Reviewer's report

Title: A school intervention for mental health literacy in adolescents: Effects of a non-randomized cluster controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 15 March 2013

Reviewer: Andrew Ramtohul

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Minor Essential Revisions:

9. Is the writing acceptable?
The writing is mostly acceptable apart from the following spelling/grammar mistakes that I have noted:
p8:
dialouges: dialogues
beliefes: beliefs
educatonal: educational
and10th: and 10th
p9:
to reflection: to reflect
secretely: secretly
"model": “model”
p14:
enganging: engaging
p15:
ethichs: ethics
p19:
continous: continuous

Discretionary Revisions:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The authors have considered the benefits that are involved in providing mental health literacy for the early recognition of mental health problems and seeking mental health care. They have recognised that this is most important during childhood/adolescence period due to increase prevalence, and have recognised
that the school environment can provide universal prevention programmes.

Therefore the authors have aimed to investigate whether mental health literacy can be improved by a universal education programme by improving naming of symptom profiles of mental disorders, reducing prejudiced beliefs and improve knowledge about where to seek help. From these questions the authors question whether prejudiced beliefs actually affects knowledge about available help.

These questions are well defined, however there could have been a third aim in considering the influence of other factors particularly sex and age have in relation to the influence of the universal education programme.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods described were appropriate regarding the sample size that was used and the high adherence of participants at pre-test and follow-up. However the fact that only one whole school was participating as an intervention school would have affected results. There could have been a control and intervention group in each of the schools chosen possibly?

There would have also been differences made regarding whether or not the teacher or the actual researcher (who was trained in this specialist field unlike the teachers) was more or less involved in the Mental health for everyone programme. This would include the impact of an ‘expert’ (graduate students in clinical psychology, or known ‘teacher’ teaching the programme. The standard of the programme would therefore vary depending on this and also issues of the young people feeling comfortable and interest taken in the programme for example. More standardisation arguably could have resulted in a more appropriate method.

There was also less described about the differences that the programme had if at all between the different age groups that were used in the research (13-16). This would involve a discussion of the age-appropriate nature of the programme being used for different age groups (different terminology used), which could again have had an impact on the level of mental health literacy.

The instruments used were appropriate in ensuring that open ended questions were asked regarding the measurement of mental health literacy, although the terms used could have confused young people, for example ‘fatigue’, ‘initiative’, ‘sensual disturbances’, which if asked in a more young person friendly manner could have produced a different result. There could have also been more questions regarding how comfortable young people would have been having someone with a mental health problem babysitting/working for them/ being a friend/ being a neighbour rather than asking almost leading stereotypical statements against people with mental health problems which actually places an assumption that people already have thoughts that they are violent or should be committed to a mental hospital or are weak or are in trouble. There is also a problem surrounding categorising the young people’s answers regarding where they gained knowledge about where to seek help for mental health problems into
4 categories as this minimises and loses the actual meaning the young people are giving. For example ‘internet’ and ‘self-help’ are categorised as ‘Home’ which could actually be a very different interpretation of what the young people meant.

3. Are the data sound?
The authors have used appropriate statistical analysis to illustrate their results thoroughly and no concerns regarding data collected.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Manuscript adheres to relevant standards for reporting and data deposition

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
Overall the discussion and conclusion is well balanced and adequately supported by the data. I do not however agree entirely with the implication of the study that school programmes should focus on enhancing knowledge about common mental disorders like anxiety disorders and depression because they knew little about the most prevalent disorders. Instead the author’s research actually highlights that such an intervention has an improvement on increasing awareness about psychosis/schizophrenia. There is actually no mention of the extent there is stigma attached particularly towards psychosis/schizophrenia, which is actually much more prevalent as a stigmatised image of being ‘mad/crazy’ than is anxiety disorders and depression. The rationale that it is more prevalent does not justify focus on these two conditions, as one of the main reasons for having mental health literacy is to reduce stigma.

The research states that their findings had an impact on the nature of how young people are aware of where they can receive help in the primary care system. However I think the discussion should include how this should have an impact on how current services for young people should respond in their aims within health promotion to highlight where young people can get help.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Limitations of the work are clearly stated, however as I have highlighted in section 2 there are other limits that need to be considered.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
I cannot identify any acknowledgement to any work upon which they are building upon.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title and abstract accurately convey what has been found.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests