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Depression in teenagers and young adults

Foundational studies of the new
treatment paradigm TARA: Training for
Awareness, Resilience, and Action

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Abstract

Introduction: Depression in adolescents and young adults is an increasing global health concern and available treatments are not convincingly effective. It is therefore important to develop and test novel treatments to improve treatment outcomes. This dissertation lays the foundation for the evaluation of a Swedish version of the treatment program *Training for Awareness, Resilience, and Action* (TARA), and tests the psychometric properties of the primary outcome measure for that evaluation.

Objectives: This dissertation aims to 1. Translate and pilot test TARA in Swedish medical students, 2. Evaluate the psychometric properties of the Swedish version of the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale second edition (RADS-2) in a clinical sample, 3. Perform a single arm multicenter clinical pilot study of the feasibility and safety of TARA and 4. Design a randomized controlled trial to test the clinical effectiveness of TARA.

Methods: The TARA manual was translated into Swedish and 23 self-selected medical students, with or without mental disorders, received TARA. Self-rating as well as qualitative evaluation was performed. Patients ($N = 536$ individuals) with a variety of psychiatric diagnoses completed RADS-2 and other questionnaires for psychometric evaluation of RADS-2. Thirty-five adolescents and young adults with depression received TARA either face-to-face or online, with data collection before, during, and after the treatment. The study design and statistical analysis plan for the randomized controlled trial was conceived and developed.

Results: It was feasible and acceptable to give TARA to Swedish medical students and they described the program as *an uncommon meeting ground for personal empowerment*. Support was found for the four-factor structure of RADS-2, and the scale demonstrated good validity and acceptable to good reliability. The clinical pilot study further supported the feasibility and clinical safety of TARA, and preliminary signs of effectiveness were seen. A detailed description of the pragmatic, multicenter, randomized controlled superiority trial that will evaluate the clinical effectiveness of TARA compared to standard treatment for depression was outlined, peer reviewed, and published in a study protocol with a statistical analysis plan.

Conclusions: The present results indicate that TARA is feasible and safe in Swedish clinical and non-clinical contexts. RADS-2 is a suitable outcome measure to use in routine clinical practice as well as in the present and future trials of depression. The initiated randomized controlled trial will be an important next step logically following the studies and results presented in this dissertation.

Keywords

Depression, adolescents, young adults, medical students, mental health, anxiety, psychological stress, qualitative research, randomization, yoga, mindfulness, psychotherapy, antidepressant drugs, biomarkers, clinical trial, feasibility studies, online intervention, reliability, validity, confirmatory factor analysis, measurement invariance

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