

Interpersonal counselling for adolescent depression delivered by youth mental health workers without core professional training: the ICALM feasibility RCT

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Published December 2024

DOI: 10.3310/GTRV6410

Plain language summary

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Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2024; Vol. 12: No. 48

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Why was the study needed?

Mild depression is common in young people and, if not treated, can lead to major depression. Evidence shows that offering young people with mild depression a talking therapy called *interpersonal counselling* could reduce distress. However, most young people with mild depression consult family services, where staff do not have training in interpersonal counselling.

What were we trying to find out?

We wanted to find out if it would be possible to carry out a big study to test interpersonal counselling for young people with mild depression, which can be delivered by non-mental health professionals following a 2-day training workshop.

What did we do?

We invited young people with mild depression to take part in the study. We provided training in interpersonal counselling to staff from 13 different services. Individuals were selected at random to either continue their usual care or trial interpersonal counselling. The aim was to recruit 60 young people to make the study valid; however, we were only able to recruit 16. We collected information using questionnaires, interviews and session recordings.

What did we find out?

Most participants found interpersonal counselling helpful. We found evidence that it might lead to better quality of life and reduced need for health care over time. Due to COVID-19, staff shortages, staff concerns that participants may not receive interpersonal counselling and participants' changing needs, we were not able to recruit enough participants to fully answer our questions, meaning we cannot rely on the findings of the study. This study did not support a future study of interpersonal counselling in the current settings. However, we have included what we learnt from our challenges, which might help researchers plan similar studies in future.

Health and Social Care Delivery Research

ISSN 2755-0079 (Online)

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Health and Social Care Delivery Research (HSDR) was launched in 2013 and is indexed by Europe PMC, DOAJ, INAHTA, Ulrichsweb™ (ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI, USA), NCBI Bookshelf, Scopus and MEDLINE.

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: journals.library@nhr.ac.uk

This journal was previously published as *Health Services and Delivery Research* (Volumes 1–9); ISSN 2050-4349 (print), ISSN 2050-4357 (online)

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This article

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HSDR programme or one of its preceding programmes as award number 17/112/16. The contractual start date was in October 2019. The draft manuscript began editorial review in November 2022 and was accepted for publication in June 2023. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HSDR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' manuscript and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this article.

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