Children and young people’s experiences and perceptions of completing mental health measures for research

Ola Demkowicz, Senior Tutor and Doctoral Researcher, University of Manchester Institute of Education

In recent years there has been growing interest and funding in child and adolescent wellbeing and mental health. This has coincided with an increased focus on the use of self-report mental health measures for this population given the current emphasis on the voice of the child in research and as part of a broader effort to ensure accuracy in reporting of symptomatology and experiences. Such measures are increasingly being completed by children and young people within institutional settings as part of major projects and trials, including within schools. As researchers, there is a responsibility to understand how these self-report processes are experienced by the children and young people engaging in mental health research, in order to inform future measure and research design. As such, we undertook a qualitative exploration of children and young people’s perspectives and experiences of completing wellbeing and mental health measures within education settings (n = 133, age 8–16 years). We identified six main themes capturing perspectives on different elements of participation experience: connecting with emotions, question topic, survey format, environment, informed completion, and research purpose and data usage. We highlight a number of implications for researchers designing mental health measurement frameworks for children and young people and consider how education settings can be supported in facilitating measure completion for this group.