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Exploring the potential of a school-based online health and wellbeing screening tool:

Professional stakeholders and young people's perspectives and experiences

Authors: Nicholas Woodrow (PhD) a*, Hannah Fairbrother (PhD) a, Katie Breheny (PhD) b, Kartina d'Apice (PhD) b, Patricia Albers (PhD) b, Clare Mills (BA) c, Matthew Curtis (BA) c, Lisa Hopkins (PhD) d, Sarah Tebbett (BSc) d, Rona Campbell (PhD) b, Frank De Vocht (PhD) b

a University of Sheffield

b University of Bristol

c Leicester City Council

d Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

* Corresponding author – Dr Nicholas Woodrow n.woodrow@sheffield.ac.uk, School of Health and Related Research, 30 Regent St, Sheffield City Centre, Sheffield S1 4DA

Early career researcher: Nicholas Woodrow is an early career researcher.

Abstract

Background

Supporting young people's (YP) mental and physical health is a global policy priority, but detecting need and facilitating access to health services and support is challenging. This paper explores YP and professional stakeholders' perspectives of the acceptability, utility and effectiveness of a school-based online health and wellbeing screening tool which has linked follow-up support, the Digital Health Contact (DHC). The DHC was initially piloted in 2017 and has been running ever since. Delivered by Public Health School Nurses (PHSN) in the East Midlands of the UK, the DHC aims to identify and put in place strategies to meet, unmet health needs among YP.

Methods

As part of a wider evaluation of the DHC intervention, we carried out online semi-structured interviews with 14 key stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the DHC (two commissioners, one provider, six PHSN, two healthcare staff and three school leaders), and 29 YP (aged 13-14 years old) from one school who had participated in the DHC. Data were analysed thematically.

Findings

The YP perceived the DHC as an acceptable and useful way of discussing health needs. The delivery method and context of the DHC (online, at home, at school), and knowledge of the involvement of the PHSN in delivering the DHC, was noted by the YP to facilitate honest responses and greater levels of engagement. Stakeholders perceived the universal application of the DHC with linked follow-up intervention as an effective means of identifying and supporting YP with unmet needs, and an efficient way to target limited service resources. There were barriers around enabling school engagement typically in terms of logistics, school infrastructure and perspectives of fit with schools. These barriers were seen to be negated through developing effective working relationships between PHSN and schools.

Interpretation

The DHC, as a school-based universal health and wellbeing screening tool with linked follow-up support, has high levels of perceived effectiveness and acceptability from those delivering and receiving it. The DHC's screening and linked follow-up support approach appears to have great potential, and could be adopted more widely to help identify and support unmet health need among YP.

Funding

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Conflicts of interest

This study, and the wider research project evaluating the DHC, has been co-produced with the DHC's commissioners (at Leicester City Council) and providers (at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust). The commissioner and the provider are committed to helping to facilitate a robust evaluation of the DHC in order to inform potential changes and wider roll out of the programme. The commissioners and providers have participated in the study as stakeholders, and been involved in the analysis and writing up of the paper. There has been no pressure or influence to modify, restate, weaken, omit or frame findings, conclusions and recommendations from any team member.

Contributions

Study design: HF and FDV

Data generation and analysis: NW and HF.

Recruitment: CM, ST, MC and LH

Writing up: NW, HF, KB, Kd'A, PA, CM, ST, MC, LH, RC, FDV

