

Check Yourself - 4 years on: evaluation of a universal, multi-risk, behavioural health screening for schools in Washington, USA

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Background:

Behavioral health screening is increasingly being used in schools as an upstream mental health intervention, but typical screening tools are targeted, with a singular mental health focus and lack student engagement. In 2018, King County, Washington, USA, transitioned from targeted Global Appraisal of Individual Needs-Short Screener (GAIN-SS) screening to a whole child/whole school approach with universal screening, in order to better triage, manage and support student mental health.

Approach:

The Check Yourself screener, co-designed with youth, was purpose built for comprehensive behavioural health screening. It contains validated screeners—Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ2), Generalized Anxiety Disorder-2 (GAD2), as well as evidence-based strengths-based questions. It includes multi-risk and protective factor topics, provides knowledge translation, personalized feedback, and online resource links. The Tiered Risk data triages students' needs, facilitating school support team management. The platform captures quality assurance data, supports workflow, ensures accountability, and mitigates risk. A 4 Year evaluation was conducted of the new screening intervention to evaluate impact.

Outcome:

Middle school (24,175) and high school (834) students participated. Tiered Risks were identified: none (50%), moderate (33%), high (17%). A single brief intervention was required in 80% while 4% had 4 or more events. The screening identified a previously unknown need in 5,284 students (21%). Middle school students (389) provided feedback on the intervention with almost half (49%) of students reporting a greater connection (e.g., cares about me) with adults at school.

Innovation and Significance:

The Check Yourself screener yielded robust data about sensitive topics and improved school connectedness. Universal screening decreased stigma and supported school equity. Tiered Risk Data ensured appropriate triaging. The platform facilitated staff workflow, addressed accountability, met quality standards and integrated quantitative evaluation to mitigate risk. This model is a promising approach to prevention and intervention in a school setting.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Check Yourself is Copyright Seattle Children's Research Institute (2016) and is available on the Tickit platform.

"Dr Sandy Whitehouse is Co-Founder of Tickit Health, which provides the digital eHEADSS and Check Yourself assessment."