

Trajectories of Psychopathology in Relation to Mental Health Related Service Contacts over Three Years in the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey 2004

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Introduction

Previously, a number of observational studies have found no association between contact with services and improved outcomes in children with psychopathology, despite the existence of effective interventions. The British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey (BCAMHS) 2004 is a study of 5,325 children aged 5-16, with data on parent-reported mental health-related public sector service contacts and psychopathology over three years, allowing exploration of the association in a large community-based dataset.

Aims

- Describe the trajectories of children in contact and not in contact with services over three years from 2004-2007
- Explore the association between mental health-related service contact over the study period and outcomes in terms of parent-rated psychopathology

Methods

This study is a secondary analysis of children's trajectories by service contact status (no contact, contact 2004 only, contact 2007 only, contact 2004 & 2007). The main measure of psychopathology over time was the well-validated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Multivariable linear regression was used to examine the association between contact and outcomes in children with a psychiatric disorder at baseline in 2004.

Results

Children in contact with services demonstrated the highest levels of psychopathology over time, and the 2007-only contact group displayed a trajectory of increasing difficulties. Overall, contact with services was not associated with improvement in outcomes, following adjustment for measured confounders.

Conclusions

The effectiveness of contact alone with services was not demonstrated in our findings. Despite methodological limitations, this underlines the need for continuing development and consistent implementation of effective interventions, alongside initiatives evaluating outcomes within services.