

Mental health support and training to improve secondary school teachers' well-being: the WISE cluster RCT

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

The WISE cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

Health and Safety Executive data show that teachers have poor mental health compared with other occupational groups. This affects their relationships with students and their ability to do their job well, which is likely to have a negative impact on student mental health.

We tested a programme for secondary schools (from age 11 years) that had three parts: (1) 8% of teachers were trained in mental health first aid for schools and colleges; (2) 8% of staff were trained in standard mental health first aid and then formed a confidential support service for their colleagues; and (3) all teachers were given a 1-hour training session on how to look after their own and others' mental health.

Twenty-five schools took part from the south-west of England and South Wales. We randomly divided the schools into two groups (one that would have the programme and one that would not). In all schools, teachers and year 8 students (aged 12/13 years) completed a survey measuring their well-being and mental health before and after the programme took place. We also collected information about the cost of the programme, and we held focus groups and interviews to find out more about participants' experience of the programme.

At the end of the study, teachers and students in the schools that received the programme did not have better well-being or mental health than those in the schools that did not receive it. This may have been because not enough people were trained or because of barriers stopping teachers and students asking for help from those who were trained.

Those who took part in the study thought that the training was useful and of high quality, and they liked the idea of the support service. However, they did not feel that the programme was well supported by senior leadership and they were disappointed that it did not lead to bigger changes across the school.

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