Young Carers

Aims of the activity/of the project
The aim of this project was, in a first step, to gain insight into the situation of children and adolescents with caring responsibilities in Austria. In subsequent phases of the project, support measures for this target group were developed, tested in a pilot study and evaluated.

Persons responsible for the project
Prevalence study: Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Hanna Mayer (University of Vienna, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Nursing Science)

All subsequent phases: Mag. Dr. Martin Nagl-Cupal (University of Vienna, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Nursing Science)

Cooperation partners
Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
Austrian Red Cross

Project description
Up to now, little attention has been paid to the situation of children and adolescents with caring responsibilities in Austria. There is a lack of information on the situation as well as qualified support measures. The project “Young Carers” aims at overcoming these shortcomings. The project consists of multiple phases and projects, respectively, which are interconnected:

1. Evaluating the situation of children with current or former caring responsibilities in Austria
   (Project runtime January 2012 to December 2012; commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection)

   Based on a motion for resolution, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection commissioned the Department of Nursing Science at the University of Vienna to conduct a study on the prevalence and situation of children with caring responsibilities in Austria. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed – based on qualitative research results from Germany – that identifies young carers indirectly via tasks/activities they perform (e.g. support of sick family members). The study was implemented in cooperation with schools in Vienna and Lower Austria (overall 85 schools; 474 classes), and 10,433 pupils between 10 and 14 years of age were surveyed. The results indicated a prevalence of 4.5% young carers. Projected on the total population this corresponds to 42,700 children and adolescents in the age group of 5 to 18 years (age range according to the definition of young carers).

   At the same time of the prevalence study, a qualitative study was implemented, which included interviews with former young carers to investigate the lifespan perspective of this group.

2. Development of a fundamental framework to support young carers and their families
   (Project runtime: April 2013 to September 2014; commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection)

   The framework was intended to demonstrate concrete measures to support this target group; at the same time, it was intended to provide orientation for institutions which plan to implement needs-oriented measures suitable for the target group of young carers.

3. Development and pilot testing of a support measure for children with caring responsibilities and their families
   (Project runtime: April 2015 to April 2017; funded by the Association of the Austrian Pharmaceutical Industry)

   The support concept aims at strengthening the individual health competence of members of a household (healthy and sick persons), designing a health-promoting family lifestyle, increasing
health and well-being of children and adolescents with caring responsibilities, and preventing young carers from being forced to take over a nursing role that is unreasonable given their age and level of development.

Within the project runtime of two years a support concept has been developed based on the actual needs for support of affected families and the experience of professional nurses and experts in the field. The approach of outreach counselling follows the concept of Family Conferences, developed in the USA.

A close cooperation with the Austrian Red Cross facilitated access to affected families, who are involved in the development and testing of the support measure.

4. ResilCare. What are resilience factors for children and adolescents with caring responsibilities?

(Project runtime: October 2016 to September 2019; funded by the Association of the Austrian Pharmaceutical Industry)

Simultaneously to the pilot testing of the support measure a study on resilience factors of young carers was implemented in autumn 2016.

Additional projects are planned, which focus on an interdisciplinary perspective (e.g. in cooperation with computer scientists and sociologists at the University of Vienna).

Results/Impact

Addressing the issue of young carers and presenting prevalence rates had a considerable impact. There was a major media response, and information campaigns were implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (e.g., at schools and on infoscreens in public transportation). These measures lead to an increased public awareness. Subsequently, grant funds were allocated specifically to this topic (e.g., a call of the Association of the Austrian Pharmaceutical Industry).

The development of the framework raised further awareness. In addition, a clear need for support measures as well as evaluations of projects involving the target group of young carers became apparent.

Quality assurance/Achievement of objectives

The information campaigns, initiated by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in order to present results from the prevalence study (phase 1) to the broader public and to raise awareness on the issue, were supervised by the Department of Nursing Science.

The framework (phase 2) was adopted in a consensus-conference, together with experts and affected persons.

In the course of the pilot testing (phase 3), the support concept will be evaluated. At this, the primary question is whether the concept meets the needs of affected families.

Webpage/Publications


(http://www.superhands.at/fileadmin/content/files/Bmask_YoungCarers_FolgestudieTeil2.pdf)

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