



Research Snapshot

Changes in depression and positive mental health among youth in a healthy relationships program

What is this research about?

Mental health challenges frequently arise during adolescence. This period is critical for the promotion of positive mental health. Research suggests that adolescent depression is common; however, the majority of these youth do not receive the help they need. Schools provide a promising opportunity to address the mental health challenges faced by youth.

The goal of this study was to identify and explore meaningful classes of youth based on pre- and post-intervention depression symptoms scores with 722 youth involved in a 15-week healthy relationships and mental health promotion program. The Fourth R Healthy Relationships Plus (HRP) Program is an evidence-informed universal mental health promotion program rooted in social emotional learning.

What did the researchers do?

Data were collected during the 2014-2015 academic year as part of a national scale-up of HRP. The program was implemented in schools across four provinces and territories. Prior to implementing the program, facilitators attended a training session and received a manual outlining each lesson plan, and youth completed self-report questionnaires assessing bullying and mental health before and after the program.

Youth were asked to report negative emotions over the past week; emotional, social, and



What you need to know:

This study explored and identified meaningful groups of youth based on their depression symptoms over time. Researchers found that youth who reported high levels of depression prior to the program experienced a significant decline in depressive symptoms and improved mental well-being following the program.

psychological well-being; and cumulative bullying experienced personally in the series of questionnaires administered.

Using a research analysis tool, the data was used to characterize groups of youth according to changes in depression over time. Four known risk factors were assessed, including: gender, age, bullying, and anxiety. In addition, the research data was also analyzed to determine whether changes in positive mental health differed across each of the identified groups.

Main Findings:

Three meaningful groups of youth were identified. The first two groups included approximately 80% of youth in the study, and represented youth who showed low or moderate levels of depression across time (“low stable group” or “moderate stable group”). The third group of youth reported high depression before the program, and significantly lower depression after completing the program.

Females, older youth, anxious youth, and those who had experienced multiple types of bullying were more likely to be in the high-decreasing group.

Positive mental health improved across time for all groups of youth. Youth in group one (low stable group) reported the highest positive mental health, followed by group two (moderate stable group). Youth in group three had the lowest mental well-being overall.

How can you use this research?

Findings suggest that not all youth experience symptoms of depression in the same way. In fact, youth followed one of three distinct trajectories across time. Notably, youth who reported high depression before the program showed significantly fewer depressive symptoms and improved mental well-being following the program.

Conclusive statements about the impact of HRP cannot be made; however, these findings are promising and provide a meaningful basis for future, more rigorous evaluations of the program.

Based on these findings, it is possible that a strengths-based, relationship-focused program can benefit all youth, particularly those experiencing depressive symptoms. This has important implications for school-based prevention and intervention efforts to promote adolescent well-being.

Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Lapshina, N., Crooks, C. V., & Kerry, A. (2018). Changes in depression and positive mental health among youth in a healthy relationships program. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0829573518777154>

About the Authors:

Natalia Lapshina, CSMH Research Associate, Faculty of Education, Western University.
Claire Crooks, Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for School Mental Health, Faculty of Education, Western University.
Amanda Kerry, CSMH PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University.

Keywords: Depression; Positive mental health; Mental health promotion; Latent class growth analysis; Adolescents

About this Summary: This summary was written by Courtney Cadieux, MA Candidate at Western University. For further information about Western's Centre for School Mental Health, visit www.csmh.uwo.ca.

Learn more about HRP:

To learn more about the Healthy Relationships Plus (HRP) Program, visit www.youthrelationships.org