

EMPATHY: An In-School, Online CBT Program for Depression

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WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?

Researchers assessed the effectiveness of EMPATHY: Empowering a Multimodal Pathway Towards Healthy Youth in decreasing depressive symptoms and suicidal ideations amongst adolescents in school.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

Actively suicidal and/or high-risk students were identified through a school-wide survey. Said students were offered a guided internet-based CBT program. After twelve weeks, participants completed the screening surveys again, and these scores were compared to their baseline scores to assess the efficacy of the program.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):

A form of psychotherapy that emphasizes the change of thinking patterns to subsequently change behavioral patterns. CBT is one of the most common, empirically-supported methods used in school-based programs addressing depression.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

Baseline and post-treatment measures were compared to reveal a 15% decrease in depression across students. Those who completed online CBT programs had higher reductions in depressive symptoms than those who did not. Of the students identified as actively suicidal at baseline, 61% were in the no-risk group at the end of the 12-week period.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

These findings indicate that the multi-modal approaches of EMPATHY have significant effects on decreasing depression and suicidality in adolescents. Furthermore, it indicates that Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy can be just as effective, and even more accessible, when distributed via technology.

WHAT CAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS DO?

School Social Workers can implement the EMPATHY program to address depression of students in all tiers of intervention. Suicidal ideation screening serves as a tier-1 preventative measure, family interviews and safety plan development serve as tier-2 interventions for all medium to high risk students, and online CBT programs serve as a tier-3 intervention for students presenting the highest symptoms of depression and suicidality.