

The Problem Management Plus psychosocial intervention for distressed and functionally impaired asylum seekers and refugees: the PROSPER feasibility RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors

Full disclosure of interests: Completed ICMJE forms for all authors, including all related interests, are available in the toolkit on the NIHR Journals Library report publication page at <https://doi.org/10.3310/NZXA0081>.

Primary conflicts of interest: Ross White reports a grant from the European Commission, Horizon 2020 (grant agreement number 779255), to conduct the Refugee Emergency: DEFining and Implementing Novel Evidence-based psychosocial intervention (RE-DEFINE) project evaluating the effectiveness of Self-Help Plus (SH+) for refugees. The results of the clinical trials are given in the report.

Published October 2022

DOI: 10.3310/NZXA0081

Plain English summary

The PROSPER feasibility RCT

Public Health Research 2022; Vol. 10: No. 10

DOI: 10.3310/NZXA0081

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Plain English summary

Asylum seekers and refugees often experience emotional distress, but they may find it hard to get the health and social care they need. Problem Management Plus (PM+) is an intervention designed to help people that is delivered by others (known as lay therapists) in similar situations, and it has been shown to help distressed people living in difficult circumstances. The aim of the PROSPER study was to find out if it is possible to conduct a trial of PM+ for distressed asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.

Using evidence from published research and from conversations with local experts, we aimed to modify PM+ to meet the needs of distressed asylum seekers and refugees living in Merseyside. We also aimed to train people with experience of the asylum process to deliver PM+. We designed a small-scale preliminary trial (a pilot trial) of five 90-minute sessions of PM+, comparing individual and group sessions with usual treatment. We set out to recruit 105 people to take part in this pilot trial. The main outcomes were symptoms of anxiety and depression, which were to be measured at 3 and 6 months after recruitment into the trial.

We found that PM+ could be modified to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees living in Merseyside. We successfully trained 12 people with lived experience of the asylum process as lay therapists to deliver PM+. However, the pilot trial was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic and we were able to involve only 11 people in it. We gathered information on how to involve people in the trial, on how PM+ was delivered, and on how acceptable the study measures were.

Although we were unable to complete the pilot trial as planned, our findings offer guidance for future studies into mental health care provided by lay therapists for distressed asylum seekers and refugees.

Public Health Research

ISSN 2050-4381 (Print)

ISSN 2050-439X (Online)

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The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the PHR programme as project number 17/44/42. The contractual start date was in September 2018. The final report began editorial review in July 2021 and was accepted for publication in March 2022. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PHR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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