ComBAT: Community-delivered Behavioural Activation Training for Depression in Adolescents

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“Depression is the third leading cause of illness and disability among adolescents, and suicide is the third leading cause of death in older adolescents (15–19 years). [...] Building life skills in children and adolescents and providing them with psychosocial support in schools and other community settings can help promote good mental health”. (World Health Organisation - WHO -2018).
**Overview of ComBAT**

**Research programme:** 5 years, starting January 2020, NIHR-funded (£2+ million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Adolescents (12-18 years) with mild-to-moderate depression</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Behavioural activation (BA)</td>
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<td>Setting</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>Comparator</td>
<td>Usual care</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Symptoms, quality of life, value for money, mechanism of change</td>
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**Depression key symptoms:**
1. low mood/irritability, 2. lack of energy/fatigue, 3. loss of interest or pleasure

**Engage in purposeful & rewarding activities:**
1. pleasure, 2. achievement, 3. meaning

**Supported by professionals in:**
1. schools, 2. charities, 3. social care, 4. justice system

**Variably includes:**
1. doing nothing, 2. general support, 3. psychological interventions, 4. medication

**Standardised questionnaires:**
1. depression scores & categories, 2. functioning, 3. service use, 4. activity levels.
A new concept: “Digital Creativity On Prescription”

- Builds on ComBAT → BA engages young people in purposeful and rewarding activities → some of these activities can be delivered/accessed via digital and interactive media: e.g. e-sports, storytelling, gaming, music, heritage, design, performance, arts.

- Existing “prescribing” schemes:
  - **Medical prescribing**: recommended medication, referral to psychological/physical treatments
  - **Social prescribing**: connecting individuals to community resources, information and social activities, statutory and non-statutory agencies.

- Digital Creativity on Prescription aims to connect individuals to purposeful and rewarding activities via digital and interactive media in the context of BA.

- It is not “digitally-enabled therapy” (e.g. CBT); the design and purpose of the digital activities are for recreation and culture.
Questions

1. Which creative digital activities, and under what circumstances, have the potential to improve depression in adolescents? What are the underpinning therapeutic mechanisms?

2. Which creative digital activities, and under what circumstances, have the potential to be harmful or counterproductive for depression in adolescents? How can such risks be mitigated?

3. How can we deliver “digital creativity on prescription” at scale and in different settings? What are the barriers and facilitators?
Digital Creativity on Prescription Work-Packages (WP)

WP1
Realist evidence synthesis

WP2
Curated bank of resources

WP3
Nested case studies

WP4
Big data

C-M-O
"What works for whom under what circumstances?"

ComBAT

Electronic or routinely collected information

analogous to:
- NHS Apps Library
  https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/
- “Books on Prescription” website
  https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription
Thank you!

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