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INDEPENDENT, OBJECTIVE AND EVIDENCE-BASED

Depression in children and young people: Prevention by psychological programmes?



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Eight out of every 100 (8%) children and young people are depressed. Up to 24 out of 100 (24%) of all young people will have gone through a depression that might need treatment at least once by the time they are 18.

To try to find a way to prevent depression in children and young people, psychologists, therapists and other experts have developed a range of education and training programmes. It was not known whether or not these could really prevent depression or reduce depressive symptoms.

Researchers therefore analysed 21 trials in which programmes like this were studied. Altogether more than 5,300 children and young people between the ages of 5 and 19 years took part.

In psychologically-based programmes children and young people with a high risk of depression attended a series of sessions, where they learned how they could cope with sad situations or stress, and how to solve problems. The analysis of these studies suggested that programmes like this could reduce depressive symptoms in children and young people with a high risk of depression, as well as prevent depression occurring from a short period of time to up to a year. Children are at an increased risk of depression if they are having depressive symptoms and/or a family member is depressed or has another mental illness.

Other types of programmes for children and young people who are not at particular risk were also studied. They provided information about how the illness develops, the signs and treatment options. The studies suggested that these programmes might only have limited success.

The researchers pointed out that individual programmes are very different. There was not enough evidence to show whether any one particular type of programme worked better. It is also unclear whether or not programmes have a different impact on girls and boys. The studies do show that psychological programmes could particularly help prevent depression in children and young people at high risk.

Glossary

evidence

Evidence is what we call scientific proof from well-conducted, good-quality scientific trials that have been carefully designed to answer specific questions. Depending on the types of questions, different scientific research methods (types of study) are most appropriate to find reliable answers to these questions. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), for example, are the best way to get reliable evidence on the effectiveness of medical treatments (interventions). This type of study, however, is not the best form of evidence for all possible questions, and does not provide the best answers to all kinds of questions, either. Epidemiological studies, for example, are very suitable for establishing well-founded proof for the spreading of a disease in the population.

depression

Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses, and it can be mild, moderate or serious. There are several different types of depression that can be recognised by different signs. Which symptoms of depression occur and how strong and frequent they are vary from person to person. People in any social or age group can be affected, both women and men. If someone has had at least two of the following symptoms for longer than two weeks, it might mean that they are depressed: deep sadness; listlessness; loss of interest in the things they usually care about.

Sources

Merry S, McDowell H, Hetrick S, Bir J, Muller N. Psychological and/or educational interventions for the prevention of depression in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2004, Issue 2. (Cochrane Database (URL: <http://www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/clsysrev/articles/CD003380/frame.html>))

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **www.informedhealthonline.org**

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