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Prevention and Intervention for Cannabis-abuse Youth: Screening Test and Integrated Cognitive-behavioral Intervention
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Prevention and Intervention for Cannabis-abuse Youth: Screening Test and Integrated Cognitive-behavioral Intervention

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Introduction

- This 2-year capacity building project aimed to train social workers and counsellors to deliver prevention and intervention services for at-risk young Cannabis abusers.
- The Integrated Cognitive-behavioral Therapy (ICBT) approach was used to guide the development of training for social workers and services for the youth.
- The cannabis abuse screen tool was translated and validated the usability and sensitivity in distinguishing high-risk youths from low-risked youths.

Project Content

Tool Validation

440 local youths were invited to fill in the Chinese-translated Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test-Revised (CUDIT-R) questionnaire.

ICBT Training

A 3-month training course with 12 sessions for total 167 social workers/ counsellors on drug-related knowledge as well as training on the ICBT approach. The learning outcome was assessed by Cognitive Therapy Rating Scale (CTRS).

Supervision

A 9-month implementation and group supervision for total 40 social workers/ counsellors for monthly 3-hour session. The learning outcome was assessed by Cognitive Therapy Rating Scale (CTRS).

Individual Counselling Sessions

One-to-one ICBT intervention was provided by social workers/ counsellors to the high-risk youths or youths who are already abusing cannabis.

Psychoeducation Workshops

The workshops which covered myths about cannabis abuse; psychological and physical problems that are related with cannabis abuse and skills in refusing cannabis taking or skills in engaging a young person with potential cannabis abuse.



Tool Validation

- The Chinese CUDIT-R has been shown to be a valid and reliable screening test and an effective rating scale for the severity of cannabis use disorder in a sample of Chinese adolescents.
- The optimal cutoff point for screening cannabis use disorder in Chinese adolescents has been determined with predictive accuracy and the cut-off points of CUDIT-R for low- and high-risk is 13.
- Compared to the sample without cannabis use behavior in the past six months, those with cannabis use behavior in the past six months had higher drug use frequency, lower motivation for drug withdrawal, more tolerant attitudes towards cannabis use, and more mental health problems.
- The group with high-risk cannabis use disorder had significantly higher drug use frequency compared to the group with low-risk cannabis use disorder.
- These findings provide valuable insights into the complexity of cannabis use disorder, which may need to be considered separately in prevention and treatment based on different populations.



ICBT Training



Prof. Daniel F. K. Wong introduced to the social workers and counsellors the theory and working principles of the ICBT approach.

Dr. Ginette P. C. Cheung, the Clinical Psychologist of the Project, taught the social workers and counsellors the application techniques of ICBT.





Through group discussions and case sharing, social workers and counsellors could actively engage with the materials, practice the techniques in a safe and supportive environment, and gain confidence in their ability to apply ICBT in their service units.



The training involve 5 guest speakers from different professional for enhancing the participants knowledge of drug taking.



The guest speaker, clinical psychologist from HK Lutheran Social Service was invited to share the theories and strategies in Cannabis addiction treatment.

By incorporating the testimony of a former Cannabis user, social workers and counsellors gained a comprehensive and empathetic understanding of substance use and the recovery process, enriching their learning experience and enhancing their ability to apply ICBT techniques.



Offence	Maximum penalty
Legal possession (other than picking) of dangerous drugs	Five (5) years imprisonment for 1st offence
Consumption of dangerous drugs	Five (5) years imprisonment for 1st offence
Production of an apparatus for and loaded for the inhalation of a dangerous drug	Five (5) years imprisonment for 1st offence





By inviting a barrister to share their expertise, social workers and counsellors gained a comprehensive understanding of the legal landscape surrounding drug trafficking and consumption in Hong Kong, enhancing their academic and practical knowledge.



A psychiatrist was invited to explain the physical and mental health damages caused by Cannabis abuse, as well as the treatment methods.



An occupational therapist was invited to explain the recovery treatment programs targeted at individuals with substance use disorders.



By inviting the representatives of The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups to share the information of their current practice on supporting the adolescents with substance abuse, the social workers and counsellors could gain a comprehensive understanding on the available support services and learn how to effectively support these adolescents.



By inviting the representatives of Narcotics Bureau to share the information of common substances in Hong Kong, the social workers and counsellors gained valuable insights into the types of substances, their harmful effects, and the measures being taken to prevent and combat substance abuse. This knowledge is crucial for raising awareness and promoting a substance-free community.



Supervision



A 9-month implementation and group supervision were provided to the social workers and counsellors who have completed 12-session professional training in application of ICBT. Group supervision was a platform for the social workers and counsellors to present their casework, bring their clinical experience and issues in the group for a discussion with other teammates. Through the interactive discussion, aimed to enhance their competence to apply ICBT, as well as increase their self-awareness and insight into their work. The supervisor facilitated the case sharing and discussion in the right direction and also provided advice and knowledge for enriching their knowledge and confidence to apply the theories into their practices.




Psychoeducation Workshops






Psychoeducation workshops on preventing substance abuse for adolescents, teachers and parents were conducted by the trained social workers and counsellors. Through these workshops, the audience would be empowered with the knowledge and skills needed to prevent substance abuse and promote healthy, substance-free lifestyles.




Output Evaluation

	Expected Result	Achieved Result
Output Indicator 1	To provide 48 training sessions to 160 social workers and counsellors with total attendance of 1760 man-times.	Have provided <u>60</u> training sessions to <u>167</u> social workers and counsellors with total attendance of <u>1766</u> man-times.
Output Indicator 2	To provide 36 supervision sessions to 40 social workers and counsellors with total attendance of 320 man-times.	Have provided <u>36</u> supervision sessions to <u>40</u> social workers and counsellors with total attendance of <u>320</u> man-times.
Output Indicator 3	To provide 80 psychoeducation workshops to 1200 youths, parents and/or teachers with total attendance of 960 man-times.	Have provided <u>80</u> psychoeducation workshops to <u>1822</u> youths, parents and/or teachers with total attendance of <u>1822</u> man-times.
Output Indicator 4	To provide 480 individual counselling sessions to 80 drug abusers and high-risk youths with total attendance of 320 man-times.	Have provided <u>536</u> individual counselling sessions to <u>80</u> drug abusers and high-risk youths with total attendance of <u>536</u> man-times.



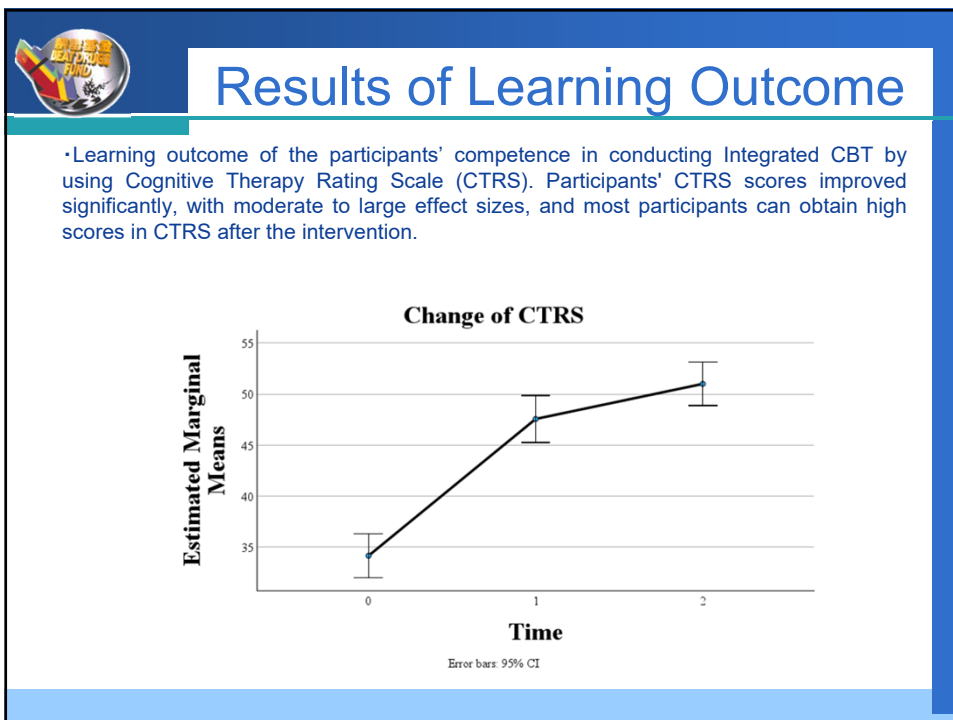
Outcome Evaluation


	Description of Indicator	Evaluation Method Used
Outcome Indicator 1	Participants show improvement in their motivation / readiness to quit cannabis	Beat Drugs Fund question set no. 13 (pre- and post-test)
Outcome Indicator 2	Participants show reduction in their cannabis use frequency	Beat Drugs Fund question set no. 6 (pre- and post-test)
Outcome Indicator 3	Participants show reduction in the risk of relapse	Beat Drugs Fund question set no. 12 (pre- and post-test)
Outcome Indicator 4	Participants show reduction in their permissive attitude towards drug abuse	Beat Drugs Fund question set no. 25 (pre- and post-test)



Outcome Evaluation


	Data Collected	Results
Outcome Indicator 1	Pre-test: 80 Post-test: 75	50.7% have improvement in their motivation or readiness to quit cannabis
Outcome Indicator 2	Pre-test: 80 Post-test: 75	71.7% reduced their cannabis use frequency after received the ICBT individual counselling
Outcome Indicator 3	Pre-test: 80 Post-test: 75	68% showed their reduction in the risk of relapse
Outcome Indicator 4	Pre-test: 80 Post-test: 75	77.3% showed reduction in their permissive attitude towards drug abuse






Results of Focus Group

- Two focus groups were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the project, as well as to gather qualitative insights from trained participants regarding their learning experiences and feedback. The Integrated Cognitive-behavioural approach (ICBT) serves as the primary intervention strategy in this project.
- The focus groups revealed that participants effectively grasped the principles of the ICBT and recognized its foundational beliefs, distinguishing it from traditional CBT. Participants expressed appreciation for the training and supervision format, noting that it not only enhanced their understanding of the ICBT but also provided a more nuanced perspective on the societal contexts, risks, and needs of cannabis users. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of supervision in bolstering their competencies, enabling them to apply theoretical concepts in practice more effectively.
- The discussions also addressed the limitations of the ICBT, helping participants identify the prerequisites necessary for its successful implementation, ultimately supporting optimal counselling outcomes.
- The findings from this focus group study yield several key implications for the application of the ICBT in addressing cannabis abuse among youth. These insights are invaluable for practitioners, program developers, and policymakers engaged in cannabis abuse treatment initiatives.




Experience Gained

- This project provided a valuable opportunity for practicing counsellors and social workers to learn an evidence-based ICBT counselling approach. There was a clear need in the social service industry for a systematic training program to enhance the professional competence of the workers to manage their duties and services in their workplace.
- Furthermore, the supervision groups served a dual purpose - it functioned as both a training group and a support group. Since all the participants work in the same industry, they come together to discuss similar situations and challenges that they face. Through the presentations, discussions, and guidance from the supervisor within the group, the participants were able to learn from each other's experiences. The learning process did not only help the workers improve their skills and confidence, but the positive feedback they received from service users also empowered them to continue providing high-quality services. So, this was extremely beneficial for both professional and the service users.



Conclusion


- ICBT intervention approach on individual counselling shows significantly effect on changing the participants' permissive attitudes towards drug abuse. Furthermore, over 70% participants obviously reduced the frequency of drug use.
- Nearly 70% participants avoided the relapse of drug use after received ICBT individual counselling.
- Thus, the outcome of ICBT intervention is positive and effective among the participants in this project.



Suggestion

Scale-up for a wider dissemination: Given the encouraging outcomes about a novel strength-based approach in working with people with drug addiction, it is recommended to explore ways (e.g., continuously developing ICBT-led training programs and advancing ICBT to the field of cannabis abuse) to scale up the project to reach a larger number of social workers and young cannabis users across Hong Kong, and further develop easily accessible materials and resources based on the ICBT model for wider dissemination.

Training of professionals: Training of professionals is vital to a successful clinical intervention. In this project, we have developed training materials to systematically train professionals to use ICBT to work with young drug abusers. However, there are rooms for further improving the training, such as: (1) producing e-materials that can be self-learnt by the professionals (i.e. as some workers may not be able to attend all the training sessions), (2) providing more skills practice sessions so that professionals can learn to apply ICBT skills, and (3) providing clinical supervision is a “must” for deeper learning and application of ICBT skills.



Way forward

Financial resources for advancing ICBT: It is recommended to advocate for policies and funding that support the advancement of ICBT, both around training and supervision, as well as the implementation of ICBT programmes in social service organizations. Without the government support, it is difficult to find resources to advance such approach in working with people with drug abuse.

Future research: Future research should prioritize adapting ICBT for diverse youth by tailoring interventions to cognitive, developmental, and cultural needs. This includes exploring alternative delivery formats like visual aids, interactive exercises, and technology-based platforms to enhance accessibility. Integrating complementary practices or other therapeutic strategies such as mindfulness and motivational interviewing should also be investigated. Rigorous evaluation of these integrated approaches is crucial, focusing on effectiveness, cultural sensitivity, and improved outcomes for young cannabis users with varying abilities and backgrounds.