Assessing the feasibility of implementing the Family-Check Up intervention in secondary schools within the UK

Section 1 – Project Details:

Rationale

Preventing depression in adolescence is currently of national priority, and reduction or prevention of depression in adolescence may help reduce problematic behavior related to the symptoms of depression (e.g. substance abuse, suicide and self-harm).

Reducing symptoms of depression in young people is a challenge, but changing family-systems and parent-adolescent relationships could have a significant impact (Fosco et al., 2016). The Family Check-up (FCU) is a family-based intervention developed in the United States (US) that aims to identify and directly tackle adolescent-child relationships, as well as indirectly reduce problematic behaviours such as substance use (Dishion et al., 2003). It does so by providing parents with better parental monitoring and conflict resolution skills.

A number of RCTs have demonstrated the efficacy of the FCU in reducing and preventing depression in adolescents, theoretically, by resolving family conflict and improving adolescent-parent relationships (Fosco et al., 2016). The FCU has also been shown to be effective at reducing behaviours such as early alcohol use (Spoth et al., 2002) with long term reduction in use, a limitation of other interventions (Connell et al., 2007). Although an effective in the US, this intervention has yet to be implemented in the UK.

Aims and methodology

This project aims to assess the feasibility of implementing the FCU in UK secondary schools, with the aim to assess whether a reduction symptoms of depression, and other related behaviours (such as substance use) can be achieved.

Stage 1: A meta-analysis of RCTs will first be required to statistically examine the efficacy of the FCU in reducing depression, and other problematic behaviours. Of particular interest will be: identification of areas the FCU has most effect, and psychological mechanisms by which the intervention is having this effect. This will be a high impact output, and will inform stage 3.

Stage 2: To examine feasibility, the next stage will be to conduct a public participant involvement (PPI) study with parents, teachers and young people. The feasibility and need for the FCU will be discussed as well as practical challenges of the intervention. Our aim is to involve this group from inception to completion of the trial with training provided to involve partners in publication. An important output from this phase will be analysis of support needed in UK secondary schools, and how to engage teachers and parents, and young people in the process.

Stage 3: A small pilot study (FCU vs comparative control) will be conducted for the final phase. Of importance will be feasibility measures (e.g. uptake, engagement, and feedback from users). Final output will include a comprehensive list of recommendations, providing guidance on how to plan and conduct a large multi-site RCT. A priority at this stage will be for the student to use pilot data to apply for post-doctoral study.
Benefits and suitability as a PhD project:

The research proposal is novel, timely, and international. It would be an exciting opportunity for a PhD student to bring this model to the UK. A student would have the opportunity to interact with FCU developers and become trained in implementation. The student would also obtain a different perspectives by working actively with a user group, building a mixture of qualitative and quantitative skills. The three-year programme has been designed to enhance the student’s chances of obtaining post-doctoral funding to conduct a large-scale trial. The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) is perfectly placed to house this PhD as it stands for interdisciplinary research in mental health, providing the student access to an outstanding research infrastructure. The student will have the opportunity to join 'CANDAL', a centre of excellence for the study of ADHD and adolescent development. The project aligns with the aims of the University, and the strategic aims of the Division/IMH to reduce the impact of mental health problems. This study topic has the potential to interface with the BRC in Mental Health Technology and NIHR MindTech healthcare technology co-operative both located within the IMH. This would result in an enriching environment for doctoral study.

References:


Section 2 – Training Provision:

The student will receive accredited training on the FCU from Arizona State University. ASU delivers both face to face, and online training for people wishing to use FCU methods. The student will also have the opportunity to undertake the Nottingham Systematic Review Course to support stage 1 of the project (meta-analysis). Active training for PPI involvement is conducted within the Division by external partners such as Dr Peter Bates. Student may also like to attend local PPI networking events held at the Division. The student will develop knowledge about trial design from Daley, feasibility study knowledge from Jones and Daley, and mechanisms underlying substance abuse and mental health problems from Jones. Qualitative analysis techniques will be supported by Jones. The student will be provided the opportunity to engage with research groups such as CANDAL, and present at local conferences. It is expected the student would present at one American conference. Both supervisors will support writing for publication throughout the doctorate.