

A trial examining the effectiveness of school-based humanistic counselling for young people

Submission date 24/10/2013	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 19/11/2013	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 07/06/2023	Condition category Mental and Behavioural Disorders	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Young people in the UK are experiencing increasing levels of psychological distress and counselling services have been established in many secondary schools to help them deal with this. Young people tend to be very positive about counselling, but the availability of services varies widely, there is little consistency in the type of therapy offered, and evidence for its effectiveness is limited. This study examines the effectiveness of a standardised school-based counselling intervention - school-based person-centred counselling (SBPCC) - which has been developed on the basis of the best available evidence.

Who can participate?

Young people in years 7, 8, 9, 10 or 12 experiencing moderate or abnormally high levels of emotional distress.

What does the study involve?

The participants will be randomly allocated to either receive counselling (SBPCC) immediately or will be put on a waiting list, to be offered counselling in 9 months. After 9 months, we will look at whether those young people who received counselling are experiencing less psychological distress than those who did not. We will also look at whether the benefits of providing a counselling service justify the costs.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

If SBPCC turns out to be helpful and cost-effective we may be able to make a major contribution to addressing psychological health problems in UK youth. Because of the sensitive issues being addressed in this study, we will not include any young people at risk of harm, but refer them to specialist support. We will ensure the highest levels of confidentiality for participants. The study team has extensive experience of work and research with young people and mental health.

Where is the study run from?

1. Saint Gabriel's College (UK)
2. Shooters Hill Post Sixteen (UK)
3. Sydenham Girls School (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
The study started in January 2013 and will run until January 2014.

Who is funding the study?

1. Metanoia Institute (UK)
2. British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (UK)

Who is the main contact?

Mr Peter Pearce

Peter.pearce@metanoia.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific

Contact name

Mr Peter Pearce

ORCID ID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0864-0021>

Contact details

Metanoia Institute

13 North Common Road

Ealing

London

United Kingdom

W5 2QB

+44 (0)20 8579 2505

Peter.pearce@metanoia.ac.uk

Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

MIPC1

Study information

Scientific Title

A pragmatic randomised controlled trial of person-centred, school-based counselling

Acronym

ALIGN

Study objectives

For children and young people experiencing emotional distress, weekly counselling will be more effective than waiting list conditions after one school term.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Metanoia Research Ethics Committee, 07/01/2013

Study design

Pragmatic randomised controlled trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Moderate to abnormal levels of psychological distress

Interventions

Following baseline assessment eligible participants will be randomised to either counselling now or to a waiting list, to be offered counselling in 9 months. A blocked, permuted, randomisation procedure is conducted by the assessor via text.

School-based person-centred counselling (SBPCC) delivered in up to 12 weekly sessions of approximately 45 minutes each. The intervention will be based on competencies for person-centred and humanistic psychological therapy. Adherence to these competences will be audited using the PCEPS Scale, a validated adherence measure for person centred and experiential therapies.

The total duration of treatment was 12 weeks (mapping on to one school term) with 3 follow-up assessments at 6 weeks (mid-point assessment), 12 weeks (end-point assessment), at 6 months (follow-up assessment) and 9 months (follow-up assessment).

Intervention Type

Other

Phase

Not Applicable

Primary outcome(s)

Psychological distress is measured using the Young persons CORE (YP-CORE) at baseline, 6 and 9 months

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Goal Based Outcome Measure (GBOM), Rosenbergs Self-Esteem Inventory (RSEI) at baseline, 6 weeks, 3, 6 and 9 months
2. Helpful/unhelpful aspects of counselling will be assessed by qualitative interviews (adapted change Interview) at baseline, 6 weeks, 3, 6 and 9 months
3. The impact of counselling on young people and the school will be assessed through in-depth interviews with a sample of teaching staff at 9 months
4. Behavioural impact will be assessed through rates of attendance, exclusion, detentions and disciplinary proceedings and educational outcomes through achievement and attainment

projections at 9 months

5. Cost analysis will be assessed by an adapted Client Service Receipt Inventory (CSRI) completed at baseline, 6 weeks and 3, 6 and 9 months. Public sector support package costs will be derived from CSRI data on use of services for which unit costs will be sought from publicly available sources. Cost and outcome data will be compared using the YP-CORE and GBOM.

Completion date

13/01/2014

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Young people will be in years 7,8,9,10 or 12
2. Experiencing moderate or abnormally high levels of emotional distress, as indicated by a score of 5 or above on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) emotional symptoms subscale at assessment
3. Motivated to attend counselling, as indicated during assessment
4. Capable of consenting to participate in research, as indicated by the pastoral care team prior to assessment
5. Good attendance record, greater than 85% attendance at school as indicated by the pastoral care team prior to assessment.

Participant type(s)

Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. At risk of significant harm to self or other, as indicated by the pastoral care team
2. Involved with other child and young people's mental health agencies, as indicated by the pastoral care team and/ or the young person at assessment
3. Planning/likely to move school during the period of the study, as indicated by the pastoral care team and/ or young person at assessment
4. In year 11 or 13

Date of first enrolment

03/01/2013

Date of final enrolment

13/01/2014

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre**Saint Gabriel's College**

Cormont Road

London

United Kingdom

SW9 6UL

Study participating centre**Shooters Hill Post Sixteen**

Red Lion Lane

London

United Kingdom

SE18 4LD

Study participating centre**Sydenham Girls School**

Dartmouth Road

London

United Kingdom

SE26 4RD

Sponsor information**Organisation**

Metanoia Institute

ROR

<https://ror.org/02j1ekg65>

Funder(s)**Funder type**

University/education

Funder Name

Metanoia Institute (UK)

Funder Name

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (UK)

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

This data will not be made available due to data protection stated in the ethics application and in meetings with each school that data would only be stored at Metanoia Institute in a secure, locked, filing room and on a secure encrypted hard drive.

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article	results	01/06/2017		Yes	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes