

research snapshot

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What are young bloggers saying about mental health?

What is this research about?

Many young adults experience mental health problems – up to one in four in a given year. But because of stigma and negative beliefs about mental health care, young adults are unlikely to seek help. As a result, many do not receive the care they need.

The widespread use of Internet blogs has created a unique space for hearing from young people. Few studies, however, have looked at these blogs to gain a better picture of the experiences of young people with mental health problems – until now.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers at York University studied the blogs of young adults, 18 to 25 years of age, who were blogging about their experiences with mental health problems. This innovative approach helped provide the researchers with a more unbiased account of what it's like to live with a mental health problem.

What did the researchers find?

Young adult bloggers living with mental health problems feel powerless. They describe these problems as oppressive and overwhelming, and yet they tend to criticize themselves for

What you need to know:

Young adult bloggers living with mental health problems feel powerless and alone. Understanding their experiences and attitudes can help inform interventions and outreach efforts.

not being able to control their difficulties. When seeking supports, they experience the mental health system as disempowering and controlling. But when they engage in self-care, they find some relief.

These bloggers also feel a profound sense of loneliness, alienation, and lack of connection with others. They hide these feelings because they:

- feel ashamed;
- are concerned about other's reactions;
- feel that they are a burden; and
- are scared or unsure about receiving mental health care.

An inability to connect with others further compounds young bloggers' feelings of loneliness. Moreover, they tend to experience mental health professionals as unresponsive and unapproachable. Nevertheless, young bloggers with mental health problems also

write about moments of connection, when they took active steps to engage with others. Blogging, then, can provide a positive, empowering space for self-expression.

How can you use this research?

Mental health professionals, family, friends, and others should offer young adults a firm sense of validation, understanding, empathy, and compassion. Because young adults appear to view the mental health care system negatively, the system should invest in educational efforts to create more welcoming, supportive environments that also facilitate choice in care. Efforts should also be made to further develop resources like blogging that allow young people to feel more connected – especially since blogging may have therapeutic benefits.

In terms of research, this study confirms – and expands on – previous findings about the mental health knowledge and attitudes of young adults. Researchers should continue to use the Internet to reach out to this underserved and undertreated population. They can help improve knowledge of mental health care services, as well as build trust and awareness in the larger community.

About the researchers

Madalyn A. Marcus is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Psychology at York University. Henny Westra and John D. Eastwood are Associate Professors in the Department of Psychology at York. Kirsten L. Barnes was an honours student in the Department of Psychology at York. The Mobilizing Minds Research Group is the research team that makes up Mobilizing Minds: Pathways to Young Adult Mental

Health, a multi-year, multi-province knowledge mobilization research project that focuses on young adult mental health. The Mobilizing Minds team includes young adults, researchers, health professionals, youth engagement experts, and community partners. It aims to develop, pilot test, and share resources with young adults (and those who support them) to help them in making decisions about their mental health. www.mobilizingminds.ca

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Keywords

Young adult, mental health care, blogging, suicide, depression

Evidence Exchange Network (EENet; formerly OMHAKEN) has partnered with the **Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University** to produce Research Snapshots in the field of mental health and addictions in Ontario. EENet actively promotes the use of research evidence in decision-making by supporting engagement and connections between researchers and mental health and addictions stakeholders across Ontario. EENet works to develop targeted KT products and tools and supports interactive exchanges. It is supported by the Ontario Government and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

EENet is located in the mental health and addictions section of www.ehealthontario.ca

