

An app for suicide prevention among Indigenous Youth: Design of an Australian Pilot Study

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Background

Indigenous youth have up to five times the rate of suicide compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts. Barriers to help seeking include the lack of anonymity in small communities, shame about seeking help, and lack of suitable service providers. An anonymous, self-paced app may help to overcome these barrier by increasing access to effective help. Smartphone and tablet uptake is increasing with our mobile networks delivering faster speeds and greater coverage for remote areas. The app aims to reduce suicidal ideation, psychological distress, and impulsivity, and increase help seeking.

Study Design

Procedure

140 participants with suicidal thoughts will be randomised to a 6 week self-help program or a wait list control group. Assessments will take place at baseline, post test, and 6 weeks follow up. The primary outcome will be suicidal thoughts. Secondary outcomes will be psychological distress, depression, impulsivity, and help seeking.

Measures

- Depression Symptom Inventory – Suicidality Subscale (DSI-SS)
- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)
- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
- Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11)
- Client Service Receipt Inventory (CSRI)

Participant Eligibility

- 18-30
- Preferably Indigenous, although non-Indigenous welcome
- Suicidal ideation without intent

Safety Plan

Given the vulnerable population, safety procedures have been put in place. Participants who present with suicidal intent at screening will be excluded and directed to appropriate services. To monitor progress throughout the trial duration, participants will be contacted every three weeks and administered the PHQ-9. Those indicating worsening prognosis will be directed to appropriate resources.

Innovations

This is the first suicide prevention app to be systematically evaluated within an RCT design. The app is also the first technologically based Indigenous specific suicide prevention program to undergo systematic evaluation.

References

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- Reser, J. P. (2004). What does it mean to say that Aboriginal suicide is different? Differing cultures, accounts, and idioms of distress in the context of Indigenous youth suicide. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 34-53.
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App Content

Module 1 – The Storyteller

Activities to help users identify thoughts and how these might influence subsequent feelings and behaviours. This module includes an animated video of the passengers on a bus metaphor as well as some interactive defusion exercises such as asking users to colour or shrink their thoughts.

Module 2 – Riding the Rollercoaster

Helps users deal with strong emotions by providing tools and strategies including: a guided mindfulness exercise; recommendation to talk to friends or one of several 24 hour hotlines; hearing how others got through their pain and found meaning; and by presenting them with a list of activities they can use to soothe themselves.

Module 3 – What Matters

Helps users to identify values that are important to them and guides them in setting some small goals to help move their lives in valued directions.

Design Principles

Interactive and visual

All text is accompanied by audio to cater for those users who may have limited reading.

Culturally relevant

Focus groups with Indigenous youth informed the app content. To ensure youth appropriate language was used, initial content drafts were reviewed and modified by Aboriginal recording artists. The visuals and graphics were provided by Aboriginal artists.

Evidence based

The app is centred largely on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy principles with elements of mindfulness based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy.

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