Design and Quasi-Experimental Evaluation of an Innovative Intervention for Incarcerated Youth

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### Background & Significance
- Incarcerated youth are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges
- There is a paucity of effective mental health interventions for incarcerated youth
- Regular written self-disclosure has been linked to physical and mental health improvements
- WRITE ON (Writing and Reflecting on Identity To Empower Ourselves as Narrators) was developed in light of compelling research on writing’s benefits. WRITE ON
- Based on empirically supported treatments
- Uses a youth-centered manualized curriculum
- Employs a mixed-methods, replicable assessment protocol

### Intervention Design
- **WRITE ON Components**
  - Prompts eliciting writing, sharing of writing, peer feedback, Mindfulness activities
  - Group bonding activities
  - Staff participation
  - Strength-based feedback from facilitator and peers
- **Target Outcomes**
  - Reduce negative mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety)
  - Increase positive mental health outcomes (e.g., resilience)
  - Strengthen coping skills
  - Enhance peer relations
  - Improve youth-staff relations

### This Study
- WRITE ON was piloted in 4 non-secure detention (NSD) facilities in NYC in 2014
- This pilot evaluation aims to:
  1. Compare mental health outcomes of youth receiving WRITE ON intervention to those of a matched control group
  2. Assess how youth received the intervention and what mechanisms are responsible for changes they experienced
- Quantitative outcome data

### Results
- **Over 80% of youth reported being satisfied with the WRITE ON intervention**
- **Mental Health Outcomes**
  - **Resilience**
    - Youth in WRITE ON (for at least 2 weeks) demonstrate a significant gain in resilience compared to youth in CSG (F=5.60, p<.05)
- **Positive and Negative Affect**
  - Youth in WRITE ON demonstrate a trend for increases in Positive Affect compared to youth in CSG (F=1.45, p=.15)
  - Youth in both CSG and WRITE ON demonstrate an increase in Negative Affect over time (F=5.81, p=.04)
  - No trends in change over time for Self-Esteem, Self-Silencing, or Hope.

### Youth’s Perceptions of WRITE ON
- “Before I did the WRITE ON program, I probably…would be like maybe more sad or more angry because I’m in NSD…basically what the WRITE ON program does for me is really takes me out of that state of mind and puts me in a place where I feel like I can be free…more open."
- “[WRITE ON] makes me feel like I’m actually doing something with myself…it’s a good program, everyone should have it.”

### Methods
- **Study Design**
  - Quasi-experimental mixed-method evaluation of a pilot intervention, sites randomly assigned to WRITE ON or Control Support Group (CSG)
  - Assessments at baseline, 2, 4, and 6 weeks
  - Youth who completed at least 50% of the intervention were invited to be interviewed
- **Participants**
  - N=51 residents from 4 NSD facilities in NYC
  - Treatment n=29(17 girls), CSG n=22(12 girls)
  - 12-17 years old, mean =14.7 years (SD= 1.16)
  - 85.7 black, Carribean or multiracial, 7.1% white, 7.2% other (47.6 Hispanic)
- **Measures**
  - Psychometrically valid and reliable self-report scales suitable for adolescents

### Conclusions
- The piloted WRITE ON intervention significantly increased resilience in youth receiving the intervention as compared to those in a matched control group
- Results suggest that WRITE ON might provide youth with psychological resources to buffer against the negative effects incurred by incarceration
- A critical limitation is our small sample size due to the high turnover rates in NSD facilities
- Future directions include expanding the program to detention facilities where youth are placed for longer periods of time

### Contact
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