Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Personalized Depression Prevention Reduces Dependent Stressors Among Adolescents: Results from a Randomized Controlled Trial

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Objective: Depression and stressors both increase during adolescence. The stress generation model posits that depression symptoms and associated impairment contribute to the generation of dependent stressors. Adolescent depression prevention programs have been shown to reduce the risk of depression. Recently, risk-informed personalization approaches have been adopted to enhance the efficacy of depression prevention, and preliminary evidence supports the beneficial effects of personalized prevention on depression symptoms. Given the close association between depression and stress, we examined the hypothesis that personalized depression prevention programs would reduce adolescents' experience of dependent stressors (interpersonal and non-interpersonal) over longitudinal follow-up.

Method: The present study included 204 adolescents (56% girls, 29% racial minority) who were randomized to receive either a cognitive-behavioral or an interpersonal prevention program. Youth were categorized as high or low on cognitive and interpersonal risk using a previously established risk classification system. Half of the adolescents received a prevention program that matched their risk profile (e.g., high cognitive risk randomized to cognitive-behavioral prevention); half received a mismatched program (e.g., high interpersonal risk randomized to cognitive-behavioral prevention). Exposure to dependent and independent stressors was assessed repeatedly over an 18-month follow-up period.

Results: Matched adolescents reported fewer dependent stressors during the post-intervention follow-up period (d = .46, p = .002) and from baseline through 18-months post-intervention (d = .35, p = .02) compared to mismatched youth. As expected, there were no differences between matched and mismatched youth on the experience of independent stressors.

Conclusions: These findings further highlight the potential of personalized approaches to depression prevention and demonstrate benefits that go beyond depression symptom reduction.

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