

**Raghavan, R., Newell, R., Waseem, F., & Small, N. (2009). A randomized controlled trial of a specialist liaison worker model for young people with intellectual disabilities with challenging behaviour and mental health needs. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 22, 256-263.**

Young people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and mental health needs and their families often face barriers in accessing services. This may be particularly true for individuals from other 'minority' ethnic backgrounds. In the South Asian community, one of the most rapidly growing in the UK, the prevalence of ID may be three times higher than in the general population. Furthermore, young people with ID in this group experience significant challenges with regard to social inclusion and support. In light of this, the present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a specialist liaison worker model in facilitating access to mental health services for young people with ID and mental health needs from Bangladeshi and Pakistani families.

The role of the specialist liaison worker included ongoing communication with families to determine their concerns and service needs, facilitating contact between the family and services agencies, and following up with both parties to ensure services provided/received. Using a randomized control trial design, 12 families were assigned liaison workers, and 14 assigned to the control group. All participants were assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Problem Behaviour Inventory (PBI), prior to random assignment and 9 months later. Family members were assessed using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) and the SF12 (a measure of quality of life), and also participated in a post-intervention focus group.

***Key Findings:***

- Young people with access to liaison workers:
  - had more frequent contact with a greater number of services
  - had fewer problems over time in comparison to the control group, as measured by the SDQ
  
- Caregivers of young people with ID:
  - felt more able to initiate contact with service providers, and better equipped to help their son/daughter than those in the control group
  - may have greater quality of life, as measured by the physical domain of the SF12, than those in the control group (though this comparison did not reach significance)

The results of this study suggest that the specialist liaison worker model may be useful in assisting young people with ID and their families to access mental health services, and may contribute to increased feelings of empowerment and self-efficacy among family members. These findings are particularly important for individuals with ID who are no longer in the school system. Parents often have limited knowledge of the services available to their adult children, or how to access them without outside assistance. The process of service navigation can be complex and challenging, particularly for families in South Asian and other ethnic minority communities. The specialist liaison worker model may hold potential to help bridge gaps between families and mental health agencies, and ensure more equitable access to services for all who need them.