

Research finds schools can help reduce depression

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(PhysOrg.com) -- School-based intervention programs could help curb the amount of antidepressants being prescribed to adolescent boys, UQ research has found.

School Counsellor Mark Taylor, who will receive his PhD during the 6pm graduation ceremony on July 24, found symptoms of depression could be reduced by teaching students the skills of conflict resolution and positive thinking, as well as encouraging [physical exercise](#).

“Working in a school setting as a counsellor I became concerned about the numbers of students who were being prescribed antidepressants, without what I considered to be enough effort to find out what was going on in the lives of these students,” Dr Taylor said.

“I wanted to substantiate that there are viable alternatives to antidepressants which can significantly reduce depressive symptoms.”

With the aim of increasing the sense of wellbeing in young adolescent males, Dr Taylor trialed the intervention methods - explanatory style, conflict resolution and physical exercise - with 25 students displaying mild symptoms of depression.

“The explanatory style intervention was designed to teach the students about the connection between their thoughts and feelings and that they were able to challenge their negative thinking to bring about more realistic thinking patterns,” Dr Taylor said.

“Teaching the students the skills of assertiveness and conflict resolution was intended to assist them with their peer relationships, and also in the home situation where conflicts also occurred.

“The final intervention was a home-based physical exercise program. Being disciplined enough to complete this exercise program for a month helped to enhance the sense of control over their lives and develops a sense of well-being following the exercise sessions.

“This sense of control is a known protective factor against depressive symptoms.”

Each of the interventions was conducted over a one-month period, with eight explanatory style lessons and six conflict resolution training sessions conducted.

Dr Taylor said, by being proactive, schools had the potential to assist students experiencing [depression](#) and reduce the need for medical intervention.

“At one level, schools can provide regular physical activity for 20-30 minutes for all students, not just for those students who may choose physical education subjects,” he said.

“Students perceived to be at risk can be identified using screening measures, and targeted with programs such as an optimism building program, teaching about explanatory style, so that those who are overly pessimistic can learn to challenge their negative thinking.

“Third, students who appear to have social peer relationship difficulties can be assisted in developing social skills, one of which is learning to deal with conflict situations.”

The research also found parents' attitudes and sense of wellbeing tended to mirror that of their children.

“Using a Stress Index for Parents of Adolescents, we found parents of the intervention group were more stressed than were parents of a small comparison group of six students,” Dr Taylor said.

“The parents of the comparison group identified themselves as being there to support their sons but not to be there on all occasions to rescue them when they experienced difficulties.

“These [students](#) were better able to cope with their challenges, because they were, as a whole, more optimistic than were the members of the intervention group.”

Dr Taylor's PhD was completed through UQ's School of Education under the supervision of Professor Robyn Gillies and Professor Adrian Ashman.

Provided by University of Queensland ([news](#) : [web](#))

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