

## Part C Project Details

### Goals and Objectives:

- 1) To enhance mental health awareness in local secondary schools
- 2) To enhance emotional regulation and coping strategies among secondary school students through implementation of a group training program
- 3) To exchange mental health knowledge with school teaching staff through deliverance of training workshops and sharing experiences throughout the group training program.

### Needs Assessment and Applicant's Capability

#### The Importance of Enhancing Emotional Regulations and Coping Skills among Secondary School Students

When a person encounters a difficulty in life, he/she could respond to the mood change (e.g., a sudden onset of low mood) using different coping strategies, ranging from a total distraction strategy to constantly focusing on the issue in an attempt to deal with or gain insight into the mood change (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; 1991). Past research suggests that one form of coping style, namely rumination, could have drawn to particularly deleterious impacts on mental health.

Rumination refers to the condition where the person constantly and repetitively thinks about the meanings, causes and consequences of the unpleasant mood (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). It is a stable individual coping preference, arising from modeling from parents, social or problem solving skills inadequacies, sex-role expectations, genetics, physiological reactivity and so forth. Rumination has been found as a characteristic symptom of psychiatric disorders such as depression. People who often engage in ruminative thinking tend to experience more intense dysphoric mood (Just & Alloy, 1997; Kuehner & Weber, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow & Fredrickson, 1993; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987), report impaired concentration and problem solving abilities (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Lyubomirsky, Kasri & Zehm, 2003; Ward, Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003), and have more accessible negative memories (Lyubomirsky, Caldwell & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Watkins & Teasdale, 2001). In other words, high ruminators are at greater risk for developing emotional disorders and once an unpleasant mood episode is triggered, high ruminators would suffer from more chronic and intensive symptoms with poorer prognosis.

In particular, past research has indicated that there are significant gender differences in relation to adoption of ruminative responses. Females, as opposed to males, were reported to show greater tendency to using this type of emotion-focused coping (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1996; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1999). Researchers have also argued that this fact has significantly helped explained why the incidence of depression in women is two times greater than men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). Adaptive emotion control and training therefore appeared to be particularly important for females in regulating their affective experiences.

Apart from gender, a person's developmental stage may also pose as a vulnerability marker for occurrence of emotional problems. It is well-understood that the trigger of a ruminative response often relates to the encounter of a stress experience in life (Robinson & Alloy, 2003). Adolescence is a time that a person experiences drastic changes in relation to physical, mental and social development. In addition to developmental change arising from puberty, school children aged between 12-14 years old has to face new challenges and adaptations when transiting from primary school to the first two years of high schools. These changes are anticipated to bring about significant stress to adolescents, which may lead to more serious emotional problems later in life (Compas et al., 1989). Scientific studies had also shown that gender difference begins to moderate the relationship between rumination and depression at the age of 12-13 years old (Jose & Brown, 2008). Adaptive coping training therefore is specifically important in preventing development of psychopathologies in this age group.

In view of the deleterious effects of rumination, a number of developed western countries had delivered various intervention programs to alter rumination response style and enhance positive coping for mental health promotion (e.g Oman et al., 2008, Watkins & Moulds, 2005). Programs that specifically targeted at teaching positive thinking and changing a person's behavioural styles (i.e. with cognitive-behavioural orientation), as well as those that promoted a status of mental calmness were particularly shown effective in reducing ruminative response and preventing relapse rates among depressed patients (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002).

In Hong Kong, a report estimated that about 90,000 people were affected by depression every year (Lee & Tsang, 2009). For adolescent depression, prevalence studies showed that up to 11% of local teens had experienced at least one episode of depression in their life, with girls showing higher rates than boys (Stewart et al., 2002). Nevertheless, no program has been found to specifically target at countering rumination in Hong Kong. Especially, a school-based program would be particularly beneficial in helping adolescents who are transiting from primary school to secondary school settings. The impact for early risk prevention and adoption of a positive coping style in life would be particularly high for whole-person development in this critical developmental stage. In light of this need, the present project aims to promote local adolescents' mental health wellbeing by delivering a group training program tailored made to local school context.

### **Target and Expected Number of Beneficiaries**

#### **Direct Beneficiaries**

We shall first partner with one secondary school in Hong Kong in our development of the program. Approximately 400 Form 1 and Form 2 secondary school students (40 students x 10 classes) will receive the invitation letter and the consent form to join a group-based training program. These 400 students and their parents will receive general educational pamphlets regarding adaptive mental health coping strategies at the same time.

We shall operate six training groups in the seed school (20 students x 6 training

groups = 120 students). The project will involve 8 one-hour weekly sessions that aim at enhancing student's emotion regulation and coping skills through interactive learning and practices. School-based group training program related to counseling tasks will be conducted by qualified professionals, such as clinical psychologist and educational psychologist.

Staff development workshops shall be conducted by the clinical psychologist and the educational psychologist in our research team during the program period. All teachers (50 teachers) of the seed school will be invited to participate in our program. We shall share our findings and lessons learnt from our group-based training program in the workshops. The teachers' workshops will include introducing mental health knowledge and sharing management and teaching skills for specific difficult cases. Teachers shall be able to learn from these skill-based training workshops and adopt the skills learnt in their classroom teaching practices. In addition, we shall co-work with social worker of the seed school in order to promote the sustainability of the program.

Upon the successful implementation of the training sessions at the seed school, we shall also target at least two other secondary schools and conduct the equivalent group-based training program and staff development workshops in these schools. Other than the seed school, it is estimated that we shall provide training to an additional of at least 100 students and 60 teachers.

#### Indirect Beneficiaries

Upon the completion of our project, we shall share our experiences and results to the general public. To promote mental health and positive coping strategies, we shall upload the educational pamphlets and helpful resources developed in this project onto the university website. In addition, we shall develop resource kit for teachers so as to enhance the sustainability and dissemination value of the project. Briefing and seminars for teachers will also be organized at schools. The indirect beneficiaries include (1) students who are not directly involved in the group-based training program in the participating school (40 students x 30 classes = 1,200 students); and (2) an unlimited number of researchers, educators, and parents who learn from our experience through reading our research reports, our educational pamphlets and resource kit for teachers.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The content for the program will be based on a standard cognitive-behavioural intervention protocol (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). Latest scientific findings on the mechanisms of rumination will be considered and specific cognitive training components will be added to address the emotional regulatory inadequacies contributing to ruminative responses. This, for example, include restructuring of goal pursuit (letting go) through mindfulness training (Oman et al, 2008), as well as enhancing memory retrieval specificity through concreteness training (Watkins & Moulds, 2005).

#### **Innovation**

This project presents the first attempt to deliver a school-based group training program that explicitly dealt with female students' emotional coping skills. In particular,

no known studies or programs had been made to specifically target the regulation of ruminative response style in promoting adolescents' mental wellbeing. Well-validated and standardized protocols will be modified by taking into account local cultural contexts from psychological perspectives. Systematic follow-up and support will also be given to participating school to discuss about special cases and management.

### **Extent of Teachers' and Principals' Involvement in the Project**

The principal of the participating school is very helpful in encouraging and support her teachers in taking part in the project. We shall consult teachers of the participating school in the development and the implementation of the group-based training program. In addition, teacher development workshops will be provided to all teachers of the participating school. It is expected that these workshops can inform teachers with good practices that they can adopt in their classroom teaching.

### **Implementation Plan with Time-line**

#### Brief content of the school-based group training program

The school-based group training program aims at promoting positive thinking and emotions in face of challenges and adversities, and disseminating applications of efficacious coping strategies and problem-solving skills. In addition, the program assists students to enhance relaxations and emotional regulations through mindfulness exercise.

The training program will consist of eight sessions, each of which lasts for 40 to 50 minutes. The sessions will be held by trained instructor, and the class size is approximately 20. Two assessments on coping strategies and emotional management, in the form of interview and self-reported questionnaires, will be administered before and after the training program by members of the research team.

Three major components will be covered by the program, namely coping strategies, positive emotions and cognitions, as well as mindfulness. The first component will equip students to confront life stresses that they may encounter, and will assist them to identify the source of negative emotions through a variety of small-group activities. The program aids individuals to overcome pressurized and burdensome situations by introducing the concept of coping and various effective coping approaches, and by animating students to reflect on their habitual coping strategies. It emphasizes how enhancing understanding and deploying productive coping strategies could avert tribulations and shape positive emotions.

To promote positive emotions and healthy cognitions, students will first be taught to identify different emotions and grasp its changeability. Following on, the relationship between emotions and life events will be discussed. The awareness of the nature of emotions enhances their understanding of their psychological state. The next session will focus on the evaluation of their emotional and cognitive responses to life events. Through games and group discussions, students will learn how embracing life with a positive mindset could sustain mental health and well-being. The following sessions will expedite individuals to induce positive emotions and to reframe negative ones through behaviourist and cognitive strategies, including social support, diversion of attention and

breathing exercise.

With respect to the mindfulness component of the program, students will acquire mindfulness techniques to focus their attention and to examine and reflect on their immediate thoughts and emotions. It will disseminate the notions of living the life to full and deliberately paying attention back to the present state of mind. These skills and awareness will equip and empower students to regulate emotions, enhance the body awareness and relieve pressure. All the above measures would evince the contributions of reducing ruminations and depressive moods to mental health.

The concluding session puts emphasis on the inter-relationship of emotion, cognition and behaviour. It will shed light on the importance of regulating these individual elements in order to sustain positive mental wellbeing. In addition, it assists individuals to disentangle themselves from difficult situations by guiding their thoughts and behaviours towards a positive direction and inhibiting them from deeply engrossing in rumination.

The overall structure of the intended training program is outlined below:

Session	For students	For parents/ teachers
Before the program begins	Seek informed consent	Seek informed consent from parents; Distribute educational pamphlets to parents and students through school.
Before the first session begins	Pre-assessment	Teacher's workshop & Parent's workshop on emotions coping in adolescents
1	Introduction to coping strategies	
2	Getting to know emotions	
3	Positive and negative cognitions	
4	Inducing positive emotions (1): Behaviourist approaches	
5	Inducing positive emotions (2): Cognitive approaches	
6	Mindfulness and stress relief	
7	Mindfulness and relaxation	
8	Life applications and conclusion	
After the eighth session	Post-assessment	



Project Time-line

<u>Period</u>	<u>Work items</u>
Mar 13 – Aug 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Development of educational pamphlets</li> <li>· Development of training materials and assessment procedures</li> <li>· Recruitment and training of research assistant and student interns</li> <li>· Recruitment of participants</li> <li>· Conducting the training program (first batch)</li> </ul>
Sep 13 – Feb 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Revision of the training program, if any</li> <li>· Invitation of secondary schools for full implementation</li> <li>· Conducting the modified training program (second batch)</li> <li>· Data collection</li> </ul>
Mar 14 – Aug 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Conducting the modified training program (third batch)</li> <li>· Data analysis and report writing</li> <li>· Staff development training workshops</li> <li>· Development of resource kits for teachers</li> </ul>

The table above illustrated our rough working schedule. The project shall last for 18 months. The first six months will be the preparation and pilot phase. The key members of the project shall meet with teachers of the seed school and develop the educational pamphlets, training materials, and assessment procedures. We shall also recruit research assistant and student interns and provide training to them. We shall also recruit participants for the training program and conduct the first pilot run of the program.

In the next six months, upon the feedback of teachers and participants, we shall revise our training program accordingly. We shall have full implementation of our training program to more students in the seed school. We shall also invite other schools joining the program. Data will be collected during this stage to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

In the last six months, we shall continue with the implementation of our training program. We shall also consolidate the data we obtain from the training groups and compile them into reports. We shall also share our knowledge and findings with the teachers of the participating schools by means of staff development workshops. In addition, we shall develop resource kits for teachers so as to enhance the sustainability and dissemination value of the project.

**Expected Deliverables and Outcomes**

Intangible Outcomes

We shall develop and evaluate a school-based training program for the enhancement of emotional regulation and coping strategies among secondary school students. We shall share the knowledge and findings with teachers and the administrators in the schools. The information will provide insights to teachers about their students and

inform them with measures and approaches that they can incorporate in their curricula and teaching practices. We also expect that the training program will have an impact on the students who participate in them. We expect that students will be aware of their own mental health and are equip with positive coping strategies to combat rumination.

### Tangible Outcomes

We shall develop a school-based training program for practitioners in the promotion of emotional regulation and positive coping strategies in combating rumination among secondary school students. We shall publish our findings in the form of research reports/journal articles to share our knowledge with practitioners around the globe and in Hong Kong. As for the educators and parents, we shall develop educational pamphlets to promote mental health and positive psychology. Free copies will be sent to parents and students of the participating school as we recruit participants for the group-based training program. Electronic copy shall be disseminated to the general public through the Quality Education Fund Cyber Resource Centre and university's website. In addition, we shall develop resource kits for teachers so as to enhance the sustainability and dissemination value of the project.

### **Budget**

<u>Staff Cost</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	
<u>One Full-time Research Assistant II</u>			\$225,382.50
\$ 14,310 x 1.05 x 9 months (Year 1)	\$135,229.50		
\$ 14,310 x 1.05 x 6 months (Year 2)		\$90,153.00	
		<b>Subtotal</b>	\$225,382.50
<u>General Expenses</u>			
One notebook computer			\$7,500.00
Statistical software and references materials			\$4,000.00
Teaching aids for training workshops			\$4,000.00
Postage			\$500.00
Transportation			\$1,600.00
Printing and Photocopies			\$4,000.00
Consumables and Stationery			\$5,500.00
Teaching resource kit development and administrative cost			\$40,000.00
Audit fee			\$5,000.00
		<b>Subtotal</b>	\$72,100.00
			\$2,163.00
<u>Contingency</u>			
			\$299,645.5
		<b>Total</b>	<b>rounded up to \$299,700</b>

Staff

One full-time research assistant (RA) is required for 15 months. The duties include liaison with schools, preparation of training materials, implementation of the school-based training programs, collection of data, and preparation of reports and deliverables.

Equipment

The full-time RA will need a notebook computer for daily operation and the implementation of training programs outside the laboratory. We shall also require statistical software and reference materials in developing and evaluating our training program. We shall also need to purchase some teaching aids and materials for our training workshops.

Transportation

Project members, RA, and student interns will travel to the participating school by public transport. The average cost of a round trip is about HK\$50. We expect the team will take approximately 32 round trips to the participating school over the 18 months. These 32 round trips include consultation with teachers and implementation of the school-based training programs (32 trips x \$50 = \$1,600).

Printing and Photocopies

The printing includes educational pamphlets, training manuals, assessment forms, and written reports.

Contingency

The contingency is 3% of the total budget excluding the staff costs.

**Assets Usage Plan**

Category (in alphabetical order)	Item / Description	No. of Units	Total Cost	Proposed Plan for Deployment
Not applicable for the time being				



**Report Submission Schedule**

I / My school / My organization commit(s) to submit proper reports in strict accordance with the following schedule:

Project Management		Financial Management	
Report Type and Covering Period	Report due date	Report Type and Covering Period	Report due date
Progress Report 1/3/2013 – 28/2/2014	31/3/2014	Interim Financial Report 1/3/2013 – 28/2/2014	31/3/2014
Final Report 1/3/2013 – 30/9/2014	31/12/2014	Final Financial Report 1/3/2014 – 30/9/2014	31/12/2014

**Evaluation Parameters and Method****School-Based Training Programs**

One purpose of the present study is to develop and evaluate a school-based training program to promote emotion regulation and positive coping strategies among secondary school students. We shall employ a quasi-experimental design with pre-and post-test measurement to evaluate their impact. Program effectiveness will be evaluated formally by administering standardized questionnaires to participated students before and after the training program, including the following:

1. *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)*

PANAS is a 20-item self-report questionnaire that focuses on assessing positive and negative state feelings. Both positive and negative subscales of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) will be administered in the present study to measure mood changes across the training program.

2. *The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)*

DASS is a 42-item symptom questionnaire that asks participants to indicate on a 4-pt scale ranging from 0 to 3, how they felt over the past week. The DASS contains three scales that consist of items relating specifically to anxiety (eg. autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects), specifically to depression (eg. dysphoria, anhedonia, hopelessness), and generally to non-specific symptoms of stress and arousal.

3. *The Response Styles Questionnaire (RSQ; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991)*

RSQ is developed as a self-report questionnaire to assess trait-like coping styles in response to negative mood. Items in the scale ask respondents to report on the frequency with which they typically engage in a variety of thoughts and behaviours when feeling upset.

*4. Informal discussion*

Informal discussion will also be regularly conducted with school teachers to understand school students' progress as well as in consultation of related mental health issues.

**Sustainability of the Outcomes of the Project**

In our school-based group training program, we shall invite teachers of the participating schools to sit in and observe the training sessions. We shall also conduct training workshops to share our knowledge and findings with the teachers. These training will help increase their awareness in mental health and positive psychology. They will also be equipped with skills in incorporating these skills and knowledge into their classroom practices. In addition, we shall develop resource kits for teachers so as to enhance the sustainability and dissemination value of the project.

**Dissemination/Promotion**

We shall develop educational pamphlets to promote mental health and positive psychology. Free copies shall be sent to parents and students of the participating school. Electronic copy shall be disseminated to the general public through the Quality Education Fund Cyber Resource Centre and university's website.

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