Mixed-Methods Evaluation of a Group Intervention for Youth in Confinement

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Background & Significance

- Incarcerated youth are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges
- There is a paucity of effective and feasible mental health interventions for youth in confinement
- WRITE ON (Writing and Reflecting on Identity To Empower Ourselves as Narrators) is a group intervention that has been successfully delivered to youth in detention
- Core components of WRITE ON: confirmed
  ✓ Brief (12 sessions)
  ✓ Trauma-informed
  ✓ Youth-centered
  ✓ Incorporates self-expressive writing into curriculum

This Study

- This study aimed to evaluate the:
  1. Mental health (MH) outcomes of WRITE ON participants compared to those in a comparison support group
  2. Processes underlying such change
- We achieved these aims through the use of mixed methodology, with the goal of extending the breadth of inquiry:

  Inquiry Component | Method
  |------------------|
  Mental health outcomes | Quantitative data
  Intervention processes | Qualitative data

Method

- **Participants:** youth detained in short-term detention facilities (STDFs) in a large city
  - 12-17 years old (M = 14.89, SD = 1.08)
  - 87.5% Black, Caribbean or multiracial, 6.3% White, 6.3% other (53.3% Hispanic)
- **Quantitative Methods**
  - Data derive from multisite pilot evaluation; sites randomized to WRITE ON (N = 2) or comparison support group (CSG; N = 2)
  - Analytic sample: N = 18 (7 girls)
  - Psychometrically valid and reliable self-report
    - Negative MHS: shame, guilt, positive affect
    - Positive MHS: self-efficacy, resilience, negative affect
  - 2 sets of multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs) to examine positive and negative MH outcomes at two-week follow-up
- **Qualitative Methods**
  - Youth who completed > 50% of WRITE ON
  - N = 11 (6 girls)
  - Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) was used to analyze interview data

Quantitative Results (cont.)

WRITE ON participants reported significant gains in resilience after two weeks compared to CSG participants

Qualitative Results

**Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships within WRITE ON positively impacted youth</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WRITE ON strengthened peer relationships</td>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth more positively impacted by facilitator</td>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITE ON promoted youth voice</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth preferred written over verbal self-expression</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth benefited from the space for self-expression that WRITE ON provided</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITE ON improved youth's feelings about themselves</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITE ON inspired more positive self-evaluation</td>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITE ON sessions skilled positive emotions</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITE ON fostered future-oriented thinking</td>
<td>6/11</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Conclusions

- WRITE ON participants experienced significantly increased resilience compared to those in matched comparison group, \( \eta^2 = .27 \)
- Increased resilience might be attributed to processes around:
  - Relationship-building / empathic connections
  - Increased ability to express themselves
  - More positive self-evaluation
- Limitation: small N due to high turnover rates
- Future directions:
  - Expand WRITE ON to longer term facilities
  - Employ diagnostic mental health instruments
  - Incorporate quantitative measures of relationships, self-expression, and self-efficacy to explore mediation models

Contact

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