

# OPTIMISING ALLIED HEALTH PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENTS IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: PILOTING A RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL OF SOCIAL WORKER TRAINING IN FOCUSED PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES (THE SW-fps STUDY)

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## POLICY CONTEXT

The SW-fps Study was part of a broader body of research which aims to improve access to evidence-based psychological treatments in primary health care. Over the last decade, major mental health reforms in Australia, such as the Better Outcomes and Better Access programs, have greatly increased community access to psychological treatments through a range of funding models designed to support provision of psychological treatments by allied health providers. More recently social workers, amongst other allied health professionals, are beginning to utilise the Medicare incentives to provide psychological treatments in primary mental health care.

## METHODS

The SW-fps Study was a randomised controlled trial designed to measure the impact of a 15 hour focused psychological strategies training intervention on the objective competence and subjective confidence of social workers. The training utilized a training DVD and workbook designed specifically for the study. 40 Victorian based social workers participated in the study, and 95 had expressed interest in the participating during the recruitment period.

## KEY FINDINGS

The SW-fps Study demonstrated a substantial and statistically significant effect of the training on both objective competence and subjective confidence. The research provided evidence that, with a targeted training intervention in focused psychological strategies, social workers can become competent at applying cognitive behavioural strategies. On average, those social workers who received the training intervention moved from below to above the base competency threshold.

The findings of this study are highly relevant to Australian mental health reforms which fund social workers to deliver focused psychological strategies, and also have implications more broadly for social work practice worldwide especially in primary mental health care settings. The paradigm of the training, based on practical cognitive behavioural strategies, creates an accessible skills base for social workers seeking to deliver effective brief interventions. Social workers appear to have a capacity to competently utilise focused psychological strategies once exposed to targeted training. Further research is required to examine the effect of the training intervention on patient outcomes, and on the competence of less experienced social workers.

For more details, go to the [three page report](#).

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