A Meta-Analytic Review of Depression Prevention Programs for Children and Adolescents: Factors That Predict Magnitude of Intervention Effects

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Abstract: In this meta-analytic review, the authors summarized the effects of depression prevention programs for youth as well as investigated participant, intervention, provider, and research design features associated with larger effects. They identified 47 trials that evaluated 32 prevention programs, producing 60 intervention effect sizes. The average effect for depressive symptoms from pre-to-posttreatment ($r = .15$) and pretreatment to-follow-up ($r = .11$) were small, but 13 (41%) prevention programs produced significant reductions in depressive symptoms and 4 (13%) produced significant reductions in risk for future depressive disorder onset relative to control groups. Larger effects emerged for programs targeting high-risk individuals, samples with more females, samples with older adolescents, programs with a shorter duration and with homework assignments, and programs delivered by professional interventionists. Intervention content (e.g., a focus on problem-solving training or reducing negative cognitions) and design features (e.g., use of random assignment and structured interviews) were unrelated to effect sizes. Results suggest that depression prevention efforts produce a higher yield if they incorporate factors associated with larger intervention effects (e.g., selective programs with a shorter duration that include homework). © 2009 American Psychological Association.

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