

Effect of Primary Care Online Emotion-Regulation Treatment: A Brief Intervention Targeting Adolescents Within First-Line Mental Health Care

2. Digital and other technological treatment and interventions

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Abstract text

Objective: Mental health problems are common during adolescence and are associated with an increased risk of suicide, but access to effective treatments is limited. Transdiagnostic treatments may prevent mental health problems and address this treatment gap, but their feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness are unknown. This study aimed to evaluate the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of the preventive, transdiagnostic, digital intervention Primary care Online Emotion-regulation Treatment (POET) for youth with mental health problems.

Methods: This single-blinded, randomized feasibility trial evaluated POET within Primary care in Sweden. Feasibility and acceptability measures included completion of assessments, compliance and satisfaction with treatments. Clinical outcomes were rated by blinded assessors and included global symptom severity and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Measures of the target mechanism emotion regulation included cognitive emotion regulation and alexithymia. The primary endpoint was post-treatment. Secondary endpoint was three-month post-treatment.

Participants: 30 adolescents (12-17 years) with mental health problems, and their parents.

Interventions: 6 weeks therapist-guided, online transdiagnostic emotion regulation treatment or an active control treatment.

Results: 30 adolescents (mean age = 14.5 years) were randomized to the experimental treatment (n=15) or active control treatment (n=15). The rate of assessment completion at post-treatment was high (93%). Compliance and satisfaction in both groups were adequate. The experimental treatment was superior to the control treatment in reducing symptom severity (effect size: 0.78, 95% CI, 0.25, 1.32) and maladaptive cognitive coping (effect size: 1.10, 95% CI, 0.17, 2.02), at post-treatment. Effects on symptom severity were maintained at three-month post-treatment. Although point estimates of effect sizes on other clinical outcomes and target mechanism were promising, favoring the experimental treatment, the comparisons did not reach statistical significance.

Conclusion: In this feasibility trial, a digital, preventive, transdiagnostic emotion regulation treatment targeting adolescents with mental health problems was found feasible, acceptable, and potentially efficacious.