

10th IUHPE European Conference and 4th International Forum for Health Promotion Research September 24-26th 2018, in Trondheim, Norway

From 9 to 91 in good health - the significance of the inner child in health promotion through the life course

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization a life course perspective is about increasing the effectiveness of health promoting interventions focusing on a child's healthy start and targeting the needs of people throughout their lifetime.

However, human beings are commonly divided by age instead of viewing life as a process. Already in the 60's Jung identified the concept of the inner child explaining that human beings' life journey includes all the past life experiences impacting their lives. The phenomenon of the inner child may be of help when promoting health through the life-course. Additionally, enabling human beings' involvement in health promotion practice and research is of importance.

Therefore, the aim was to describe and understand schoolchildren's, adult's and older person's experiences of childhood in connection to health and well-being in the present and through the life course, illuminating the inner child.

Methods, context and participants

Three studies giving voice to 53 individuals aged 9-91 was re-analyzed with a hermeneutical phenomenological approach. The 20 adults and 13 older persons were interviewed about childhood experiences and the 20 schoolchildren were interviewed about childhood experiences in play. The main question posed to the gathered data in the re-analyzes was "How do the participants narrations about childhood experiences illuminate the inner child useful for health promotion through the life course?"

Results and conclusions

The participants narrated about the importance of a secure atmosphere and trusting relationships, which helped them to overcome challenging times for example when they felt abandoned. The participants experienced how their own strength became a source for development. They narrated about play as an activity where they learned how to promote a healthy childhood, struggling for independence and learning how to be responsible when growing up. The findings also indicate that the participants learned useful life lessons, suggesting that experiences during childhood can help us to adapt and pass along knowledge across generations. These dimensions of mental, social and existential well-being can be seen as examples of the inner child's significance in health promotion through the life course.