

Pilot Study of an Online Emotion-Focused Skills-Based Course for Students Seeking Services at University Health Services

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INTRO

- College students are at an increased risk for anxiety and depression, and demand for mental health services often exceeds available resources (CCMH, 2016).
- This pilot study examined an online course designed to teach emotional coping skills as part of a stepped-care approach for students seeking psychological services at their Student Health Center.

AIMS: (1) examine the acceptability and feasibility of integrating the course into a college student health center, (2) describe the demographic and clinical presentation of students who enrolled.

METHODS

- N=34 college students ($M_{age}=20.26$; 44.1% White; 97.1% Female) seeking services at their Student Health Center.
- A sub-set (N=18 enrolled in, N=8 completed) an online skills-based course based on the Unified Protocol (UP), a CBT intervention.
- Measures of depression and anxiety symptoms, experiential avoidance, readiness to change, and mental health stigma were collected at baseline.
- Measures of course satisfaction and course-related knowledge were assessed immediately after the course.

A short online skills-based course was acceptable to college students seeking care within a college mental health system.

Given the high rates of anxiety and depression in college students, coupled with limited resources for treatment, brief online courses should be considered as part of stepped care models.

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	Baseline M(SD)
Depression (DASS-21)	22.7 (10.69)
Anxiety (DASS-21)	16.3 (7.25)
Stress (DASS-21)	23.1 (7.25)
Experiential avoidance (BEAQ)	53.6 (9.37)
Mental illness stigma (EASI)	12.8 (4.41)
Treatment seeking stigma (EASI)	21 (7.48)
Readiness to change (URICA)	9.5 (1.65)

RESULTS

- The most common reasons for seeking treatment included **anxiety** (84.2%), **depression** (67.6%), and **stress** (67.6%).
- Students reported **high levels of experiential avoidance** and **moderate levels of mental illness and treatment seeking stigma**.
- Students were in the **contemplation** phase of change, suggesting an **awareness of problems and interest in addressing them**, but **no clear commitment to taking action**.
- Students reported finding the course content **acceptable** ($M=4/5$), **helpful** ($M=3.75/5$), and demonstrated a **good understanding of content** ($M=94\%$ correct on knowledge quiz).

DISCUSSION

- A short online skills-based course was acceptable to college students as part of a stepped care model within a college mental health system.
- Future research is needed to identify barriers to engagement and a better understanding of the profiles of students interested in these programs could help to inform future recruitment efforts.