

Title: Building Resilience, wellbeing and positive mental health in schools: Mixed methods findings from a pilot positivity program.

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Abstract

Background: Mental health problems are a growing concern in Australian schools with 26% of youth affected. Alongside traditional mental health treatment for young people, population based prevention programs which promote positive mental health need to be created, implemented and evaluated. An activity based, resilience program (Boomerang Effect) was developed to deliver a whole of school approach to mental health promotion by building skills in positivity, motivation, strengths use, mindfulness and emotion management. This pilot study investigates the positivity module impacts.

Method: Three Sydney Catholic high schools introduced the positivity module in PD/H/PE or homerooms with program effects assessed via a mixed methods study. During the pilot phase, thematic analysis of five focus groups conducted with Year 7-10 students was completed. Additionally, standardised measures of resilience (CD-RISC-25), target skills optimism (LOT-R) and self-efficacy (PSQ) were collected before and after the module with analysis via paired t-tests.

Discussion/Outcomes: Several themes regarding program benefits and uses emerged from thematic analysis of student focus groups. Results from 100, Year 9 students who received a once weekly positivity lesson for ten weeks in PD/H/PE showed significant average improvements for resilience ($t=0.58$, $p=0.01$), optimism/positivity ($t=0.67$, $p=0.009$), and self-efficacy ($t=4.18$, $p=0.000$).

Conclusion: Preliminary data suggests the positivity module may improve students resilience, optimism/positivity and self-efficacy with focus groups revealing themes of utility and program benefits. Implications for delivering positive mental health promotion in schools has broad potential including future role directions for occupational therapists collaborating with teachers to deliver occupational based programs which build positive school environments.