

School counseling can help young people manage mental health issues despite costs

21 January 2021, by University Of Roehampton



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For the first time in the U.K., a large-scale study led by the University of Roehampton and published in *The Lancet: Child & Adolescent Health* has revealed that school-based humanistic counseling is effective and should be considered as a viable treatment option for children suffering from mental health issues despite considerable costs.

The research, which was conducted between 2016 and 2018 across 18 London schools and surveyed 329 children aged between 13 and 16 years olds at six-week intervals, found [school](#)-based humanistic counseling led to significant reductions in pupils' psychological distress over the long-term, compared to pupils who only received pastoral care. However, it was also revealed that this type of counseling comes at a cost, totalling between £300 and £400 per pupil.

With one in eight 5 to 19 year olds in the U.K. estimated to meet the criteria for a [mental health disorder](#), the research provides critical evidence for schools considering expansion of their mental health services.

The study found that pupils who were offered counseling services experienced significantly improved self-esteem, as well as large increases in their achievement of personal goals. The paper also calls for urgent evaluation of other mental health interventions for adolescents, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and classroom modules on emotional literacy.

The project lays important groundwork for further studies and explorations into the improvement of mental health provision for [school children](#) in the UK and costs, particularly with the ongoing impact that COVID-19 is having on young people's [mental health issues](#) across the country.

Lead author of the paper, Mick Cooper, Professor of Counseling Psychology at the University of Roehampton, said: "Adolescence is a period of rapid change for young people and makes them particularly vulnerable to [mental health problems](#), so studies like ours, which is the first large scale project of its type ever to be conducted in the U.K., are vital to assess how mental health services can be improved in schools.

"Our analysis found that school-based humanistic counseling works and makes a difference to the well-being of pupils, albeit at a cost. However, it also highlighted the importance to continue to study the provision of mental health support in schools and how other services, such as CBT, can be employed to tackle these issues. There is pressing need for a diverse and comprehensive mental health provision and care for young people in schools across the U.K., but it is essential that this is properly assessed to establish what works and what should be widely implemented to improve the mental well-being of young generations."

Jo Holmes, Children, Young People and Families Lead at the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP) said: "Professionally delivered school counseling services are not cheap,

and neither should they be. School counselors are highly trained, experienced and skilled practitioners, often working with complex need and trauma linked to psychological distress. School counseling has the potential to take some of the short and long-term pressure off statutory provision, and can support young people as they transition to and from more specialist mental [health](#) services.

"Counseling provides a safe space where [young people](#) can truly explore what is worrying them, setting their own goals, tailored to meet their individual needs, and helping them to 'off-load' and function better in their daily lives. It delves deeply into complex thoughts, feelings and emotions and is not a short-term sticking plaster."

More information: Humanistic counselling plus pastoral care as usual versus pastoral care as usual for the treatment of psychological distress in adolescents in UK state schools (ETHOS): a randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet: Child & Adolescent Health*.

DOI: [doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30363-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30363-1)

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Provided by University of Roehampton

APA citation: School counseling can help young people manage mental health issues despite costs (2021, January 21) retrieved 3 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-school-young-people-mental-health.html>

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