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Evaluating the impact of a manager training course featured on the Unmind mental health app

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21/06/2023

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

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21/06/2023

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
21/06/2023

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[X] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[ ] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Mental health problems affect hundreds of millions of people worldwide, impacting individual quality of life and creating a significant economic burden for employers. Employee performance, rates of illness, absence from work, and staff turnover are all affected by employees' mental health status.

There is now strong evidence that intervening early when signs of mental health problems appear can improve work outcomes and facilitate recovery, offering a clear incentive for employers to take a more active role in supporting the mental health needs of their workers. Managers are in a unique position to address work-based mental health risk factors and make changes that have a positive effect on the mental health and wellbeing of staff, the recovery of employees with mental health problems, and potentially prevent future mental health problems. However, many managers report a lack of knowledge and confidence in promoting workplace mental health, suggesting a need for formal training, guidance, and support.

Recent best practice guidelines from institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellent (NICE) recognise that all organizations should offer manager training, with the aim of improving managers' confidence to effectively respond to the needs of staff experiencing mental health issues, and to implement evidence-based managerial techniques that promote a more mentally healthy workplace.

The current study will aim to evaluate the impact of a newly-developed, self-guided, online training intervention for managers named "Workplace of Tomorrow Part 1: Mental Health at Work" (WoT Part 1). WoT Part 1 is featured on Unmind -- a mental health and wellbeing platform for the workplace -- and is intended to be scalable, and flexible, and to provide managers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to support their teams and create a positive work culture.

The study will recruit managers who are likely to be digitally engaged and working in desk-based roles. Participants will be recruited from an online participant recruitment platform named Prolific (https://www.prolific.co), and randomly allocated to complete the WoT Part 1 training, or to a control group who won't have any access to the training.

This method of random allocation will allow the research team to evaluate whether the training is effective at improving manager confidence, and other measured outcomes, compared to not

receiving any training.
The main outcome of interest will be manager confidence to appropriately respond to the needs of staff experiencing mental health issues and actively implement techniques that promote a more mentally healthy workplace. Other outcomes measured in the study will include manager knowledge (such as knowledge of common mental health problems, and the factors that shape a mentally healthy workplace), attitudes and stigma towards mental health, compassion towards self and others in the workplace, and frequency of carrying out managerial behaviors that can create more mentally healthy workplaces. These outcomes will be collected at the start of the study, immediately after completing the training (4 weeks), and after a 3-month follow-up period. Whilst the main aim of the study is to understand whether the training has an immediate impact, the follow-up period will allow the research team to test whether any potential benefits from the training are maintained over time.

Who can participate?
Adults aged 18 years and above, fluent in English, who live in the United Kingdom or the United States, and are in full- or part-time employment. They also have to be employed in a managerial role, and work in one of several specific industries, including “Business Management & Administration'', “Finance”, “Government & Public Administration'', “Information Technology”, “Legal”, “Marketing & Sales”, or “Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics''.

What does the study involve?
Participants will first be invited to complete an initial baseline survey about their role as a manager (including their knowledge of mental health problems and their confidence to support team members with their mental health and create a more mentally healthy workplace), information about their workplace and who they are (such as their age and sex), and about their own mental health. Participants will then be randomly allocated to complete the manager training course via the Unmind platform, or to a no-intervention control group that won’t be asked to use Unmind or complete any training. Participants in the Unmind group will be given free access to the Unmind platform for four weeks, during which time they will be asked to complete the manager training course.
At the end of the 4-week period, all participants will be invited to retake the same survey about their knowledge and confidence, so that the research team can compare how peoples’ scores might have changed over the study period. Participants in the Unmind group will also be asked to provide feedback on their use of the training course.
Finally, all participants will be invited to complete a final survey, 3 months after the main study period.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Participants will receive monetary compensation for taking part in the study. Individuals who are allocated to the Unmind group may benefit from the manager training course by learning new information or skills that can help them to better support their teams. The content included in the training course is designed to be educational and is not known to be associated with any negative effects. However, in the event of a participant experiencing distress, the research team would follow good practice and ensure that that individual is referred on to an appropriate source of support.
Each participant will be asked to answer some brief questions about their own mental health as part of the study, which may cause a degree of discomfort. Since individual responses will not be monitored, participants will be encouraged to seek appropriate support if they are worried about their mental health. The information sheet that participants receive will include details of who to contact in case of any concerns about their mental health, or in the event that they experience any distress or discomfort during the study.
Should participants feel uncomfortable answering any questions, they can opt to close the

survey and withdraw from the study. Participants can also withdraw any time after completing a survey by contacting the research team.

Where is the study run from?
The study will be conducted online and is a collaboration between the University of Sussex and Unmind Ltd (the creators of the digital mental health platform being tested in this study). The research team at Unmind Ltd are based in the UK.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
February 2023 to November 2023

Who is funding the study?
Unmind Ltd (UK)

Who is the main contact?
1. Professor Kate Cavanagh (kate.cavanagh@sussex.ac.uk)
2. Dr Marcos Economides (marcos.economides@unmind.com)

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Principal investigator

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Study information

Scientific Title
Efficacy of an online mental health training program for workplace managers: protocol for a randomized controlled trial

Study objectives
Primary hypothesis:
1. Participants randomized to a workplace intervention for managers will experience larger increases in self-reported manager confidence (to appropriately respond to the needs of staff experiencing mental health issues, and actively implement techniques that promote a more mentally healthy workplace) from baseline to post-intervention than the control group.

Secondary hypotheses:
1. Participants randomized to the intervention arm will experience larger increases in all self-reported secondary outcomes from baseline to post-intervention than the control group.
2. Post-intervention improvements in self-reported primary and secondary outcome measures will be maintained at the 3-month follow-up.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 07/06/2023, Sciences & Technology C-REC (University of Sussex, Brighton, BN1 9RH, United Kingdom; +44 (0)1273 606755; crecscitec@admin.susx.ac.uk), ref: ER/KC226/11

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Virtual parallel-group fully-powered randomized controlled trial

Study type(s)
Efficacy

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Workplace intervention to provide managers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to support their teams and create a positive work culture

Interventions
This study will evaluate a newly-developed, self-guided, online training intervention for workplace managers named “Workplace of Tomorrow Part 1: Mental Health” (WoT Part 1). WoT

Part 1 is intended to be scalable, and flexible, and provide managers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to support their teams and create a positive work culture. WoT Part 1 is developed by and hosted on Unmind, a digital mental health platform for the workplace (https://unmind.com/), accessible via smartphone or web app. The training consists of seven sessions, each approximately 10 minutes in duration, covering four core modules. At a high level, these modules include: 1) Mental health education, 2) Strategies to support the mental health of others, 3) Self-care for managers, and 4) Workplace determinants of mental health. The overall aim of the training is to improve managers' confidence to appropriately and effectively respond to the needs of staff experiencing mental health issues, and to actively implement techniques that promote a more mentally healthy workplace.

The study will be a virtual, parallel-group, fully-powered randomized controlled trial (RCT) with assessments at baseline (t0), post-intervention (4 weeks; t1), and 3-month follow-up (t2). The researchers will aim to recruit 300 participants currently residing in the United Kingdom (UK) or the United States (US) who self-identify as being in full-time or part-time employment as a manager, from the Prolific recruitment platform (https://www.prolific.co). Participants will be randomized to the study intervention (WoT Part 1) or to a no-intervention control group, for a period of 4 weeks, with a 1:1 allocation ratio. Randomization will be implemented via the Qualtrics "randomizer" feature (which uses block randomization), and thus the allocation sequence will not be visible to either study participants or researchers. Qualtrics software uses variable block sizes to ensure balanced groups.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Manager confidence, captured using a 9-item self-report measure developed by the research team, designed to cover core learning from the four intervention modules. Participants will be asked to respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale labeled "not at all" (0), "a little bit" (1), "moderately" (2), "quite a bit" (3), and "very" (4). Scores will be summed to produce an overall confidence score ranging from 0-36, with higher scores indicating greater confidence. Manager confidence will be measured at baseline, post-intervention (4 weeks), and at 3-month follow-up.

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Manager knowledge will be captured using a 13-item measure developed by the research team, designed to cover key information taught in the four intervention modules. This measure will include two subscales, one being employee-focused (9 items) and one being self-focused (4 items). Participants will be asked to respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Manager knowledge will be measured at baseline, post-intervention (4 weeks), and at 3-month follow-up.
2. Stigma/Attitudes towards mental health will be captured using 5 items adapted from subscale 1 of the 9-item version of the Opening Minds Scale - Workplace Attitudes (OMS-WA), which measures attitudes that predict avoidance of colleagues experiencing mental health problems. Participants will be asked to respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Stigma/Attitudes towards mental health will be measured at baseline, post-intervention (4 weeks), and at 3-month follow-up.
3. Compassion for others will be measured using a short-form, 5-item version of the Sussex-Oxford Compassion for Others Scale (Brief SOCS-O). In this study, 4 items from the Brief SOCS-O will be adapted to make them specific to a workplace setting (i.e. having compassion for a colleague). Participants will be asked to respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale from "not true at all" (1) to "always true" (5). Compassion for others will be measured at baseline,

post-intervention (4 weeks), and at 3-month follow-up.
4. Compassion for self will be measured using a version of the short-form, 5-item Brief SOCS-O (described above), adapted for the self (Brief SOCS-S). Item 1 is shared between both measures and will only be captured once. Response options are equivalent to the Brief SOCS-O. Compassion for self will be measured at baseline, post-intervention (4 weeks), and at 3-month follow-up.
5. Manager behavior will be captured using the same 9-item measure developed by the research team to capture manager confidence, with each item being adapted to capture the specific underlying behavior. The measure will use a 3-month reporting period, with participants being asked to report how often they have carried out behaviors captured in each item with themselves or with a colleague who they manage at work. Participants will be asked to respond to each item using a 4-point Likert scale with options “never” (0), “at least once” (1), “several times” (2), or “many times” (3). Manager behavior will be measured at baseline, post-intervention (4 weeks), and at 3-month follow-up.
6. Managers will be asked to rate the extent to which they agree with a single statement designed to capture the perceived overall impact of the training on individual mental wellbeing and workplace outcomes, as follows: “My team will benefit if I apply the knowledge, skills, and behaviors taught in this training (for example by feeling less stressed, or being more productive)”. Participants will be asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). This outcome will be captured at post-intervention only.

Completion date
30/11/2023

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Being at least 18 years old
2. Currently residing in the UK or the US
3. Self-identifying as being in full-time or part-time employment
4. Self-identifying as being a workplace manager
5. Self-identifying as working within a predefined list of the most relevant industries (see below)
6. Being fluent in English
7. Having access to the Internet at home via a smartphone, laptop, or desktop computer
8. Having an active account on the Prolific online recruitment platform

The workplace industries captured in the inclusion criteria were selected on the basis of aligning most closely with Unmind’s target audience, and being available as predefined categories within Prolific’s prescreening criteria. The following seven industries were selected: “Business Management & Administration'', “Finance”, “Government & Public Administration'', “Information Technology”, “Legal”, “Marketing & Sales”, “Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics''.

Participant type(s)
Employee

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
18 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet the inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
01/07/2023

Date of final enrolment
07/07/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

United States of America

Study participating centre
University of Sussex
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Sponsor information

Organisation
Unmind Ltd

Funder(s)

Funder type
Industry

Funder Name

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during the current study will be available upon request from Dr Marcos Economides (marcos.economides@unmind.com, or research@unmind.com) following publication of the main trial findings. Data will be shared with other research teams for the purpose of contributing to systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Participant consent has been sought for this. Shared data will be fully anonymised.

IPD sharing plan summary
Available on request