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Program to improve help-seeking in young adults experiencing distress but not seeking professional help

Submission date
31/10/2023

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
02/11/2023

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
04/02/2025

Condition category
Other

[_] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and other stress-related conditions are very prevalent and hence called common mental health problems. Many young adults experience these problems. However, despite the experience of distress due to these problems, people do not often seek help/delay seeking help from professional help providers due to various personal and social reasons and obstacles. Therefore, this study aims to develop and evaluate a multi-component help-seeking intervention for non-treatment-seeking distressed young adults to enhance appropriate help-seeking for common mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety.

Who can participate?
People aged 20-35 years old who have attended formal education for at least 12 years and are experiencing distress due to mental health problems but do not intend to seek help

What does the study involve?
The study will involve filling out a few online questionnaires to assess the severity of distress, the extent to which it affects functioning and barriers experienced in seeking professional help. Individualized feedback will be provided based on these responses. If the distress is significant, the participant is requested to participate in an online intervention designed to improve appropriate help-seeking for common mental health concerns.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Individualized feedback about distress level and suggestions about a range of options to deal with the same, including self-help resources and guidance on seeking professional help, is provided. Credible information to increase awareness about common mental health problems, when professional help may be needed, and ways of overcoming barriers to seeking professional help is provided. This will also equip an individual to understand if someone else they know is experiencing a common mental health concern and how they can be helped to consult an expert, when appropriate. At any point during the study, if participants decide to seek professional consultation, they are free to contact the researcher during the designated working hours, who

will offer to coordinate their referral to NIMHANS outpatient service/NIMHANS Centre for Well-Being clinics as needed. If they prefer to seek professional help elsewhere, information on other local places offering mental health services near them can be provided. The study findings will be useful in furthering scientific knowledge about interventions to increase professional help-seeking in distressed young adults experiencing depressive/anxiety symptoms.
There are minimal risks of participating in this study. Participants may experience some discomfort while filling out the online survey about their distress level and while receiving individualized feedback and engaging in a telephone conversation with the researcher about their concerns and barriers experienced to seeking professional help. However, this distress is likely to be temporary.

Where is the study run from?
National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (India)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
December 2018 to May 2023

Who is funding the study?
Indian Council of Medical Research (India)

Who is the main contact?
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Contact information

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Principal investigator

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Study information

Scientific Title
Development and pilot evaluation of multi-component help-seeking intervention for non-treatment-seeking distressed young adults

Study objectives
1. There would be no significant reduction in perceived barriers to seek professional help for common mental health problems among distressed young adults following the intervention.
2. There would be no significant increase in the inclination to seek professional help for common mental health problems among distressed young adults following the intervention.
3. There would be no change in the status of professional help-seeking behaviour for common mental health problems among distressed young adults following the intervention.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 07/06/2019, Institutional Ethics Committee (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bengaluru, 560029, India; +91-080-26995004; deannimhans@yahoo.com), ref: NIMH/DO/IEC (BEH. Sc. DIV)/2019

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Sequential mixed-methods design including a cross-sectional exploratory phase followed by a single-group short-term prospective study to pilot test the help-seeking intervention

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Distressed persons in the community who are not seeking any professional consultation

Interventions
The study aimed:
1. To examine the effectiveness of a help-seeking intervention in reducing perceived barriers to

professional help-seeking for common mental health problems
2. To examine the effectiveness of a help-seeking intervention in enhancing the inclination to seek professional help among non-treatment-seeking distressed young adults
3. To examine the effectiveness of a help-seeking intervention in enhancing help-seeking behaviour among non-treatment-seeking distressed young adults
4. To assess the feasibility and acceptability of a help-seeking intervention for non-treatment-seeking distressed young adults
5. To assess the predictors of help-seeking inclination from a mental health professional and help-seeking behaviour following the intervention among non-treatment-seeking distressed young adults

Background work:
Before conducting the pilot trial of the help-seeking intervention for addressing the study objectives, background work involved exploratory and intervention development phases.
The exploratory phase explores help-seeking perspectives of distressed young adults through an online survey (n = 37) followed by semi-structured interviews using purposive and snowball sampling. While the survey samples distressed non-treatment seekers; the interviews are conducted to obtain perspectives of both treatment-seeking (n = 11) and non-treatment-seeking (n = 10) distressed young adults. Stakeholder perspectives on potential content and modes of intervention delivery to enhance professional help-seeking for common mental health problems are also inquired into.
In the development phase, the proposed help-seeking intervention is developed based on empirical research, relevant theoretical frameworks on help-seeking and data from the exploratory phase. The intervention comprises eight core components and one optional component. These utilize various formats (e.g. video, audio, poster, phone call), and are delivered in a range of 5 to 9 days via WhatsApp/email. The intervention includes components that enhance awareness about common mental health problems, the utility of self-help and support from significant others and, at the same time, increase participants' skills at recognizing when it may be appropriate to shift to professional help-seeking. The total duration of the intervention from baseline to second follow-up assessment ranges between 112-136 days. The help-seeking intervention was content validated by three experts and its pre-pilot run was conducted for fine-tuning and familiarization. Alongside, the Barriers to Seek Professional Help for Mental Health Scale (BSPH-MHS) was developed to be used as one of the outcome measures.

Intervention testing:
In the final phase, a pilot trial of the help-seeking intervention is conducted to assess effectiveness, feasibility and acceptability in reducing barriers and improving help-seeking inclination and behaviour among distressed non-treatment-seeking young adults for common mental health concerns. Based on sample size estimation, participants are recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. Participants respond to the announcement flyer circulated through various modes on multiple platforms with a QR code and hyperlink directing them to the consent form outlining the detailed description of their study participation. After completing the baseline assessment, participants who score above the distress cut-off on K10 are delivered the intervention with one component per week on average. After completion of the intervention, online post-assessment and feedback on the intervention are conducted with the participants via brief phone calls. The first follow-up assessment is conducted one month after the post-assessment, examining the changes in help-seeking barriers, help-seeking inclination from various sources and help-seeking behaviour from a professional. One month later, participants who did not seek professional help will be asked about their help-seeking behaviour, following which the study participation came to an end. If the participants report seeking professional help at any point during the study, it is considered an end-point of the intervention for them. An exit interview is conducted with help-seekers using a brief phone call

to ask about their consultation experience and facilitators of help-seeking after they sought professional help.

Intervention Type
Mixed

Primary outcome(s)
1. Barriers to professional help-seeking measured using the Barriers to Seek Professional Help for Mental Health Scale (BSPH-MHS) at baseline, post- and follow-up assessment
2. Help-seeking inclination from mental health professionals measured using the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) at baseline, and three-time points during the intervention, post- and follow-up assessment
3. Help-seeking behaviour from mental health professionals measured using a single item yes/no question at baseline, and three-time points during the intervention, post- and follow-up assessment

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Help-negation measured using the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) at baseline, three-time points during the intervention, and post- and follow-up assessment
2. Inclination to seek help from non-professional and professional sources, in general, measured using the GHSQ at baseline, three-time points during the intervention, and post- and follow-up assessment
3. The likelihood of consulting a mental health professional in the next two months measured using a single-item question on a 7-point Likert Scale

Completion date
12/05/2022

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Aged 20-35 years
2. Formal education of at least 12 years
3. All genders
4. Self-report of the current experience of psychological distress for a minimum of 2 weeks
5. Scoring above the cut-off on Kessler Psychological Distress Scale for psychological distress (≥20)
6. Not seeking professional help for current psychological distress
7. Working knowledge of the English language
8. Access and comfort in using the internet

Participant type(s)
Other

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
20 Years

Upper age limit
35 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
221

Key exclusion criteria
1. Indian nationals not currently residing in India
2. Lack of access to the internet

Date of first enrolment
30/10/2019

Date of final enrolment
20/12/2021

Locations

Countries of recruitment
India

Study participating centre
National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences
Hosur Main Road
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Sponsor information

Organisation
National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences

ROR
https://ror.org/0405n5e57

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
Indian Council of Medical Research

Alternative Name(s)
Indian Council of Medical Research, Government of India, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, ICMROrganisation, , Indian Council of Medical Research, New Delhi, ..., ICMR, ICMRDELHI, ...

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
National government

Location
India

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not expected to be made available. Consent was obtained for presenting findings in scientific gatherings and publications without revealing any personally identifying information. However, explicit consent was not sought for sharing individual-level raw data. The consent form also mentions 'Information provided by you will be open for scrutiny only for regulatory authorities and the research supervisor.'

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		16/02/2024	11/06/2024	Yes	No
Other publications		30/01/2025	04/02/2025	Yes	No