

Mental health 'first aid' for teachers focus of new study

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Researchers from the University of Bristol have begun a trial to find out how well a training and support package for teachers works in recognising and combatting mental health problems.

Mental [health problems](#) are a frequently highlighted as a concern in the teaching profession. A 2015 report by the Education Support Partnership

found 77 per cent of the 2,077 teachers surveyed suffered from stress, 60 per cent from anxiety and 38 per cent from depression.

The Bristol evaluation, which is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), will look at the effectiveness of a training package called 'Mental Health First Aid' (MHFA). The package aims to equip lay people to recognise the signs and symptoms of [mental ill health](#), and to provide initial help to people in distress, before referring on to specialist help if needed.

Dr Judi Kidger from the School of Social and Community Medicine at the University of Bristol is leading the trial. She said: "Teachers who leave the profession often cite [mental health problems](#) as one of the contributing factors, so it's crucial they get the right support. Our study is intended to improve the mental health support and training available to secondary school teachers."

The trial is taking place in 24 secondary schools – half in Bristol and surrounding areas, and half in Cardiff and surrounding areas.

The team's study will have two aspects. They will train a group of staff in MHFA, who then set up a confidential peer support service for colleagues, as there is evidence that school staff do not feel able to talk openly about difficulties they are having. There will also be training for mainstream teachers such as tutors in MHFA for Schools and Colleges, which specifically aims to equip school staff to support students in distress.

Dr Kidger said: "Our randomised controlled trial will look at what impact MHFA training and a staff peer support service have on teacher wellbeing. We'll also be measuring effects on teacher depression, sickness absence, and underperformance at work, as well as student mental health and wellbeing.

"There is reasonably strong evidence that MHFA [training](#) increases knowledge and confidence in helping others, and decreases stigmatising attitudes, but there is a lack of evidence about its impact on the [mental health](#) of those who are supported by MHFA trainees, so we hope to further knowledge in this area.

"We are currently recruiting schools to take part in the trial, and would love to hear from any schools in the Bristol or Cardiff areas that are interested."

The trial started on Dec 1 2015, with the first data collections in June 2016, final follow up data collections in June 2018, and an official end date of April 2019.

Provided by University of Bristol

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