

Three hours is enough to help prevent mental health issues in teens

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The incidence of mental health issues amongst 509 British youth was reduced by 25 to 33% over the 24 months following two 90-minute group therapy sessions, according to a study led by Dr. Patricia Conrod of the University of Montreal and its affiliated Sainte-Justine Hospital Research Centre. "Almost one-in-four American 8 to 15 year olds has experienced a mental health disorder over the past year. We know that these disorders are associated with a plethora of negative consequences," Conrod said. "Our study shows that teacher delivered interventions that target specific risk factors for mental health problems can be immensely effective at reducing the incidence of depression, anxiety and conduct disorders in the long term."

Nineteen schools in Greater London participated in the study, which included a control group of schools in which students did not receive any interventions. Students were evaluated for their risk of developing [mental health](#) or substance abuse problems using an established personality scale. The scale measures different personality factors that are known to be correlated strongly with behavioural issues: for example, a person with high level of impulsivity is more than five times likely to develop severe conduct problems within the next 18 months. The researchers looked for impulsivity, hopelessness, anxiety sensitivity and sensation seeking. The schools in the intervention condition were trained to delivery interventions to their high risk students the control schools were not.. The two-session interventions included cognitive-behavioural strategies for managing one's personality profile. The interventions included real life "scenarios" shared by the high risk youths within their

focus group. The groups discussed thoughts, emotions and behaviours within the context of their personality type—identifying situational triggers, for example—and with the guidance of the teacher, explored ways to manage their issues.

In the two years that followed the interventions, students completed questionnaires every six months that enabled the researchers to establish the development of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, conduct problems and suicidal thoughts. The effects were clinically significant, with a 21-26% reduction in severe depression, anxiety and conduct problem symptoms over the course of the trial. Teenagers high in impulsivity had 36% reduced odds of reporting severe conduct problems. Similarly, teenagers high in anxiety sensitivity reported 33% reduced odds of severe anxiety problems. Teenagers high in hopelessness exhibited similar decreases in severe depressive symptoms (23%) as compared to youth with similar personality profiles who did not receive interventions. "The interventions were run by trained educational professionals, suggesting that this brief intervention can be both effective and sustainable when run within the school system," Conrod said. "We are now leading similar study in 32 high schools in Montreal to further test the efficacy of this kind of programme."

More information: Schools interested in taking part in the programme can visit the project's website at www.co-venture.ca

Provided by University of Montreal

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