UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

NIHR | Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex

DEVELOPMENT OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS

CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS WITH PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

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Supervised by Dr. Kathryn Lester and Dr. Daniel Michelson

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruptions to education and this has been particularly difficult for children with emotional difficulties and SEN

This has had subsequent outcome of increased school attendance problems (SAP), particularly anxieties around attending school.

The onset of SAP is likely to **occur in primary school** [1] and,

The importance of **early intervention** has been recognised but very few interventions exist for primary school-aged children. [2]

This study aims to develop a **new intervention specifically for families where children are having anxiety about attending school,** taking into account the evolving Covid-19 context

STEPS TO DEVELOP INTERVENTION

PHASE ONE

Gathering research on school attendance problems

Method
Reviewing literature/policy/interventions

Ongoing

PHASE TWO

Bringing together experiences of parents and professional

Method
Surveys with 29 parents and 19 professionals
&
Interviews with 10 parents and 12 professionals

April - August 2021

PHASE THREE

Build an intervention in a practical way

Method
Co-design workshops with 10 parents and 10 professionals

May 2022

PHASE FOUR

Try out the intervention in the real world.

Method
Feasibility study with developed intervention in Sussex.

TBC

OBJECTIVES OF CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP (PHASE THREE)

What intervention components might work best?

How should the intervention be delivered?

What should the intervention aim to change?

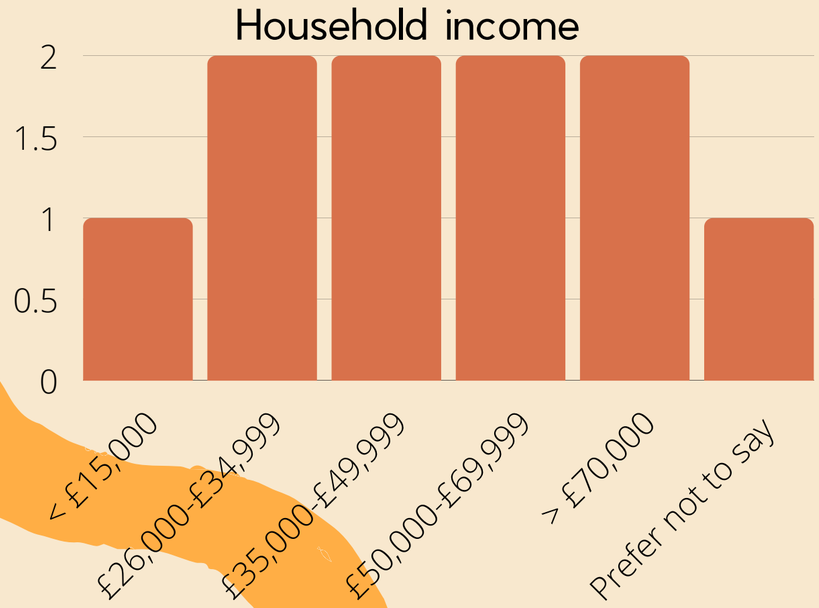
Who should deliver the intervention?

STAKEHOLDERS

PARENTS

N = 9 (90%) mothers and N = 1 (10%) father

N = 9 (90%) undergraduate or postgraduate level of education

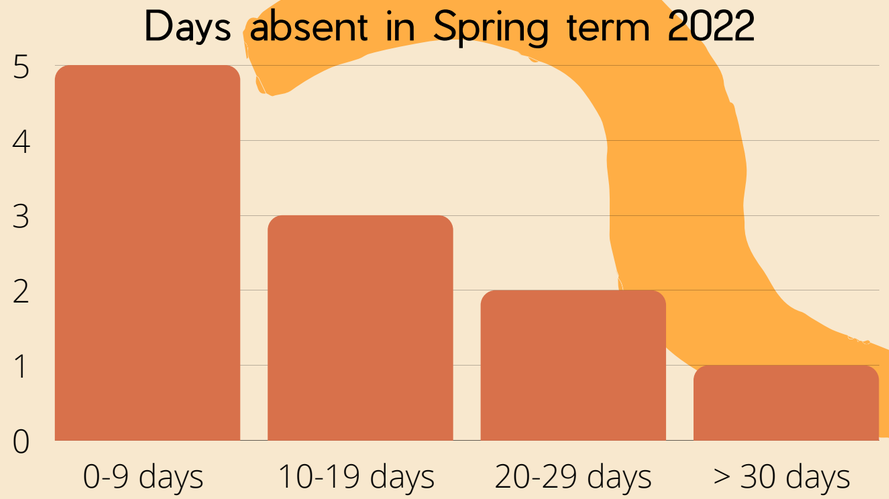


PARENT'S CHILDREN

N = 2 (20%) of children eligible for FSM

N = 3 (30%) additional learning needs (i.e. autisim, adhd and anxiety)

N = 3 (30%) in KS1 and N = (70%) in KS2

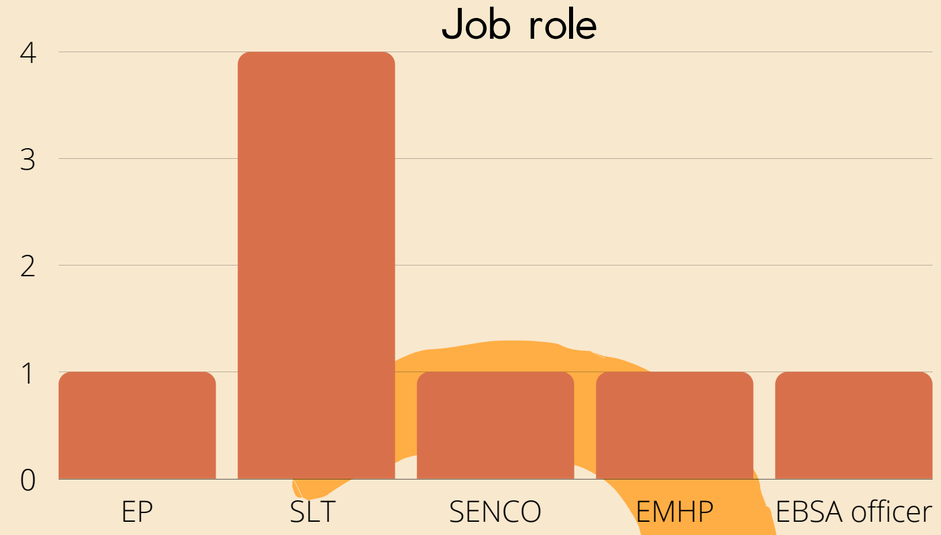


STAKEHOLDERS

PROFESSIONALS

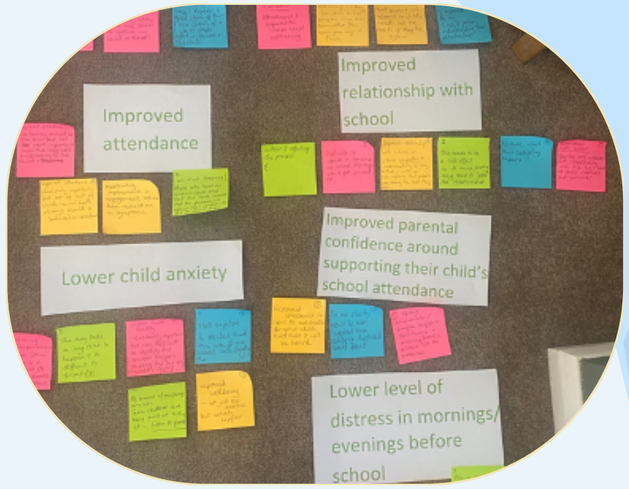
N = 7 (87%) female and N = 1 (12%) male

N = 6 (75%) workplaces had "about the same as the national average" of children with FSM, N = 1 (12%) had "below the national average" N = 1 (12%) was unsure.

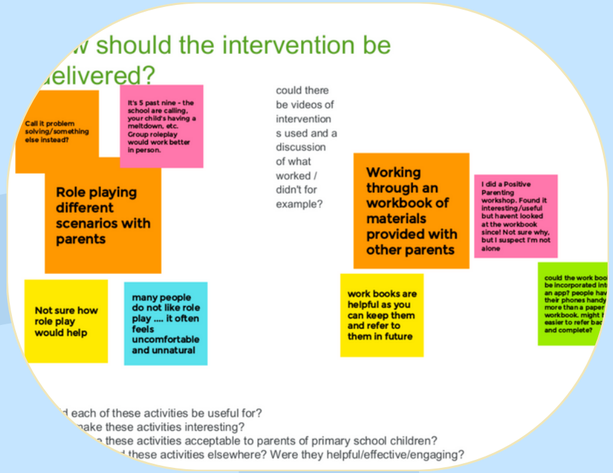


METHODS

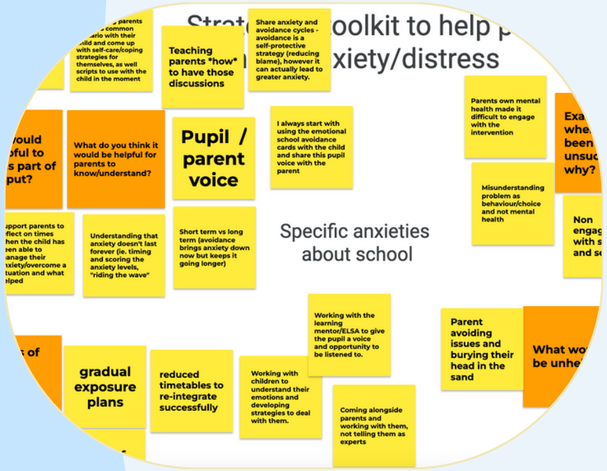
WORKSHOP ONE: IN PERSON WITH 6 PARENTS



WORKSHOP TWO: ONLINE WITH 4 PARENTS



WORKSHOP THREE: ONLINE WITH 8 PROFESSIONALS



METHODS

Sharing previous helpful and unhelpful experiences of specific interventions and services

Relating lived experiences to specific parameters of the putative new intervention.

Commenting on a draft intervention model informed by previous research

Considering the pros and cons to aspects of the intervention.

RESULTS

WHAT ?

Supporting parent/school relationship

- Advice/knowledge sharing on statutory context of attendance
- Strategic tools for communicating with school
- Build parent's confidence to approach schools
- Sources of mediation.

Parent

Help parents respond to child's anxiety/distress, with strategies/toolkit for:

- Specific anxieties about school
- Scenarios with high levels of behavioural anxiety/distress
- School transitions
- Building child's confidence.

Emotional Support for parents to:

- Feel empowered
- Manage the stress/anxiety of supporting their child
- Feel supported and connected.

Child

Anxiety

School attendance problems

School

Recognise the impact of (but cannot change)

- School environment
- School ethos
- Covid-19
- School response to child/parent
- Support/resources provided by schools.

RESULTS

HOW ?

Group-based peer support

- In-person
- Opportunities to connect and learn from other parents
- Time to 'get to know' one another.

Accessible and manageable

- During the day/week days
- Small home-learning tasks
- One focal point of resources (i,e, website)
- Pre-contact; directions, what to expect etc.

Interactive and engaging

- Workshop style
- Activities and learning from professionals and parents
- Active participation
- Well organised
- Involve children in home-based tasks.

RESULTS

WHO ?

Who would make a good group facilitator?

'Knowledgable about anxiety and SAP'

''impartial from school'

'Good listener'

'train-the-trainer?'

'Energized but relaxed'

'focussed on problem solving not moaning'

'Mental health support teams?'

'Child and Family workers?'

'empathetic'

'mix of peer and professional support'

'Kind'

'Can share own experiences of SAP'

'non-judgemental'

CONCLUSION

Feedback from stakeholders was consistent with an **applied ecological systems model of SAP** (e.g. Melvin et al., 2019), highlighting relevant risk and protective factors across **environmental, family and individual child domains**.

Stakeholders endorsed **strategies to improve parent-school communication,** and **better understand statutory requirements around attendance**. Strategies were also recommended to help **parents effectively respond to a child's anxiety/distress about school** through cognitive-behavioural techniques.

In terms of intervention providers, stakeholders pointed to the need for **knowledgeable and impartial facilitators** with scope for parents to obtain **group-based peer support.**

Additionally, stakeholders advocated for i**n-person delivery that is accessible and manageable** with a**dditional supportive resources** such as a website and/or workbook. Also value was given to providing the intervention at the **early stage/onset of SAP.**

NEXT STEPS

- **Next steps**, will be to create an intervention blueprint and materials, with continued co-design, that can be field-tested

- To discuss the intervention development further, please contact Brontë McDonald (bm333@sussex.ac.uk)