

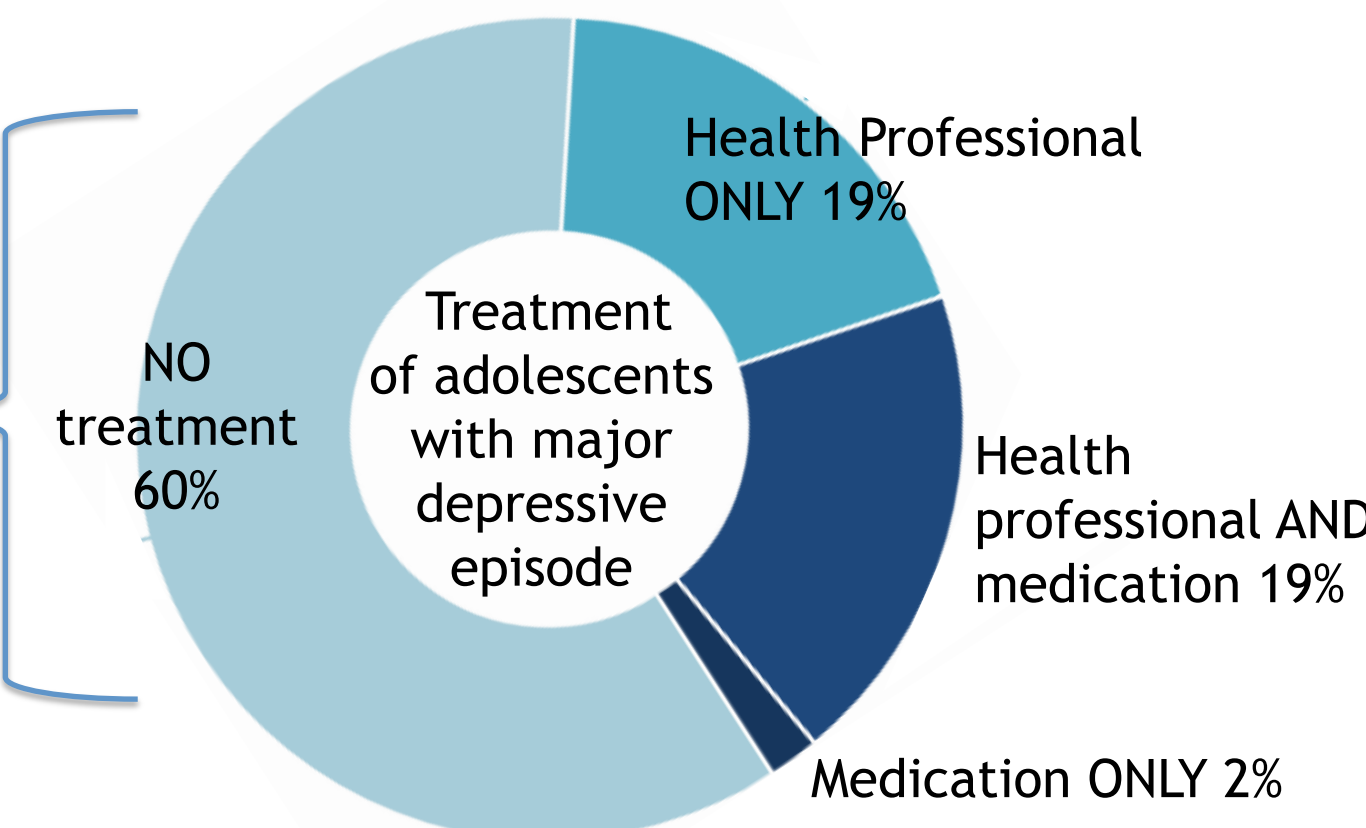
Writing through the Blues: Reducing Depression in High School Adolescents

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Introduction

In 2016, an estimated 3.1 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode. (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017)

Approximately 60% of adolescents with major depressive episode did not receive treatment in 2016. (NIMH, 2017)



Untreated adolescent depression is associated with poor grades, poor career development, poor relationships, substance abuse, and increased risk of suicide. (Ashford, 2018)

Because adolescents spend 1/3 of their time at school, the school environment can be a very important setting to offer prevention and treatment programs for depression.

Research Question

What is the most effective school-based intervention to reduce symptoms of depression in high school adolescents?

Methodology

Databases: PsycINFO, SocINDEX, ERIC

Search terms (found in Abstract):

- High school students OR teenagers OR secondary schools OR adolescents
- School based intervention OR intervention OR treatment OR therapy OR program
- Depression OR depressive disorder OR depressive symptoms OR major depressive disorder

Inclusion Criteria: English, 2008-2018, peer-reviewed, academic journals, systematic review, meta-analysis, RCT.

Exclusion Criteria: Pre-adolescents (younger than 12 years), adults (older than 18 years)

Database search identified 338 articles, 7 were selected for analysis.

Recommended Intervention: CBT BIBLIOTHERAPY



Treatment that uses a self-help book to guide and encourages students to challenge and improve unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. (Yuan et al., 2018)

- Provides written exercises that are based on cognitive behavioral therapy principles.
- Can be completed in a group setting at school or individually at home; administered over 6-12 weeks.
- Students can work through the exercises with or without the help of their parent.
- Therapist only needs to offer limited contact to support students in working through the exercises.
- Can be completed without therapist support.

Rational for CBT Bibliotherapy

- A meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials found bibliotherapy to be significantly more effective than control in reducing symptoms of depression in adolescents. (Yuan et al., 2018)
- An alternative design study conducted with 341 students compared CBT group therapy, supportive expressive group therapy, CBT bibliotherapy, and control. Bibliotherapy produced greater reduction in risk for future depressive episodes than other treatments. (Stice et al., 2010)
- Cost analysis in the Stice et al. 2010 study indicates that only \$8 per student is spent for bibliotherapy compared to \$80 per student for group CBT.

Advantages

- Accessible to students who feel embarrassed about going to therapy. Greater privacy for students.
- Reduces time and financial burden of visiting a counseling clinic.
- Easy to use, low cost, and low staffing demands.

Limitations

- Attrition: Requires high level of self-motivation from student to complete treatment.

Other Treatments Considered

Group & Individual CBT Therapy

- Solution-focused psychotherapy that modifies dysfunctional emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Group and individual CBT has strong evidence base for adults but not enough for adolescents. (Hetrick, S. E., 2015)
- Limitation: Not as available or financially accessible for adolescents or low-income populations. (Yuan et al., 2018)

Pharmacotherapy (SSRI)

- Prescribing antidepressants (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) to treat depressive symptoms.
- Meta-analysis has found pharmacotherapy to be as equally effective to CBT and combination (CBT and SSRI) therapy. (Singh, N., 2014)
- Therefore, CBT is preferred since there are no associated side effects, has demonstrated sustained effects, and is the more cost-effective treatment approach. (Singh, N., 2014)

Conclusion & Recommendations



Bibliotherapy is a low-cost and accessible intervention that school social workers can use to effectively treat depressive symptoms in adolescents.

- Most effective for high school students who are literate and have writing skills.
- To address attrition (due to low motivation), school social workers or parents can play a supportive and encouraging role in treatment.
- More rigorously designed comparative studies are needed to support efficacy and long-term effectiveness of bibliotherapy.