The prevention of internalising disorders in 8-9 year old children: post-test and six month outcomes of the Positive Thinking Program

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Study Aim:
To evaluate the short-term efficacy of the Aussie Optimism - Positive Thinking Program, a new universal program aimed at preventing depressive symptoms and disorders in 8 – 9 year old.

The Aussie Optimism - Positive Thinking Program
- The Aussie Optimism Positive Thinking Program (AOP-PT) is a mental health promotion program based on cognitive and behavioural strategies.
- It is designed to meet the developmental needs of children in the middle primary school Years 4 and 5.
- Includes 10 x 1-hour modules presented by teachers to whole classes.

Method:
- 20 state primary schools were randomly assigned to receive the program implemented by teachers or to a control condition involving their regular Health Education curriculum.
- Intervention group = 461 children aged 8 – 10 years, 10 schools
- Control group = 472 children aged 8 – 10 years, 10 schools

Participants:
- 481 year 4 students from 11 socially disadvantaged schools in Perth, Western Australia participated in the 10 week positive thinking program, run by their classroom teachers.
Measures:

- Depressive symptoms – Children’s Depression Inventory (CDI).
- Anxiety symptoms - Spence Children’s Anxiety Scale (SCAS).
- Depressive & Anxiety disorders – Diagnostic Interview for Children & Adolescents – IV (DICA).
- Children’s Attribution Style Questionnaire (CASQ)

Results: Post-test

- Intervention group children were significantly less pessimistic than children in the control group on the CASQ.
- Fewer intervention group children ($n = 4, 3.9\%$) had developed depressive disorders (Major Depression or Dysthymia) after receiving the program, compared to control group children ($n = 11, 13.9\%$).

Incidence of Depressive Disorders

Results: 6-month follow-up

- Intervention group children reported significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms than control group children.
- These effects were apparent for children who had received 70% or more of the AOP-PT program.

Depressive Symptoms Estimated Marginal Means

Conclusions

- The Aussie Optimism – Positive Thinking Program was associated with improvement in attribution style, and reductions in the incidence of depressive disorders at post-test.
- At 6-months follow-up the program was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms.
- The program was not associated with effects on anxiety symptoms, incidence or prevalence of anxiety disorders.