to try to help a friend who does not want to receive help, suggesting that then it might not be worth it. They acknowledged that it is not always possible to help a friend, but that you could try to talk with them to find a solution.

Participants in the low SES group discussed the importance of having their own strategies in order to *take action against challenges*. Participants suggested that you could talk to someone if you feel bad, such as a teacher or a friend. But this could also be challenging, as it is not always possible to trust others, and then it could be better to keep things to oneself rather than risk a spread of rumors. When it came to schoolwork, it was deemed important to have self-discipline and not only blame the teacher, but also take responsibility for one's own work. It could also help to listen to motivational speeches on YouTube, pray, and work to improve one's self-esteem. Strategies involved planning schoolwork and talking with teachers about adaptations.

"If you're shy or something, you don't dare speak in front of the whole class. Then you could tell your teacher that will understand why you don't dare and... If it's, like, a presentation or something, you

could do it in a smaller group. With people, like, you feel comfortable talking in front of."

School L2

Everyone, the participants said, has a responsibility to act against bad things, such as other students disrupting lessons. You could take responsibility by not encouraging students who misbehave, by ignoring them, or by talking to the principal.

The high SES group discussed to *take responsibility for own wellbeing*. Something that a person could do, regarding school and sports, is to become more structured by planning and working in a more goal-oriented manner. Participants also suggested working on improving study techniques or hiring help for homework. Another way to deal with stress could be to distract oneself by doing something fun, such as listening to music, reading, going for a walk, or hanging out with friends. Participants discussed that it is also important to learn to stand up for oneself. This was discussed as being easier said than done, but it could entail trying not to get stressed over grades, blocking people who make you feel bad on social media, believing in oneself, and not comparing oneself to others.

"Yeah, maybe that's mostly where you compare yourself, or maybe to people close to you. And then you should maybe focus on yourself and, like, promote yourself."

School H5

The participants in the low SES group also discussed that, apart from taking action, one strategy could be to ignore and escape one's everyday challenges and *try not to think about it*. This could be done by hanging out with friends, working out, sleeping, or watching a show. It could also help to ignore people who do not act right, on social media and in school.

"Also, overthinking, we overthink way too much."

School L3

Resorting to distractions, as suggested, could work for a while, but participants emphasized that it is also important to find solutions to the underlying problems.

Discussion

The analysis showed both similarities and differences between the low and the high SES group in proposals for tackling everyday challenges, possibly reflecting similarities and differences in everyday conditions between the neighborhoods. During the focus groups and in the transcripts, the discussions at first appeared very different between low SES and high SES schools. But further on, in the analysis, when the sub-themes from each group were

