

Can school mental health interventions cause harm?

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What's the existing evidence?

The psychological therapies on which school interventions are based can lead to symptom increase in some individuals¹⁻³

Learning CBT skills in universal school interventions can lead to an increase in internalising symptoms relative to control groups^{4,5}

Mindfulness lessons can lead to an increase in depressive symptoms for adolescents with elevated levels of mental health symptoms at baseline⁶

Qualitative studies indicate that school mental health lessons make some adolescents feel more distressed⁷⁻⁹

"I mean, it's like you start thinking like that... that you have low [thoughts] because they bring it up all the time, negative thoughts and that you should change that all the time. But those who sort of have positive [thoughts], they start thinking negative in the end."
- Teenage participant who had CBT lessons at school⁹

What now?

In January 2023, I am starting a Prudence Trust fellowship at Oxford to investigate this phenomenon further

This will be a co-produced, mixed-method project to examine how many adolescents deteriorate during school mental health interventions, who is most at risk, and what can be done to minimise harm

I am setting up a special interest group for academics and clinicians with shared interests

If you are working on relevant projects, interested in measuring possible harm in an intervention, or want to find out more, please get in touch

Get in touch

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