

Qualitative Findings from Piloting the LEAP Project: An Online Spirituality-Based Depression Intervention for Young Adults

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Background

Depression amongst young Canadians is on the rise and onset is occurring earlier in life. This is of concern, given the potential negative impact on developmental processes, poor academic performance, and increased risk of adulthood depression.

The objective of this investigation was to report on the experiences and perspectives of depressed youth who participated in a clinical trial that piloted an 8-week online spirituality-based depression intervention called the LEAP Project (rebranded **BreathingRoom™**).

Methods

A qualitative approach was used in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the intervention impact on study participants.

Participants and Recruitment: Participants who completed the LEAP clinical trial were selected using a convenience sampling strategy.

Intervention: The LEAP intervention consists of eight modules. Each module is presented using video clips, music, visualizations, true stories and life practices.

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. An interview guide was used based on a topical framework: impact of the program, experience of the program, and recommendations on how to improve the program. The findings presented focus on the impact of the intervention.

Analysis: All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative content analysis approach. NVIVO software was used for data management and to support the analytic process.

Results

Of the 62 participants in the clinical trial, 12 provided consent to participate in the qualitative interviews. Participants age ranged from 13 to 24 years of age, and 11 were female.

Four main themes emerged which reflected how the LEAP intervention impacted participants and their experiences of or related to depression:

1. Change in perspective
2. Making connections
3. Enhanced self-control
4. Improved well-being

New Understanding

"I'm not going to lie and say that all of it (the depression) is gone 100%, because it's definitely not. I mean, it's a process. No one is ever fully happy. And, part of being happy is accepting that. So I find like, I feel guilty when I'm depressed, but then I realize, you know, it's not my fault, no one is ever fully happy. It's a good realization to have." (P12-F-16)

Change in Perspective
 Participants' experiences indicate that through the intervention, a fundamental shift in understanding and perspective occurred. This provided a grounding through which they were better able to address or cope with their depression or situations associated with depressive episodes.

Coming to terms:

Your experiences of your parent's divorce and your cousins passing are things that you wanted to deal with. Was this helpful? "Yeah, I think it helped me come to terms with a lot of it.... Um, just with the fact that my cousins are gone...just things...um...module 7 was very helpful in me forgiving my father. I kind of was very touchy around that module because, I don't know, I don't like letting things go and it really hit close to home..." (P2-F-17)

Coping

"I guess I started to cope with it...just...I like the idea of being able to figure out how change the way you experience things. That is the best way to be able to deal with this in the future. So I think this is a good program in that way." (P6-F-19)

Enhanced Self-Control
 Participants reflected that the intervention was useful in providing tools and teaching coping strategies, enhancing their ability to manage depressive episodes or shift into a non-depressed state. This led to a greater sense of control over emotions and resulting behaviors. This was identified as a key element in their ability to cope with depression.

Control:

In what way do you feel better?

"Like you are more in control of what happens to you...like (if) something bad happened (before) I would be like oh, I'll just study the rest of the day... But now I realize...I can control how... I can decide how I react to things but not what happens to me." (P3 -F-17)

Reconnecting with Self:

"I liked the discovering your purpose...moving away from feelings of emptiness and towards feelings of passion. Because my passion is music ...because of the depression I haven't really been playing. Like (before) I was playing shows and I was working on a CD. But that kind of stopped when things got bad. So that was good because it kind of reminded me that I still have the music." (P6-F-19)

Making Connections
 Many participants felt connected or re-connected through the LEAP program. This was marked by a sense and the realization of not being alone. Some expressed a sense of connection to and awareness of their surroundings. Many also felt as though they had reconnected with themselves and experienced "the real me".

I Am Not Alone

"I guess what I got out of this program is that I'm not alone in this...her (Melanie's) experience that was really, kind of like, inspiring, that's really kind of what I liked most about it." (P9-F-22)

Social Well-Being

"I was tired all of the time. Insomnia was a problem for me. I was just a 12 year old kid you know. And I was tired all of the time and it stopped me from doing a lot of stuff, like. That's why I wasn't good grades and I wasn't making any friends. This really helped me open up to myself and to open up to others." (P12 -F-16)

Improved Well-Being
 Participants described an improvement in well-being in emotional, physical, mental and social aspects of their health. This was characterized by: higher energy levels; increased motivation; hopefulness; reduced negative feelings such as fear, anger, frustration; reduced feelings of depression; a greater connection to self; and, a change in their interactions with others.

Emotional Well-Being:

"Like, now after the program, I get little, little moments of just like the worst feeling ever. But back before the program, it was all the time. Like I was stuck in a rut. Like I couldn't get up." (P12-F-16)

Conclusion

• While the clinical trial results indicated that depression severity decreased in all 12 participants, the qualitative evaluation identified multi-faceted changes, beyond the change in or alleviation of depressive symptoms.

• LEAP may be a useful support tool to address various challenges that are faced by teens and young adults.

• LEAP is well-suited to address a broad range of life situations, beliefs and backgrounds.

• It presents a possible adjunct to existing treatments.

The LEAP Intervention



Module 1 – Self Acceptance
 (Breaking Through: Uncovering the REAL You)



Module 2 – Appreciation of Beauty & Creativity
 (Enjoying Again: Reconnecting with Life)



Module 3 – Mystery of Life
 (Coming Alive: Discovering Your Purpose)



Module 4 – Gratitude
 (Shifting Gears: Finding the Positive Spin)



Module 5 – Compassion and Giving
 (Reaching Out: Making a Difference)



Module 6 - Acceptance
 (Moving On: Responding to Setbacks)



Module 7 - Forgiveness
 (Breaking Free: Dealing with Past Hurts)



Module 8 - Celebration
 (Celebrating Possibilities: Moving Forward)

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