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FOCUS ON RESEARCH

A randomised controlled trial of a community based group guided self-help intervention for low mood and stress.

Researchers
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Aim
To assess the effectiveness of the Living Life to the Full (LLTTF) community-based life skills classes on depression, anxiety and social function at 6-months, and to investigate whether the intervention was cost-effective and acceptable to attendees.

Project Outline/Methodology
Individuals with symptoms of depression self-referred via community adverts to LLTTF classes. The 8-week course involved weekly 1.5hr classes where class leaders guided participants through written self-help booklets aimed at teaching key life-skills. Participants were randomly allocated to an Immediate Access (IA) group or a Delayed Access Control (DAC) group. The DAC group participated in the classes after a waiting period of 6-months allowing a comparison of effectiveness of classes. Measures of depression (PHQ-9), anxiety (GAD-7) and social function (WSAS) were collected at baseline and 6-months. Classes were delivered by the charity Action on Depression.

Key Results
Individuals aged 16+ years and who had at least mild depression were recruited. We aimed to recruit 126 participants and in the end recruited 142. Most (68.1%) had experienced depression for over five years. Classes were delivered competently and consistently as gauged by ratings of 17 classes attended by the study research assistant.

At baseline 49.3% were taking an antidepressant- and there was no difference in antidepressant usage between the groups. At six month follow-up, data was obtained on 71.8% (102/142) of participants.

PHQ9 questionnaire scores represent minimal depression (score 1-4), mild (5-9), moderate (10-14), moderately severe (15-19), and severe depression (score 20-27). The mean PHQ9 in the LLTTF arm dropped to 9.2, at 6 months compared to 13.6 in the DAC arm. Overall, 59.6% of those who attended the LLTTF classes now scored below 10 (the clinical cut-off for depression) at 6 month follow-up compared with 17.4% at the start of the project.

Significant reductions were also seen for anxiety and social function in the IA arm. These improvements were also greater at six months in those attending the LLTTF classes than those seen in the DAC group for anxiety (2.83 points better off on the GAD-7 anxiety questionnaire), and for social function (5.31 points better off on the WSAS rating scale).

The classes were cost-effective with a reduction in the LLTTF class arm costs from £907 to £780 (£-127), and from £802 to £740 (£-62) in the control group in the 6 months before and after joining the study. Overall the delivery of the classes (rooms, staff, resources) was cost-neutral as delivery costs were fully offset by the savings in health care usage in the intervention arm – with significant savings in terms of admission to hospital. The classes delivered improvements in Quality of Life with a cost per quality-adjusted life year between £20,000- £30,000.

Conclusions
The LLTTF classes appear to be effective and cost-effective in improving depression, anxiety and social function when delivered in a community setting.

What does this study add to the field?
This is the first large study including an economic analysis that has evaluated group-based life skills classes. The evidence from this study suggests the approach to be effective.

Implications for Practice or Policy
LLTTF classes should be made available to self-referred groups in community settings.

Where to next?
The study should be repeated by independent research groups, and examine other age ranges. Versions already exist for older adults and younger people. The classes are also available for free access online at www.llttf.com and that site should be evaluated in a randomised trial.

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