



Counselling in secondary schools: What the research tells us, what we need to find out



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Context

- Significant revival in provision of therapeutic counselling in British secondary schools
- Roll-out of services in Wales... and Northern Ireland, and Scotland



Evaluation

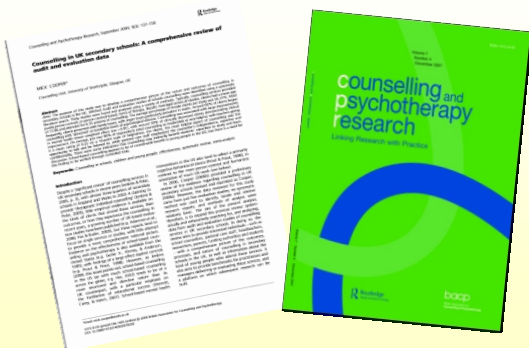
- But is their evidence to support the expansion of school-based counselling?
 - Increasingly important question
- Recent years seen production of numerous, very positive evaluations
- But separate, independent findings – and are they representative?



Aims of talk

- Present comprehensive review of audit/evaluation studies of secondary school-based counselling in UK:
 - Outcomes
- Also...
 - Services
 - Clients
 - Clients' perspectives on change
 - Therapists' perspectives on change
 - Impact on education

Published as:
Cooper, M. (2009). Counselling in UK secondary schools: A comprehensive review of audit and evaluation studies *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 9(3), 137-150.





Criteria for inclusion in review

- Conducted in last ten years (post-1998)
- UK-based
- School-based
- Secondary school
- *Therapeutic* counselling
- Primarily one-to-one
- Some collection of quantitative data



The services/datasets

- 30 eligible studies, from 19 projects
= Approx 10,000 clients
- 13 Scotland / 6 NI / 11 England
- 10 Person-centred / 20 humanistic
- Sessions: generally one school period (40-60 minutes)



CLIENTS

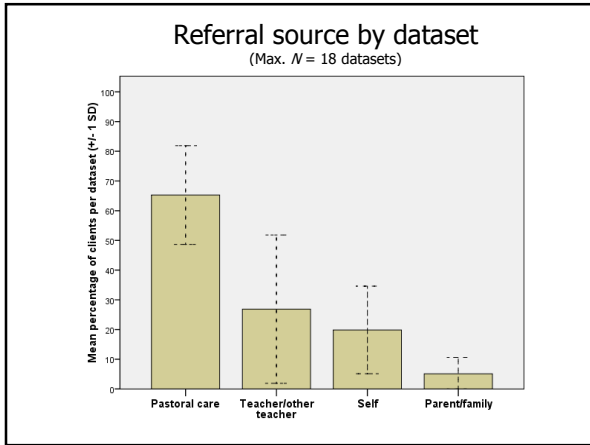


How are young people referred in to counselling?



Sources of referral

- Pastoral/guidance staff most common: involved in about 2/3rds of all referrals
- (Wholly) self- and parental-referrals relatively rare



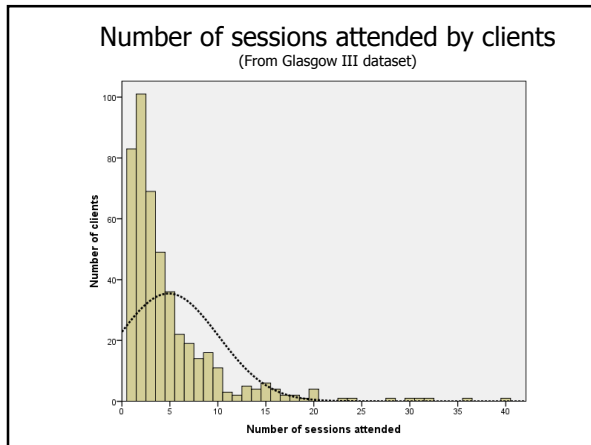


How many sessions do clients attend for?




Attendance

- Mean = 6.35 sessions
- But around 50% attend for 4 sessions or less



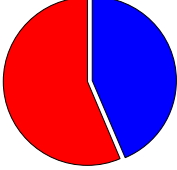


Who attends most,
males or females?




Gender

- 87% of studies: more females than males
- Mean percentage males across study = 43.69%



Gender	Percentage
Males	43.69%
Females	56.31%

Legend: ■ Males ■ Females



How old are clients?

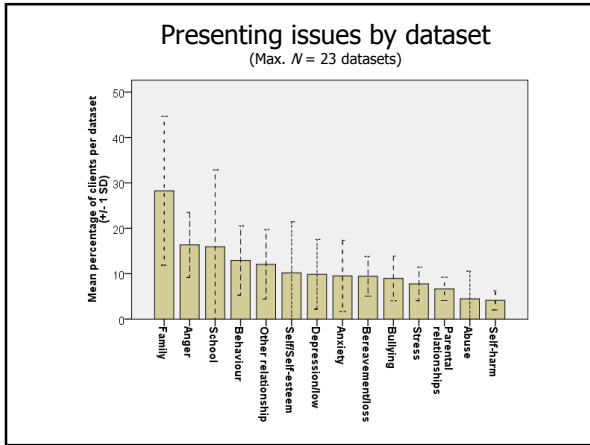


Age

- Mean age = 13.86
- Year 9 most common

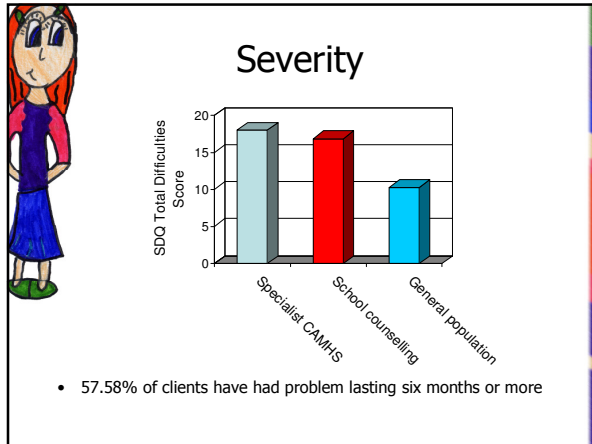



What problems do clients bring to counselling, and discuss?






How severe are clients' problems?





Outcomes

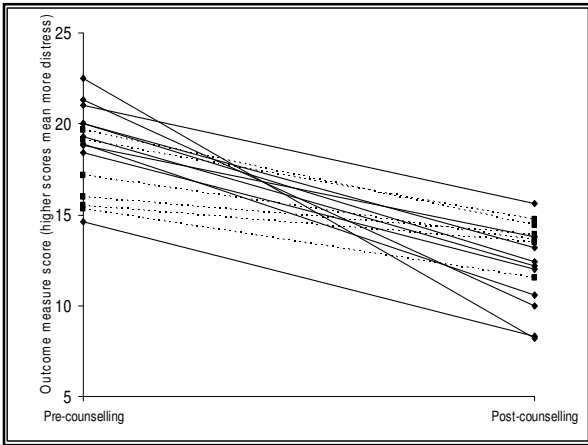


Is counselling associated with improvements in wellbeing?



Yes

- Every evaluation dataset ($N = 16$) shows significant improvements from pre- to post-counselling



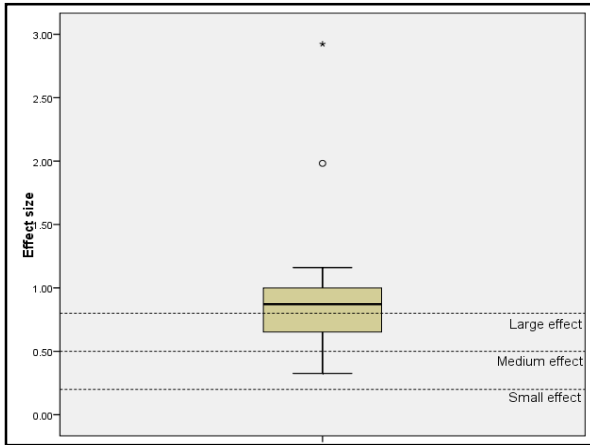


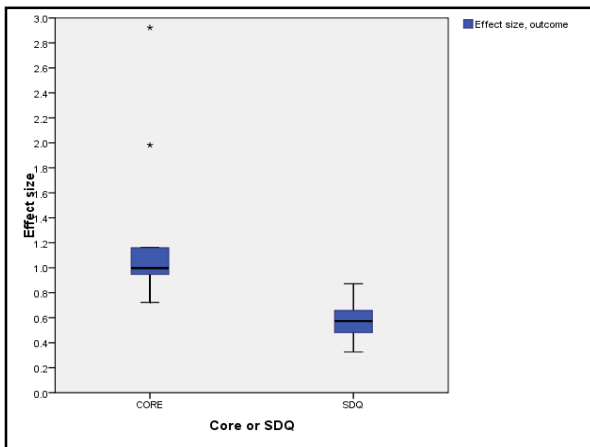
How much change does counselling bring about?



Effectiveness


- Overall 'effect size' = 0.81
(0.2 = small effect, 0.5 = medium effect, 0.8 = large effect)
- Core-YP gives double effect size of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)



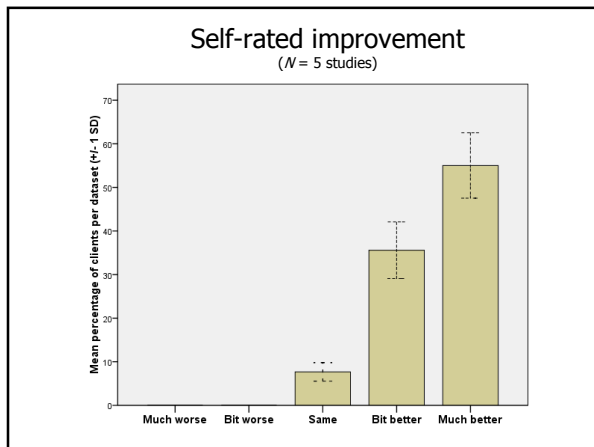




CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVES

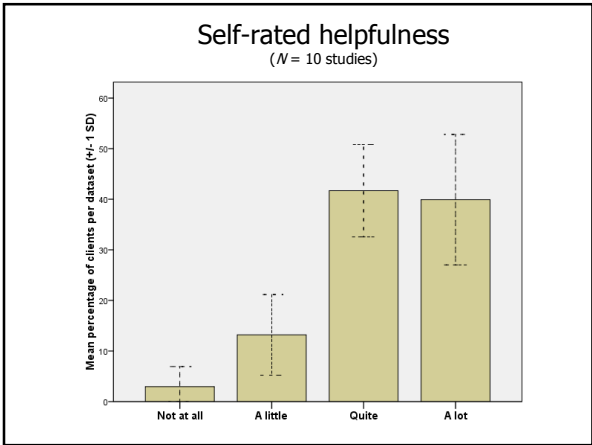


Do clients think they improved?





Do clients think counselling has helped?





Qualitative responses

- Generally match quantitative responses:

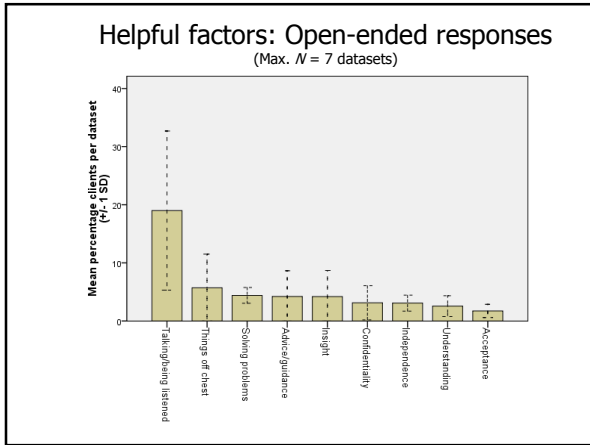
'Service is brilliant. I am glad I accepted the counselling. It has been a great help.'

'It really helped me. It's, it's really the best thing I've ever done'

'It was really good, really helpful. I was loads better'



What was it about the counselling that was helpful?





What could be improved?



Areas for improvement

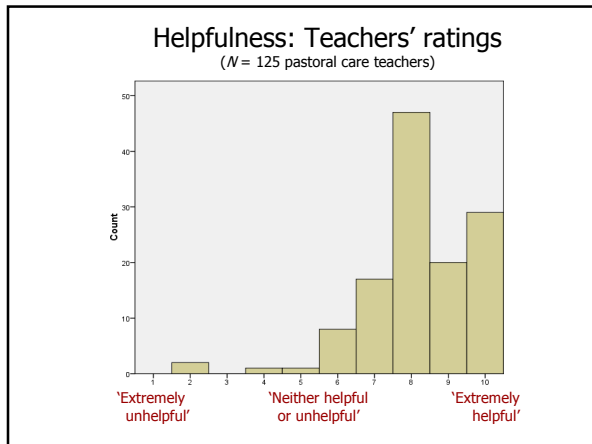
- *Availability:* The counsellor should be more around for longer/more available
- *More active:* The counsellor should give more advice and input/do more than just listen
- *Promotion:* The counselling service should be better publicised in the school
- *Maintain privacy:* Confidentiality should not be broken
- *Difficult process:* It was too painful to open up




TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES



Do teachers think counselling is helpful for clients?






Teachers' open-ended responses

- In general, very positive about the helpfulness of counselling:

'I was sceptical to begin with...but it's been great, excellent, superb'

'This is an excellent service which has been of huge benefit to pupils on a short/long term basis'

'Excellent resource which pupils find very valuable'



Why do teachers think counselling is helpful?



Helpful factors – teachers

1. *Independence*: the neutrality of the counsellor – someone other than teachers or parents that a young person could talk to
2. *Expertise*: The counsellor's specialised training in counselling (over and above that of pastoral care staff)
3. *Confidentiality*: the private nature of the counselling service
4. *Accessibility*: that young people could be referred to the counselling service easily, and without long delays before being seen by the counsellor



How do teachers think counselling could be improved?




Areas for improvement/challenges


1. *Greater availability*: counselling service should be extended, with more counsellors/more hours per week
2. *Greater promotion*: profile in school should be raised
3. *Better communication*: counsellors should communicate more openly/effectively with pastoral care staff
4. *Greater range of activities*: other therapeutic activities, like anger management groups/counselling for parents



IMPACT ON EDUCATION

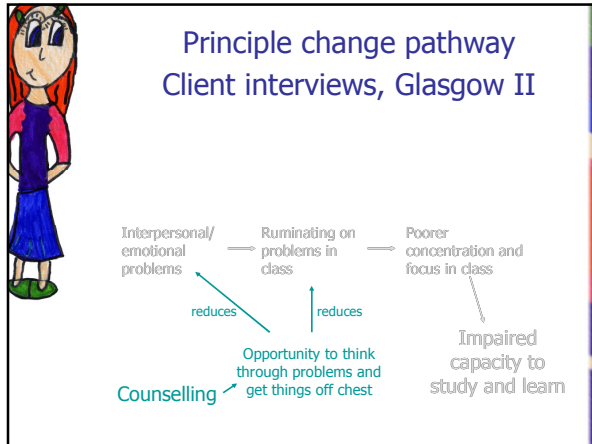


Does counselling help clients study and learn better?




Educational impact

- Self- and teacher-rated impact on: Motivation to attend / Ability to concentrate / Motivation to study / Willingness to participate in class
- Clients:
 - Improved: 60-70%
 - Same: 25-35%
 - Worse: 5-10%
- Teachers
 - Improved: 75-90%
 - Same: 5-20%
 - Worse: 2-3%





What we know: Summary

- 
- ### The 'typical' client....
- Around 14 years old
 - Referred through pastoral care
 - Attends for three to eight sessions
 - Slightly more likely to be female
 - Likely to present with, and discuss, family and relationship issues (and, if male, anger)
 - Difficulties present for six months or more, at relatively severe level
 - Likely to feel significantly better after counselling
 - Likely to attribute improvement mainly to counselling:
 - because it gave them a chance to talk through problems with an independent person
 - May also feel more able to engage with learning



What do we need
to find out?



Does the evidence
of helpfulness
stand up to
critical scrutiny?



Is it just completers who do well?

- Post-counselling questionnaires not completed by those who dropped out
- What is the experience of non-completers?
- Some indications that may not be that different:
 - Mid-therapy responses similar to end of therapy
 - Generally high response rates: 60-80%
 - Teachers also rate positively
- But, need more complete data >> more frequent data-points (e.g., YP-CORE every week)



Can we trust self-completion forms?

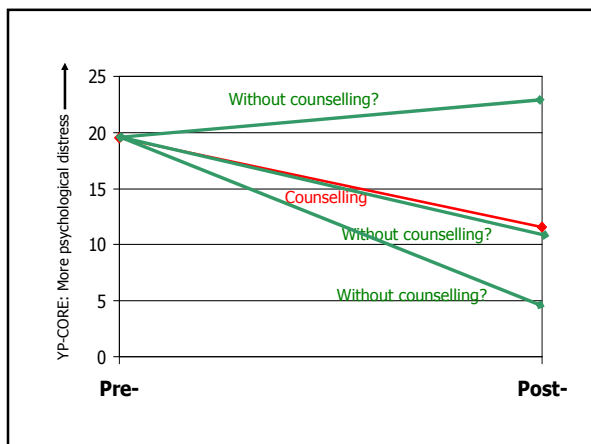
- Are respondents just trying to be nice?
- Do people really know what is helpful?

- Pre- to post-changes give more reliable assessment, but...



Change ≠ Efficacy

- Are improvements from pre- to post-counselling *caused by* counselling, or simply due to changes over time?





Need for controlled research

- Randomised controlled trials: comparing counselling against waitlist for similar sample
- Multiple baseline designs: examines change prior to counselling (e.g., assessment to first session)



Other research areas

- Cost-effectiveness?
 - What is it that is helpful in counselling in schools?
 - More qualitative interview studies
 - In-depth case-studies
 - Who is it most suitable for?
 - How do we identify appropriate clients?
- << Improve effectiveness



Thank you



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