COMPASS TEAM: Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Skills for 16-25 year olds in psychological distress.

Dr Suzan Aydinlar, Counselling Psychologist, Mrs Anna Quinn, Mental Health Practitioner, Mrs Emma Boyd, Trainee Clinical Psychologist & Ms Jennifer Lai, Trainee Clinical Psychologist

Background

- The number of presentations for 16-25 year olds in psychological distress in NHS Lanarkshire Emergency Department (ED) has increased from 561 in 2014 to 1408 in 2016, a 64% increase.
- The Scottish Government Health Survey identified that self-harm was most prevalent amongst 16-24 year olds, with 18% reporting having ever self-harmed and 4% attempting suicide (Scott Gov, 2015).
- However, young people between the ages of 16-25 with severe mental health disorder are significantly less likely than older people to be receiving mental health services (Krepp et al., 2016).
- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is a cognitive behavioural intervention which is effective in reducing suicide and self-harm behaviours (Linehan, 1993).

Aims:

The COMPASS Team was funded by the Scottish Government Mental Health Innovation Fund between March 2016 and March 2018. The team aimed to improve responses to young people in distress through offering interventions and training, and in doing so, reducing the requirement for people to use emergency services as a route of access to support and intervention for stress and distress.

Methods

DBT is based on a biopsychosocial theory which emphasises the role of difficulties in regulating emotions and behaviour in the development of psychological difficulties. DBT skills groups are psycho-educational groups that run weekly for two hours. Four modules are covered within the DBT Skills groups:
- Core mindfulness (2 weeks)
- Distress tolerance (6 weeks)
- Emotion Regulation (6 weeks)
- Interpersonal Effectiveness (6 weeks)

The overall goal of DBT skills group is to help individuals change behavioural, emotional, thinking, and interpersonal patterns associated with problems in living.

The COMPASS team ran two DBT skills groups in NHS Lanarkshire between November 2017 and February 2018. There were a total of 77 referrals made to the two DBT skills groups and 51 were offered a place on the group. Attendance rates at the group were 64%.

Telephone consultation was offered to group members Monday to Friday 9-5 and focused on helping group members apply the skills learned in the DBT group to everyday life.

The COMPASS team developed a range of workshops to meet the needs of different services. These workshops were based on DBT skills and aimed to provide professionals with a range of practical skills they could use when working with people in distress including mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal-effectiveness skills.

Workshops were delivered to Psychological Therapies Teams, Community Mental Health Teams, psychiatric in-patient services, and third sector services within NHS Lanarkshire.

A total of 171 members of staff across services attended these workshops. Attendees included community psychiatric nurses, clinical and counselling psychologists, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, charge nurses, and support workers.

The central dialectic within DBT is to balance acceptance strategies with change strategies. The consultation group is a weekly group where the DBT team comes together for case discussions and focuses on providing a dialectical balance for therapists, and aims to increase the therapists’ skills in teaching DBT skills.

The COMPASS team also received expert supervision in DBT.

Results

DBT skills group outcome measures:
Group participants completed the CORE-OM, MSES-R, WEMSWS, and feedback forms at the end of each module.

- 71% of individuals who completed the group showed improvements on CORE-OM scores.
- 65% of individuals who completed the group showed improvements in mental wellbeing.
- 69% of individuals who completed the group showed improvements in self-efficacy.
- 57% of individuals who completed the group showed improvements in work and social adjustment.

Scores on outcome measures pre-to-post group

Feedback from group members:
On a scale from “very poor” to “excellent”: 71% rated the group as “excellent” 29% rated it as “good”.

What group members found most helpful about the group:
- 68%: learning a range of different skills
- 42%: meeting people with similar difficulties
- 29%: friendly, supportive, and welcoming group

Reduction in self-harm behaviours:
- 100% of group participants reported a reduction in the frequency of their self-harm behaviours since attending the group.
- 82% of group participants reported a reduction in the severity of their self-harming behaviours.
- 76% of group members showed an improvement in risk scores on the CORE-OM (p<0.03).

Skills Training Workshops:
Feedback on the workshops was positive and most participants reported that they would feel confident in using the skills taught in the workshops in practice. On a scale from “very poor” to “excellent”:
- 77% rated the workshops as “excellent” and
- 33% rated the workshops as “good”.

References: