

Exploring Teachers' Perspectives on Child Anxiety: Opportunities to Promote Anxiety Management Skills in the Classroom

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Introduction

Background

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness reported among children and youth in Ontario.¹
- Schools play an important role in identifying and providing intervention for students with anxiety.^{2,3}
- Research consistently demonstrates that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is the most effective evidence-based treatment for anxiety disorders.⁴
- Research suggests that teachers can effectively facilitate CBT-informed programs and yield similar results at reducing student anxiety as mental health professionals.⁵

Research Gaps

- It is unknown how teachers in Ontario identify and provide intervention for students with anxiety.
- Research has not yet examined teachers' perspectives in using CBT-informed strategies in the classroom.

Research Questions

How do teachers identify students with potential anxiety concerns?

How do teachers provide intervention for students with potential anxiety concerns?

What are teachers' perspectives in using CBT-informed strategies to support students with anxiety in the classroom?

What resources do teachers require to better support students with anxiety in the classroom?

Methods

Participants

- 11 classroom teachers from elementary schools in London, Ontario and its surrounding counties (Elgin-Middlesex, Oxford).
- All participants identified as female.
- 25 to 50 years old ($M = 40.8$).
- 2 to 25 years of teaching experience ($M = 14.8$).

Procedure

- Online demographic questionnaire via Qualtrics (5 minutes).
- Participants attended one of four online focus group session via Zoom (90 minutes).

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics from the demographic questionnaire were used to summarize participant characteristics.
- The focus groups were transcribed and coded manually.
- Thematic analysis was used to analyze the focus group data through the six phases outlined by Braun and Clark (2006).⁶

Results

Figure 1

Thematic Map of the Themes and Subthemes that Emerged from the Focus Groups.



Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Exemplar Quotes that Emerged from the Focus Groups.

Theme	Subtheme	Exemplar Quote
Opportunities for CBT-Informed Strategies	Connection to the Curriculum	<i>This is something you can incorporate into your regular curriculum.</i>
	Aligns with Existing Practices	<i>We're already kind of implementing indirectly some of the behavioural techniques from CBT.</i>
	Exposure & Scaffolding	<i>Being able to work together to come up with a plan.</i>
	Class-Wide Implementation	<i>What's necessary for some is good for all...</i>
Barriers to CBT-Informed Strategies	Time Constraints	<i>You just don't have the time.</i>
	Lack of Education, Resources, & Support	<i>I don't really know that I've been given that many resources to be honest.</i>
	Variability in Practice	<i>I'd want to see some type of continuity...</i>
	Complexity of Anxiety Presentation	<i>It shows up in so many different ways.</i>
	Role Boundaries	<i>Making sure that I'm not crossing the line into a job I'm not qualified for.</i>
	Overburdened Mental Health System	<i>It's waitlists...that's the struggle right now is how can we support the kids while we're waiting.</i>
Current Knowledge and Resources	Community Resources	<i>We have community resources, we've got Vanier, Craigwood Talk-In Clinics...</i>
	Collaboration with School Staff	<i>Working in collaboration with your school support team...</i>
	Collaboration with Parents & Families	<i>I rely heavily on my relationship with parents.</i>
	Professional Development	<i>Gaining any information we can and seeking out the different PD sessions.</i>
	Anxiety Signs & Symptoms	<i>Crying not for short periods of time but for long periods of time.</i>

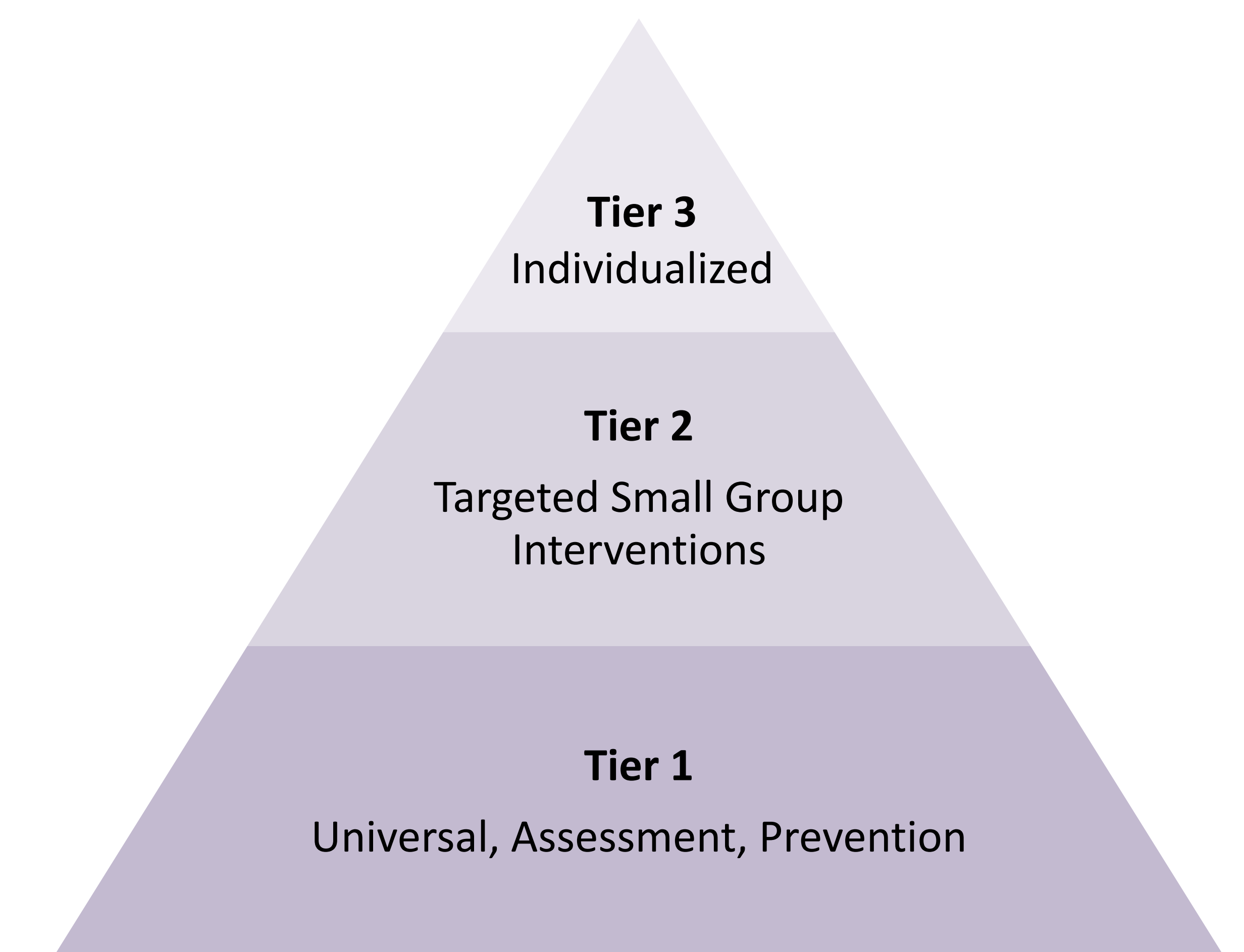
Discussion

Implications

- Teachers in Ontario require additional training and support to meet the increasing demands associated with supporting the mental health needs of their students.
- Teachers may be able to accurately identify signs and symptoms of anxiety in their students but may need more support in providing and referring to appropriate evidence-based interventions.
- Results from this study can be used to inform the development of CBT-informed programs for teachers that are both practical and effective in the classroom environment.

Figure 2

The Tiered Approach to Intervention.⁷



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References

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