Samira Akhtar
Project Manager MindMates / psychotherapist
Student Health Centre

EUSUHM 07/09/2017
Content

• Why Mindmates?
• Core mission of MindMates
• Strenghts of this project
• Interventions of MindMates
• Conclusions
• Time for questions, reflection
1) University students as a specific and unique group:
• Between adolescence and young adulthood
• Demanding transition in a time period characterized by social change, uncertainty, individualization and social fragmentation
• Vulnerable to the development of emotional problems, mental disorders and suicidality
University students as a high risk group:

• International research shows the prevalence of mental problems to be about 1/7, > average general population

• KU Leuven research among first year students shows:
  - High prevalence for emotional and mental disorders
  - High and persistent prevalence of suicidal behaviour
  - Low help-seeking behaviour
    - Experienced need for help is low. Only get higher in cause of depression/anxiety, severe substance abuse and suicidality
    - Barriers: cognitions, negative attitudes and structural elements
    - When student search help: family, friends, peers are often the first to be consulted

• 3/4 of the mental disorders onset before the age of 25
• Second most common cause of death: suicide
2) Intercept and reduce gaps in mental health care
   - Gap between child/adolescent psychiatry and adult psychiatry
   - Gap between ‘mind’ issues and help seeking (treatment gap)

3) Alternative to the classical approach to suicide prevention

All of those findings let to the development of a specific and new prevention approach for university students: MindMates
Core mission of MindMates

University-wide prevention program:

• **improving general well-being among all students** by reinforcing protective factors (e.g. connectedness, mental health literacy, problem solving behavior) and by reducing risk factors (e.g. passive coping strategies, social isolation, mental problems)

• creating a caring and mental health promoting environment

• stimulating openness towards mental health
Strenghts of this project

• Public health approach to suicide and suicide prevention
• Integral prevention policy
  ➢ Universal, indicated and selective prevention (USI)
  ➢ Strong link with curation (prevention and clinical intervention)
  ➢ Well-being-oriented and problem-oriented
• Prevention pyramid (Deklerck, 2008) as framework
• Scientifically monitored by the research project Fortune (team Prof. R. Bruffaerts)
• Coordinated and rolled out by the Student Health Centre
• Interventions are spread over the entire university
• For and by students
Interventions of MindMates

Emotional health at the KU Leuven

- 61% no emotional problems (~24,000 students)
- 25% some emotional problems (~10,000 students)
- 10% emotional problems in multiple areas (~4,000 students)
- 4% severe emotional problems (~2,000 students)
Interventions

- Stepped care
- Intensive treatment
- Attentive meetings with other care providers

+ Screening and early detection
+ Treatment
+ Active peer support
+ Proactive care (individual level)

+ Skills training students and personal
+ Information session
+ Proactive care (group level)

Health promotion
Information & sensitization
Connectedness-increasing

- 61% no emotional problems
- 25% some emotional problems
- 10% emotional problems in multiple life domains
- 4% severe emotional problems

~2,000 students
~4,000 students
~10,000 students
~24,000 students
Largest group: students that report no emotional problems (61%)

Approach:
• Health promo (Campaign Team)
• Providing information and enhancing awareness concerning mental well-being (website www.mindmates.be, lectures, media)
• Increasing social cohesion and connectedness (Activity Team)
• Increasing or reinforcing resilience
Second level: students that report some emotional problems (25%)

Approach:

• Enhancing mental health literacy through skills and information training sessions for students and personal
  ➢ Student workshops “Upgrade your mind”
  ➢ Training for gatekeepers
  ➢ Information session for student faculty unions

• Proactive care: if necessary the trainer refers students to another training or treatment option(s) within or outside the Student Health Centre (prevention ↔ clinical interventions)
Student Workshops “Upgrade your mind”:

- Becoming a MindMate, recruiting volunteers
- Themes: selfcare and care for others, conversation skills, coping strategies, setting boundaries, professional help (where/how)
- Method: conversation, role-playing, challenging current general assumption

Practical:
- Registration through website, no-obligation
- Four sessions, weekly 1.5h
- Max. 15 students
- In Dutch and English
- Led by a psychologisch SHC
- Location: SCH or in living environment of students

Training for gatekeepers in suicide prevention:

- Gatekeepers = intermediators who often come in contact with students, but no in the role of discussing or guiding emotion problems
- In prevention research pointed out as one of the most effective methods!
- Themes: basic knowledge concerning emotional problems and suicidality among students, do’s and don’ts in conversation, information suicidal process, signal detection, risk estimation, professional help (where/how), how to optimize suicide prevention
- Method: conversation, role-playing, sharing experiences, giving information, motivational interviewing, detection of myths and misconcepting as well as challenging those cognitions

- Practical:
  - Two sessions, monthly 2h + 1 follow-up session in the next semester
  - Groups of max 15, min 6 gatekeepers
  - Led by a Prof. Ronny Bruffaerts and Samira Akhtar
  - Location: working environment of the gatekeepers
Information session for student faculty unions:

- New intervention: “Get to know MindMates”
- “Warm up” session
- Themes: What is MindMates, which interventions offers MindMates
- Method: conversation, interaction, sharing experiences, website

- Practical:
  - On demand
  - Groups of min 15 and max 30
  - 1 session, 2h
  - Led by a psychologist of SHC and a member of one of the MindMates teams
  - Location: facilities of the student faculty union
Third level: students that report emotional problems in multiple live domains (10%)

Approach:

- Screening and early detection by the use of the self test (website [www.mindmates.be](http://www.mindmates.be)), by GP (free preventive psycho-medical control for first year students), by Mind-Buddy, by MindMates coworkers
- Setting up treatment: referral to treatment options within or outside SCH
- Referral to other student services
- (Pro-)active peersupport by a trained follow student (Mind-Buddy)
  - More individualized technique to counter loneliness and emotional problems
  - Social and/or emotional support for a specific duration
  - Conditions to become a Mind-Buddy: participation student workshops, mental resilience, supervision every semester
Highest risk group: students that report severe emotional problems (4%) 

Approach:

• Stepped care
• Intensive and personalized psychiatric, psychotherapeutic and/or psychosocial treatment (internal/external)
• Referral to other student services
• Optimizing crisis procedures
• Optimizing referral network + attentive meetings with other care providers
• Future: e-health
The MindMates interventions are frequently consulted and used:

- Visitors homepage website (since October 2015):
  - ± 60,000 Dutch speaking students
  - ± 7,000 English speaking students

- Participation selftest (since February 2015):
  - 2,520 Dutch speaking students
  - 384 English speaking students

- Average of 6 student workshops per semester
- Average of 2 groups of gatekeepers are targeted per academical year
- Growing MindMates teams
- Growing demands to get a Mind-Buddy for social and/or emotional support
- Start up info-session for student unions
- Continuous awareness campaigns, frequent connected-increasing activities
Conclusions

• Student Health Centre of KU Leuven offers a solid and integral prevention policy with accessible interventions for Dutch and English speaking students (as a group or individually) as well as for personal
• The interventions take place in clinical world but also at school, work, in de university environment
  ➢ which makes prevention a task of us all
• Not all mental health questions need a psychotherapeutic answer
• Connectedness as a protective factor is strongly targetted
• Together with the growing success of MindMates comes the growth of mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour among KU Leuven students
• Growing interest from other educational institutions in the MindMates interventions
Questions, reflections?

MindMates

Together our minds can achieve greater things.
Contact details

Project manager, Student Health Centre: Samira.Akhtar@kuleuven.be

Head of Student Health Centre: Anne.Neyskens@kuleuven.be

Fortune, Prof. Ronny Bruffaerts: ronny.bruffaerts@med.kuleuven.be,
Partners: Foundation ‘Ga voor Geluk’, Fortune, Loko