

Interprofessional School-Based Mental Health Services for Rural Adolescents in South Australia

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Abstract : Adolescent mental health is an international priority and the impact of innovative service models must be evaluated. Secondary school-based mental health services (SBMHS) involving private general practitioners and psychologists are a model of care being trialed in South Australia. Measures of depression, anxiety, and stress are routinely collected throughout psychotherapy sessions. This research set out to quantify the impact of psychotherapy for rural adolescents in a school setting and explore the importance of session frequency. Methods: Demographics, session date and DASS21 scores from students (n=65) seen in 2016 by three psychologists working at the SBMHS were recorded. Students were aged 13-18 years (M=15.43, SD= 1.24), mostly female (F=51, M=14), attended between 1 and 23 sessions with a median of 6 sessions (MAD 5.93) in one-year. The treating psychologist collected self-administered DASS21 scores. A mixed model analysis was used with age, sex, treating psychologist, months from first session, and session number as fixed effects, with response variables of DASS depression, anxiety, and stress scores. Results: 71.5% were classified as having extreme or severe anxiety and half had extreme or severe depression and/or stress scores. On average males had a greater increase in DASS scores over time but males attending more sessions benefited most from therapy. Discussion: Psychologists are treating rural adolescents in schools for severe anxiety, depression, and stress. This pilot study indicates that a predictive model combining demographics, session frequency, and DASS scores may help identify who is most likely to benefit from individual psychotherapy. Variations in DAS scores of individuals over time indicate the need for the collection of information such as living situation and exposure to alcohol. A larger sample size and additional data are currently being collected to allow for a more robust analysis.

Keywords : adolescent health, psychotherapy, school based mental health services, DAS21

Conference Title : ICPPBMH 2018 : International Conference on Pediatric Psychiatry, Behavioral and Mental Health

Conference Location : Sydney, Australia

Conference Dates : January 29-30, 2018