

School for Public Health Research

Public Health Evidence Briefing

Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice



National Institute for
Health Research

Improving Mental Health Support and Training for Teachers

- Teachers have poorer mental health than the general working population, and are expected to support student mental health with little training on how to do so.
- An intervention was developed in which teachers were trained in Mental Health First Aid and went on to support colleagues and students.
- Participating schools perceived the intervention to be feasible, relevant and useful.

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School teachers do not feel well equipped to support students with mental health difficulties, and often lack support themselves in coping with stress and distress

Key issues

- Teachers have poorer wellbeing and higher levels of mental health difficulties than the general working population.
- Teachers are the professionals most often approached by students with mental health difficulties, and students who rate teachers as supportive are less likely to experience depression in the future.
- Teachers do not generally receive training in how to support students at risk of mental health difficulty, and teachers experiencing stress or distress themselves may have difficulty developing supportive relationships with students.

What we did

NIHR SPHR researchers, along with public health and education professionals, developed an intervention in which secondary school staff received training in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) (www.mhfaengland.org) and then set up a confidential peer support service for colleagues experiencing distress or difficulty. A second group of staff received training in youth MHFA, to develop skills in supporting students. The intervention was piloted in three schools, with another three acting as a comparison group.

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Findings and implications

- Schools were willing to take part in the study, and to be randomly assigned to receive the intervention or to be a comparison school
- Those school staff that attended the MHFA training found it to be relevant and useful to their roles in school
- The peer support service was welcomed as a 'first port of call' for staff in difficulty, and a range of support was provided from a listening ear to signposting to professional help services

What next?

The study team are now running a larger evaluation of the intervention over two years and involving 25 schools. This will enable them to establish if the intervention has an impact on teacher and student mental health. The larger study is funded by the NIHR Public Health Research programme.

"I think it's useful, within my year team there are people who I think are less confident and I've seen a difference in their practices"
Teacher – MHFA training attendee

References:

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/16/1060>
[http://www.jad-journal.com/article/S0165-0327\(15\)30762-X/fulltext](http://www.jad-journal.com/article/S0165-0327(15)30762-X/fulltext)

SPHR Contact/Find out more about this study at:

<http://www.bris.ac.uk/social-community-medicine/projects/wise/>

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