

School Adolescent Mood Project: Examining the Effects of an Evidence-based Depression Prevention Program in Schools

Statement of Problem

Adolescent depression has become a major public health concern as it grows in prevalence and we learn more about its associated [adverse outcomes](#), such as suicide, educational underachievement and mental health issues later in life. Therefore, there is a critical need for the development and implementation of depression prevention programs, particularly in schools where youth are most likely to receive mental health services. School-based programs have the potential to prevent depression, promote healthy development and maximize school success.

One such program is Interpersonal Psychotherapy-Adolescent Skills Training (IPT-AST), a prevention intervention that teaches students communication and interpersonal problem-solving strategies to decrease conflict, increase support, and improve social functioning, vulnerability and protective factors for depression. Importantly, IPT-AST has proven to be highly acceptable among students, and has demonstrated robust effects. In three randomized controlled trials in middle and high schools, IPT-AST delivered by research clinicians was shown to be effective at reducing depression and anxiety symptoms, improving functioning, and promoting positive school outcomes, more so than usual school counseling and counselor-led groups that matched IPT-AST in frequency and length of sessions. Based on this research, IPT-AST has been classified as a promising [Blueprints program](#).

Mental health care delivery has changed quickly and dramatically as a result of COVID-19, with the majority of services being delivered remotely through digital health. As we begin to think about school-based services in the coming years, we have an opportunity to apply lessons learned from recent growth and innovation in digital health and to study the acceptability and efficacy of school-based mental health interventions, such as IPT-AST, when delivered through telehealth.

Description

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Randomized control trials in middle and high schools showed IPT-AST delivered by research clinicians was effective at:

 Improving social functioning and promoting positive school outcomes



Interpersonal Psychotherapy-Adolescent Skills Training teaches students communication and interpersonal problem-solving strategies to decrease conflict, increase support, and improve social functioning, vulnerability and protective factors for depression.

The purpose of our study is to test whether IPT-AST is effective when delivered through telehealth in local schools. We will randomly assign adolescents with elevated symptoms of depression to IPT-AST or services as usual (SAU). IPT-AST will be delivered through telehealth by research staff (alone or in collaboration with school support staff) and SAU will be delivered by counselors or other student support staff in schools. The study will measure social outcomes, emotional outcomes, and school outcomes among adolescents. It will also assess acceptability, feasibility, fidelity, and sustainability of the program, as well as costs and cost-effectiveness. This study will provide vital information on telehealth-delivered IPT-AST and will promote the provision of more effective care in schools.

Next Steps

Our ultimate goal is to enable the dissemination of IPT-AST and other prevention programs in schools to promote positive social, emotional and school functioning for all youth. IPT-AST shows great potential as a depression prevention program. However, the promise of IPT-AST cannot be fully reached until we demonstrate that IPT-AST results in positive and sustained effects on emotional and school outcomes compared to SAU.

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PolicyLab Leads

Jami Young
PhD

Faculty Member

Dr. Young has received funding from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for her research on Interpersonal Psychotherapy–Adolescent Skills Training (IPT-AST), a group preventive intervention for adolescent depression which targets interpersonal vulnerabilities for depression. She has conducted three randomized controlled trials of IPT-AST delivered in schools and has examined the effects of this program on a variety of mental health, interpersonal and school-related outcomes. Currently, Dr. Young has a collaborative R01 to conduct a personalized prevention study to examine whether the effects of depression prevention programs can be maximized by matching youth to programs based on their vulnerabilities for depression.

Dr. Young’s research has also included the study of risk factors for later psychopathology. She was the principal investigator of a collaborative R01 longitudinal study of genetic, cognitive and interpersonal risk factors for youth depression. Most recently, Dr. Young has begun to examine the identification and management of adolescent depression in primary care settings.

In addition to her research, Dr. Young has been involved in national and international efforts to train community clinicians in evidence-based prevention and treatment interventions for adolescent depression. She also serves as an NIH Grant Reviewer for the Psychosocial Development, Risk and Prevention study section. Taken together, Dr. Young’s work aims to decrease the incidence of adolescent depression and increase children’s access to evidence-based assessment, prevention, and treatment of depression and other behavioral health conditions.

Dr. Young received her PhD in clinical psychology from Fordham University. She completed an NIMH-funded post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Child Psychiatry at Columbia University. Prior to coming to CHOP, Dr. Young was at Rutgers University where she was an Assistant and Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology.



Jami Young
PhD

Email: YoungJf@chop.edu

Team

Molly Davis
PhD

Faculty Member

Molly Davis is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and a licensed clinical psychologist in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at CHOP. Additionally, she is an assistant professor of psychiatry at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

The overarching aim of Dr. Davis' research is to produce findings that can be used to improve the effectiveness and implementation of identification, prevention, and intervention programs for youth and families from underserved communities, with a particular focus on programs targeting depression and suicide risk. Dr. Davis has engaged in research across the translational research spectrum, allowing her to develop expertise in developmental psychopathology, prevention/intervention and implementation science research. She is particularly passionate about narrowing the research-to-practice gap in primary care and schools by identifying depression and suicide risk via screening and implementing evidence-based prevention programs to address risk. Dr. Davis is also invested in identifying barriers and facilitators to implementing evidence-based behavioral health practices that are common across different settings and clinical practices to accelerate implementation.

Currently, Dr. Davis works primarily on an Institute of Education Sciences (IES)-funded randomized controlled trial testing the efficacy and implementation of a telehealth-delivered group depression prevention program (Interpersonal Psychotherapy-Adolescent Skills Training; IPT-AST) for adolescents in schools. She is also collaborating with researchers at the University of Pittsburgh and CHOP on an National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)-funded P50 Center, which focuses on testing novel suicide and depression prevention approaches in pediatric primary care, most of which involve digital mental health tools. Dr. Davis has also been studying depression screening, including risk rates and screening administration patterns, in pediatric primary care.

Dr. Davis received her PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Georgia (UGA). At UGA, she also earned a Quantitative Methods in Family Science Certificate, which provided her with training in advanced statistics. She completed her predoctoral clinical internship on the integrated behavioral health track at CHOP.



Molly Davis

PhD

Email: davismf@chop.edu

Gillian Dysart

Clinical Research Assistant

Gillian Dysart (she/her) is a clinical research assistant at PolicyLab and the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Ms. Dysart works with Dr. Jami Young on a study examining the efficacy of a school-based depression prevention program for adolescents.

Ms. Dysart graduated from Temple University with a bachelor's degree in psychology. During her time at Temple, Ms. Dysart worked as an undergraduate research assistant at the Child and Adolescent Anxiety Disorders Clinic (CAADC).

Ms. Dysart's research interests include the dissemination and implementation of evidence based mental health practices, integration of mental health care into community and primary care settings, and treatment equity. She plans to pursue a PhD in clinical psychology.



Gillian Dysart

Email: dysartg@chop.edu

Sara Reagan

Clinical Research Coordinator

Sara Reagan (she/her) is a clinical research coordinator at PolicyLab and the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Ms. Reagan works in the Adolescent Depression Prevention and Treatment (ADePT) Lab with Dr. Jami Young, and she primarily works on studies focused on enhancing and disseminating interventions for adolescent depression and suicidality.

Prior to joining PolicyLab, Ms. Reagan was a clinical research coordinator in the Traumatic Brain Injury Research Initiative at the University of Pennsylvania, where she worked on studies examining longitudinal outcomes of traumatic brain injury and identifying social, cognitive and biological predictors of recovery.

Ms. Reagan graduated from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) with dual bachelor's degrees in psychology and biological sciences. During her time at UMBC, Ms. Reagan worked as an undergraduate research assistant at the Johns Hopkins Center for OCD, Anxiety, and Related Disorders in Children (JH-COACH). She studied longitudinal outcomes of childhood Tourette syndrome and obsessive-compulsive related disorders.

Ms. Reagan's research interests include: improving interventions for mental health conditions, identifying predictors and mediators of treatment outcomes, and targeting interventions based on childhood predictors as seen through a lifespan approach. She recognizes the need to promote equity in mental health care. She plans to pursue a PhD in clinical psychology.



Sara Reagan

Email: reagans@chop.edu

Courtney Wolk, PhD

Norma Coe, PhD

Bob Gallop, PhD

Jane Gillham, PhD

Funders of Project

Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education

Project Contact

Jami Young

youngjf@chop.edu

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Sep 27, 2021

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[Long-term Effects from a School-based Trial Comparing Interpersonal Psychotherapy-Adolescent Skills Training to Group Counseling](#)

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