



## Reducing Depression in 9-10 Year Old Children in Low SES Schools: A Longitudinal Universal Randomized Controlled Trial

Rooney, R., Hassan, S., Kane, R., Roberts, C.M., Nesa, M. (2013). Reducing depression in 9-10 year old children in low SES schools: A longitudinal universal randomized controlled trial. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 51, 845-854. doi:10.1016.j.brat.2013.09.005.



910 children (ages 9-10) in Western Australia participated in a randomized trial (randomized by school) of a curriculum-based mental health promotion program. The program involves cognitive and behavioral strategies aimed at preventing depressive and anxiety symptoms and disorders in middle primary school children. Children in the intervention condition demonstrated a significant pre-post reduction in depressive symptoms as well as parent-reported emotional difficulties; the gains were maintained at 6 months post-intervention.

### Key Findings:

- The intervention was associated with a significant reduction in child-reported depressive symptoms and parent-reported emotional difficulties. These gains were maintained at 6 months follow-up, but not at 18 months follow-up.
- There was no significant reduction among youth in the intervention group in anxiety, attribution style, or parent-reported pro-social behaviors.
- There were no gender differences in the effects of the intervention.
- The control group also demonstrated significant decreases in depressive symptoms from post-intervention to 6 months and again at 18 months. However, they had no significant decrease in symptoms from the pre- to post-intervention period.

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could offer supportive classes for parents on how to recognize mental health difficulties in their children and strategies for addressing them.
- Programs could develop classes for youth to broaden and strengthen their resilience and coping skills.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funding to train family program workers on effective coping strategies for children.
- Policies could recommend offering professional development to public schools with large number of military children to help enhance understanding of military culture and the unique challenges faced by military youth.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could adapt the intervention to simplify the cognitive aspects and place greater emphasis on skill development to see whether this improves outcomes.
- Additional research could address whether attributional style is more amenable to change at later ages.

## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Longitudinal data were gathered from 10 sites across the United States when children were 54 months old, and in third, fifth, and sixth grades. These data were part of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care.
- Mothers and teachers completed a questionnaire evaluating children's prosocial behavior with peers in third, fifth, and sixth grades.
- A trained rater coded parental sensitivity during structured observational tasks at 54 months, third grade, and fifth grade.
- Structural equation modeling was used to evaluate bidirectional relationships between children's prosocial behavior and parental sensitivity in mothers and fathers, independently.

### Participants:

- The sample included 1,364 children as well as their parents (1,155 mothers, 459 fathers) and teachers.
- Boys and girls were roughly equally represented; one-quarter were from an ethnic minority.
- Approximately one-third of mothers and 39% of fathers had at least one college degree; 10% of mothers and 8% of fathers had less than a high school education.
- No additional demographic information for study participants was reported in this manuscript.

### Limitations:

- Relatively few fathers were included in the models, limiting conclusions that can be drawn regarding relationships between paternal sensitivity and children's prosocial behaviors.
- Parental sensitivity was obtained during engagement in a limited number of structured tasks. Additional tasks or unstructured tasks may have influenced ratings of parental sensitivity.
- Paternal perceptions of children's prosocial behavior were not obtained.
- Observed gender differences in prosocial behavior may be partly attributable to the nature of the prosocial behaviors assessed (i.e., emotionally responsive behavior).

## Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent <i>Minor Limitations</i> (★★★)	Appropriate <i>Few Limitations</i> (★★★)	Limited <i>Several Limitations</i> (★★★)	Questionable <i>Many/Severe Limitations</i> (★★★)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ★
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★★)	Questionable (★★★)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
				<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications	
Overall Quality Rating				★ ★ ★	