

Psychological Medicine

MONOGRAPH SUPPLEMENT 6

The effectiveness of
attached social workers in the
management of depressed
female patients in general
practice
Roslyn H. Corney

Cambridge University Press

The effectiveness of attached social workers in the management of depressed female patients in general practice

There is a pressing need to evaluate the different forms of treatment for depressive illness encountered in general practice. In recent years, a number of social work attachments to general practice have been established and high proportions of their referrals have been depressed. This study consists of a controlled randomized clinical trial designed to investigate the effectiveness of social work intervention with depressed women.

The 80 women included were aged between 18 and 45 and were assessed initially by means of a psychiatric and social interview. Those suffering from 'acute' or 'acute on chronic' depression were randomly allocated to an experimental group who were referred to an attached social worker or to a control group for routine treatment by their doctor. Six months later, they were reassessed using the same instruments. Details were also collected from the medical notes and the social workers completed specially designed forms regarding their intervention.

Over 60% of both groups were clinically improved at follow-up, but there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in clinical or social outcome. Moreover, medical data indicated no differences in visits made to the doctor, psychotropic drug prescription or psychiatric status one year after referral. However, further analyses of two and three-way interactions suggested that although the social workers' interventions had no effect on the majority of women, those who were initially assessed as suffering from 'acute on chronic' depression with major difficulties in their marriage or heterosexual role were found to benefit. These patients could also be distinguished from the others by their high degree of motivation, by the initial severity of their social problems and by the amount of practical help provided by the social workers. While the findings suggest that overall the social workers' additional involvement did not bring about significant improvement, it seems likely that they can be most help when there are social problems requiring practical assistance and when the depressed patient has poor emotional support from others, including her spouse.

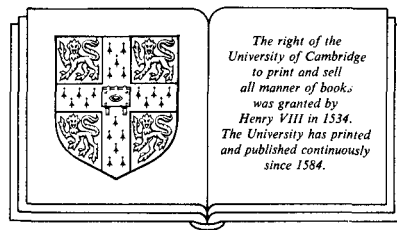
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SYNOPSIS There is a pressing need to evaluate the different forms of treatment for depressive illness encountered in general practice. This study consists of a controlled, randomized, clinical trial designed to investigate the effectiveness of social work intervention with depressed women.

Eighty women aged between 18 and 45 were included and assessed initially by means of a psychiatric and social interview. Those ascertained to be suffering from 'acute' or 'acute on chronic' depression were randomly allocated to an experimental group who were referred to a social worker attached to a general practice or to a control group for routine treatment by their doctor. They were re-assessed 6 months later.

Over 60% of both groups were clinically improved at follow-up, with no statistically significant differences between the two groups in clinical, social or medical outcome. Further analyses suggested, however, that those women initially assessed as suffering from 'acute on chronic' depression with major marital difficulties were found to benefit from social work treatment. These patients could be distinguished from the others by their high degree of motivation, by the initial severity of their problems and by the amount of practical help provided by the social workers.

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