School-based counselling: A review of the evidence

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Background

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Overview

• What is school-based counselling?
• Does school-based counselling reduce mental health problems?
• How might school-based counselling be helpful?
• What national developments are there?
• The ESRC-funded ETHOS trial of school-based counselling
• Implications

Mental health problems in young people

• 1 in 10 have diagnosable mental health condition
• Mental health difficulties associated with: lower levels of academic achievement and engagement, ongoing difficulties into adulthood

Source: Colman, 2009; WHO, 2008

What is school-based counselling in the UK?

Review of the evidence

Google search: BACP Scoping Reports
The emergence of school-based counselling for young people in the UK

Widely disseminated

One of most common provisions for mental health problems in young people in the UK

Dissemination of school-based counselling in UK secondary/post-primary schools

Estimated cases per year

Approximately 70,000-90,000 in UK

Approximately 50,000-70,000 in England

Cases in England (per year)

Service modality in UK

- Primarily ‘humanistic’/‘person-centred’/‘integrative’; similar to ‘non-directive supportive therapy’ (approved by NICE for mild depression)
- Aims to help young people find own answers through listening, warmth and empathic reflections
- Focuses on general emotional and interpersonal problems (cf. specific diagnoses)
- Generally one-to-one (cf. group/family)
Case example: Anya

- 14 year old from central England
- Referred for missing school, aggressive behaviour
- Reported experiencing periods of ‘depression’
- Devastated by father’s recent stroke
- Fighting constantly with father, regularly grounded

Details of this client have been changed to protect anonymity

Referral routes

- School staff
- Self
- Parents/carers

Reported waiting times: relatively brief

- 50% within 1 week
- 35% within 1 month
- 15% within 1 month

Psychological difficulties at assessment (SDQ) (counselling)

- ‘Normal’
- ‘Abnormal’
- ‘Borderline’

Presenting/developing issues

- Family issues
- Anger
- Behaviour
- Bereavement
- Bullying
- Self-confidence

Source: Cooper, 2009; Hill, 2011; estimates from approximately 20,000 young people

Source: Cooper, 2013; Hill, 2011; as reported by school staff and local authority leads

Source: Cooper, 2009, from 611 young people

Source: Cooper, 2009, 199, 2011; approximate data from over 20,000 cases
Is school-based counselling helpful?

Data from over 5,000 cases indicates that school-based counselling consistently associated with significant and large reductions in psychological distress, equivalent to improvements in adult mental health services.

‘School-based humanistic counselling’

- Distillation of UK counselling practice
- Based on humanistic/person-centred competences
- Weekly sessions (max. 10)
- 2009-2014: Four pilot randomised trials comparing against usual care (N = 32-64)


But

Would those improvements just happen anyway?
School-based humanistic counselling: **Findings**

Associated with:
- Moderate short term reductions in psychological distress and difficulties
- Moderate short term improvements in self-esteem and personal goal attainment

Source: Cooper, 2010, 2013; McArthur, 2013; Pybis, 2014; Pearce, 2017

**RCT combined results (YP-CORE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment/ Baseline</th>
<th>Endpoint</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 weeks (n=118)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ES = 0.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 weeks (n=126)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ES = 0.72*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 weeks (n=46)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ES = 0.44</td>
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Teachers’ ratings of helpfulness of counselling for their pupils

Pastoral care teachers’ perceptions of helpful aspects of counselling/added value’
1. Independence
2. Confidentiality
3. Accessibility
4. Expertise
5. Time

Pastoral care teachers’ perceptions of areas for improvement
1. Greater availability
2. Greater promotion
3. Better communication
4. Greater range of activities

What might be the process of change?
Review of the qualitative evidence

Google search: BACP Scoping Reports

Google search: BACP Scoping Reports

A relationship that develops... over time

'I brought up something that I'd never told anyone so it just goes to show how much the relationship's changed over time cos I've never trusted anyone with it, and then, I trusted (counsellor)' (Carl)

'In counselling, I always start with like little things and then, from them little things if I know, like, I can trust them and they're helping with the situation and that they didn't pass judgement on me or anything it then—It's like a build-up on the next thing I tell them is more important to me.' (Annabelle)

Source: Gurvitz, 2017

An intervention for young people with no-one to talk to?

No-one to talk to (≈60)

...that they'd talk to someone about (≈300)

An emotional concern (≈600)

School students (≈1000)

From research to competences

2012: Evidence of effectiveness from pilot RCTs formed basis for developing competences for humanistic counselling with young people

National developments

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National developments
From competences to training

http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethics/competences_and_curricula/cyp_competences.php

E-learning training for child counsellors
45, half-hour sessions
Funded by the UK Department of Health
minded.org.uk

New BACP curriculum framework for counselling young people based on competences, incorporating Counselling MindEd

Development of first CYP IAPT curriculum for counselling, including module on CBT
DfE Publishes Departmental Advice on Counselling in Schools (2015, updated Feb 2016)

1. Definitive evidence of effectiveness is still lacking, particularly at follow-up.
2. Even if it is effective, is it cost-effective?
3. How does it work: and how can we improve it?

Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness Trial of Humanistic Counselling in Schools: Individual RCT (ETHOS)

**Research team:** Mick Cooper, Meg Stafford, Tiffany Rameswar (University of Roehampton); Karen Cromarty (Independent consultant); Michael Barkham (University of Sheffield); Peter Bower (University of Manchester); Charlie Jackson (BACP); Jenni Beachem (LSE); Andy Fugard (Birkbeck); Peter Pearce (Metanoia); Cathy Street, Rebekah Ryder, Ed Mortimer, Joanna Lea (NCB); Manchester Academic Health Science Centre Trials Co-ordination Unit

**Dates:** 1st April 2016 – 1st March 2019 (35 months)

**Participants:** 18 schools (with no current counselling service), 306 young people (13-16 years old) experiencing moderate to high emotional symptoms

**Randomisation:** School-based Humanistic Counselling or Pastoral Care as Usual (with option for counselling at end)

**Outcomes** (6 weeks, 12 weeks/endpoint, 6 month follow-up): Differences in psychological wellbeing (e.g., YP-CORE, RCADS, SDQ, GBOM), cost-effectiveness (CSRI), academic engagement (e.g., attendance); perceptions of helpful/unhelpful aspects (young people, teachers, parents/carers)

**Funding** ESRC: £835,000 (with additional support from Department of Psychology, University of Roehampton; BACP)

***Implications***

- 208 young people recruited (of 306, 68%)
- 105 allocated to SBHC, 103 to PCAU
- Completion rates at testing points: 98%-100%
- 20 interviews with young people completed
- Final round of recruitment due Spring 2018
- Results due Spring 2019

*Ethos Progress (as of Sept. 2017)*

- Recruited
- Target/optimal
- Minimum
• Consider how you ensure that all young people in your school have a skilled adult they can talk to, at a level of depth
• Consider appointing a school-based counsellor to help young people address broad-spectrum emotional and interpersonal problems
• Ensure that a counsellor is practising an evidence-based method
• Ensure that any counselling provision is integrated within a wider framework of mental health pathways and interventions

Sources


