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Abstract Title

Age-Group Differences in Retention, Mental Health Outcomes, and Perceived Usability in the BEAM Digital Parenting Intervention

Authors

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Background

Young mothers experience elevated mental health concerns and structural barriers to care but remain understudied in evaluations of digital mental health and parenting interventions.

Objective

This study examined whether mothers who were younger than 26 when their child was born differed from older mothers in retention, clinical and parenting outcomes, and perceived usability following the Building Emotional Awareness and Mental Health (BEAM) program.

Methods

This secondary analysis pooled pre-post data from six cohorts of BEAM, a 12-week digital intervention combining mental health and parenting content, peer coaching, and an online community. Participants were 295 mothers in Manitoba, Canada; 41 were younger than 26 at the target child's birth. Linear mixed-effects models examined changes in depression, anxiety, parenting stress, social support, and child behavioural difficulties. Logistic and linear regressions compared post-intervention survey completion and usability, respectively.

Results

Post-intervention completion did not differ significantly by age group. Depressive symptoms declined in both groups. Estimated Patient Health Questionnaire-9 scores decreased by 5.94 points among younger

mothers and 4.08 points among older mothers; younger mothers showed a 1.86-point greater reduction (95% CI [-3.49, -0.23], $p = .026$). This pattern remained when age was modelled continuously but was not significant in baseline-adjusted ANCOVA. Anxiety, parenting stress, and child behavioural difficulties decreased, while social support increased, with no significant age-group differences in change. Both groups rated BEAM favourably. Younger mothers rated its usefulness more highly than older mothers ($M = 6.03$ vs. 5.42 ; $b = 0.58$, 95% CI [0.11, 1.06], $p = .016$).

Conclusion

Younger mothers were retained at comparable rates and improved at least as much as older mothers across outcomes, with some evidence of greater improvement in depression. Flexible digital interventions may provide a relevant and acceptable form of mental health and parenting support for younger mothers.