

A soccer ball is positioned on a dark asphalt surface. In the background, a brick building with several windows is visible, slightly out of focus. The overall scene is outdoors during the day.

# ENO THE 2010 STOCKHOLM

Children of mentally ill  
parents

# Education of occupational therapist in Denmark



About us:

Camilla Jensen, age 22 & Camilla Christensen, age 25.

Students from Århus, Denmark.

We have been studying Occupational Therapy for two years, and are expecting our bachelor degree in January 2012.

Right now we are in practical training at psychiatric hospitals for a period of ten weeks.

Before that we worked on psychiatric and socially issues - our group worked with children of mentally ill parents.

# Children of mentally ill parents Why this group?

- ▣ We chose to work with this group because it's overlooked in our society.
- ▣ The children needs focus and it made the project more meaningful, challenging and exciting.
- ▣ We also choose to work with “children of mentally ill parents” because this group is especially low on occupations and therefore it's relevant for our profession.

# Definition & facts of these children

- ❑ When we speak of poverty, economics and homelessness often comes to mind. Few think about the possibility of being poor on activities and experiences.
- ❑ Still about *30.000-60.000* children of mentally ill parents in Denmark are categorized as socially disadvantaged, and just this group is perceived to be poor in activities and experiences.
- ❑ This is caused partly because mentally ill parents often are on low income and partly because they can't handle taking the children to sports or other activities.
- ❑ 20% of these children risk to get their own mentally disease.
- ❑ They are in risk of being socially excluded from the society.

# An adult tells about her childhood with a mentally ill parent...

*“Then she lay most of the day behind drawn curtains, and sometimes when I was about to go to school in the morning she could say that she was probably not there anymore, when I got home. It was hard to force at school on those terms, and I often skipped school to be home and look after her”*

# Focus on activities & interaction

- ❑ The aspects presented above, prevents the child in maintaining an activity pattern that reflects who the child is as an occupational performing human being – so that the child does not develop an optimal nor independent occupational competence.
- ❑ We know that health and well-being depends on participation and engagement in occupations, and as an occupational therapist we seek to enable empowerment and occupational justice. Our main focus is to find, what is needed, and what will make a difference to this group in their everyday life.
- ❑ Children react differently growing up with mentally ill parents and could often be divided into two categories; inward- and outward reaction.

# The children's risk

## – regard activity and participation

- ❑ Often the children are being required to assume the parental role, when mom or dad are ill, and unable to handle everyday life.
- ❑ Some of these children experience that it's not possible to celebrate their own, or even participate in other children's birthdays.
- ❑ All this can prevent these children from building their own occupational identity, when not experiencing an active occupational participation with their peers.
- ❑ They may come to feel excluded in relation to other children and even society.

# What is the effort in Aarhus community?

- The psychiatry in Aarhus County provides education for employees in Aarhus county, to qualify the effort towards vulnerable children and young people of mentally ill parents, ensuring early intervention
- SIND's organisation for relatives, "Young projekt" provides guidance for young relatives. The purpose is to guide and support the children and teach about mental illness
- The Local Psychiatric Centers in Aarhus have established conversation groups for children between 10 and 16 years, whose parents are receiving treatment for mental disorders in the local psychiatric, at the GP or psychiatrist. The groups give the children opportunities to meet other children in the same situation



So how can we, as Occupational therapists help this group?



play

school



friendship

interests



# MOHO - Model of Human Occupation

- Volition: Through the role as “The young caretaker” it becomes a great part of the children volition and defines how they see themselves.
- Habit: It’s hard to change habits if it has become a part of the child's everyday life.
- Performance capacity: If the social environment prevent the children building up their own volition, they can’t assume the role as a child, which will affect their performance capacity

# MOHO - Model of Human Occupation

- Occupational participation: The child is often prevented from participation with their peers because of the role as “The young caretaker”
- Skills: Being the young adult could mean that the child doesn’t develop the same skills as their peers concerning motor-, communication, interaction- and process skills
- Environment: If the social environment changes it is possible for the child to participate in occupation.

# We can help using occupational tools?

- Use of MOHO's conceptual model to clarify which components that contributes to loss of occupation  
*Ex Create a secure environment socially and physically*
- COPM to clarify important activities for the individual child
- Use of a network card to clarify resources in the social networks
- Using MOHO's therapeutic strategies to involve and inform the child about the parents condition
- Interest Checklist to see the child's interest and how many is preserved
- Occupational Questionnaire to clarify the child's daily activities

# References

## Website

- [www.barn-i-fokus.dk/](http://www.barn-i-fokus.dk/)

## Recommendation booklet

- \* Children of mentally ill parents; Network of Preventive Hospitals in Denmark; 2007
- \* When children are relatives; SUS, Barn-i-fokus; 2006

## Books

- \* MOHO – Model of Human Occupation; Kielhofner, G; 2008
- \* Enabling occupation II; Townsend E, Polatajko H; 2008

## Articles

- \* Occupational Justice; Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, Townsend E, Wilcock A; 2006