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Protocol published for study evaluating the benefits of school counselling

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The protocol utilised for studying the benefits of professional school-based counsellors in supporting young people experiencing emotional issues has recently been released. This three year £835,000 study has established a dedicated counselling service in 18 London secondary schools.

One in 10 children in Britain have been identified as experiencing a diagnosable mental health disorder according to the Office for National Statistics. The ETHOS trial began in April 2016 and is led by counselling psychologist Professor Mick Cooper from the University of Roehampton. The ETHOS project aims to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of school-based, humanistic counselling. It is the first large-scale randomised controlled trial of this type of intervention.

The protocol was developed by Megan Stafford and Professor Cooper from the Department of Psychology, with a team of leading practitioners and specialists. The study compares the clinical and cost-effectiveness of School-Based Humanistic Counselling (SBHC) with Pastoral Care as Usual (PCAU) in school settings.

Just under 600 pupils have been assessed and 330 have taken part in the study, having been identified as experiencing symptoms of emotional distress. Eligibility criteria for young people includes being between 13 and 16 years of age and experiencing moderate to severe levels of emotional distress. Participants in this study are randomised to receive either SBHC or PCAU.

SBHC is delivered in up to 10 weekly, individual sessions in the participant's school with a qualified, experienced counsellor. Adherence to the counselling model is assessed by a sub-team of auditors and in clinical supervision. Pastoral care as usual consists of the schools' pre-existing systems for supporting the emotional health and well-being of students.

After six weeks, twelve weeks, and twenty-four weeks, participants are tested to ascertain any differences in levels of psychological distress between the two conditions. Those who participated in counselling will also be asked about how it might have helped them. Data collection will end in July 2018.

Professor Mick Cooper said ‘Young people who deserve the very best care for their mental health. Counselling may provide young people with a safe space to talk things through and work these things out for themselves in a supportive, confidential and understanding relationship with a counsellor. At the end of this trial, we will be able to understand the contribution that school-based counselling can make, its cost-effectiveness and how we may improve it’.

To read the full article published in Biomedical Central please click here

[< https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-018-2538-2 >](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-018-2538-2)

. To keep up to date with the latest information on the ETHOS trial visit the website here. The project is majority funded by the Economic and Social Research Council grant award for three years from April 2016 to April 2019. The project is also supported by the British Association for Counselling and the University of Roehampton.

100% of the Department of Psychology

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research is rated ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’ for its impact (REF 2014).

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