

An activity-focused time-use intervention (ATUS) to improve mental health and well-being in adolescents: an acceptability study

Key findings

- The eight-week intervention was deliverable in a school environment to year 12 students and was found to be acceptable by adolescents (n=7).
- Online completion of measures was good for three out of four of the outcome measures used, but results raised concern regarding overlapping concepts and test re-test reliability between pre and post intervention.
- An alternative occupation focused outcome measure should be identified to better measure the primary outcome of the intervention; for example, an occupational balance, or time-use diary measure could be used.
- Semi-structured interview revealed aspects of the intervention would benefit from further refinement; for example, duration of some tasks and reviewing the role of homework.
- Aspects of the study delivery should be refined, specifically the process of ensuring participants better understand the purpose of the intervention.
- Following these modifications, the intervention would be ready for feasibility testing with individuals with emerging mental health difficulties.

Project aims

- 1) To deliver the ATUS intervention and explore the acceptability of the intervention to adolescents aged between 16 and 17 years in secondary education.
- 2) To identify barriers and facilitators to delivering the ATUS intervention in the school environment with key stakeholders.
- 3) To explore the acceptability of planned outcome measures and identify implementation issues.

Background

- Numbers of adolescents reporting mental health problems have increased (Patel et al., 2018).
- The emergence of mental health problems during adolescence, occurs during a critical period for activity and role development (Bowman et al., 2020).
- Interventions are needed that address the influence of multiple inter-related personal, social, and environmental factors (Mei et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2018).
- Daily activities and lifestyle factors are essential to multiple aspects of healthy adolescent development, including neurological, biological, psychosocial, and occupational development, habit establishment, acquisition of skills, and adult role competencies (Bowman et al 2020; Larsen & Luna., 2018; Patel et al., 2018)
- The Activity Time Use Intervention (ATUS) is a systematically developed, occupational therapy informed intervention, designed to empower adolescents (aged 16 to 17 years) with sub-clinical level difficulties to develop the competencies necessary to make autonomous occupational choices leading to a healthier balance of daily activities and mental health.

Methodology

A pragmatic, mixed method, pre and post-test, acceptability study design informed by the intervention mapping framework was used to explore the acceptability of the ATUS intervention and identify facilitators and barriers to the implementation of the intervention in a school environment. The therapist delivered the intervention according to the intervention manual, and after each session wrote a reflective log regarding delivering the intervention, recorded attendance and students' completion of tasks. Sessions plans and experiences were regularly discussed with people with lived experience to discuss where future modifications may be required. The intervention consists of eight sessions over 11 weeks, details of which can be found at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eip.13512>. A sequential pragmatic mixed-method approach was taken in the data analysis, which included using framework, thematic, and quantitative analysis.

Recommendations and conclusion

This small acceptability study identified that the ATUS intervention was well received by healthy participants and was practical to deliver in the school environment. There are some modifications required, as detailed in the key findings section. A feasibility pilot of the intervention with the target population, adolescents with emerging mental health difficulties, is practical following modifications.

Publications

A paper is in process and due to be submitted to a peer reviewed journal imminently.

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