

What are the Experiences of and Attitudes Towards Interventions Aiming to Improve the Mental Health of Children and Young People with a Long-Term Physical Condition: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research

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Background

Children and Young People (CYP) who live with a long-term physical condition (LTC) are at risk greater risk of mental ill health. Little research has synthesised the experiences and attitudes towards the wide range of interventions that seek to address these mental health issues for this population.

Aim of Systematic Review: To gather the experiences and attitudes of CYP, caregivers and practitioners regarding interventions which aim to improve the mental health of CYP with long-term physical conditions and identify factors which may enhance or hinder the effectiveness or successful implementation of these interventions.

Methods

- Thirteen academic databases, websites and grey literature sources were searched. Citation chasing of relevant studies and author contact was used to locate further literature.
- Relevant data was extracted from included studies and quality assessed using the Wallace checklist.
- An analytical process called meta-ethnography was used to synthesise the themes across the included studies.

Results

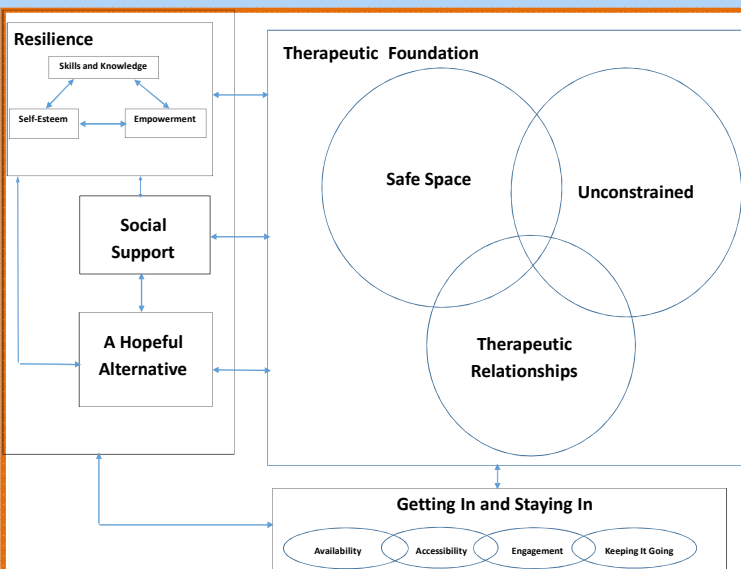
Sixty relevant articles were identified spanning over 20 different interventions and 15 LTCs. The meta-ethnography developed five themes [Figure 1]. "Therapeutic Foundation" discusses how experiencing a sense of safety may be healing for CYP and the different factors required to achieve this:

CYP with HIV discussing Peer Support Group: I feel open that I could talk to whoever, however I want like I can talk open about what I feel and what I need (Muskat, 2016 p6)

"Social support" explores how improved links with peers and family members can help CYP access affirmational, emotional and informational support. "A Hopeful Alternative" discusses factors that can provide CYP with a positive sense of the future.

CYP with CHD discussing attending Camp: you can be anything that you want to be and that even though we have heart problems, we can still have an awesome time (Bultas, 2015 p546)

The fourth theme explores how acquiring skills and knowledge, feeling empowered and improved sense of self-esteem can improve a CYPs sense of "Resilience". "Getting In and Staying in" details the process involved from the recognition of MH difficulties in CYP with LTC through to maintaining engagement and sustaining the benefits of the intervention after it has ended.



Conclusions

Taken together the themes suggest that when interventions can provide a familiar, safe environment that allows CYP to freely share their experiences and build trusting, empathic relationships, they can allow participants to access social support and become more positive and resilient. Few studies included CYP that were known to be diagnosed with mental health conditions, therefore the findings may apply to prevention of mental ill health as well as treatment. This suggests there is a need for process evaluations conducted alongside effectiveness studies.

For more information about this review or the wider project on interventions for the mental health of CYP with LTCs, please contact Liz Shaw: E.H.Shaw@exeter.ac.uk or 01392 722396