

research snapshot

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How Do Young Adults Prefer to Access Mental Health Information ?

What is this research about?

Young adults encounter barriers to mental health services based on structural and financial limits. However, their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about mental health information can also impact how useful it may appear to young adults. The need for information can be underestimated or discounted by young adults. With improved mental health literacy, they may feel more confident to seek help with psychiatric disorders. How can young adults inform knowledge translation (KT) efforts for mental health literacy?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers involved young adults in developing suggestions on how to provide resources on anxiety and depression. Conjoint analysis was used to survey youth on a variety of features around mental health information and their preferences. The researchers wanted to observe the real-world choices and attitudes from young adults, including which service features they valued the most.

There were 1,068 participants surveyed aged 18 to 35 years. They were recruited at 4 large primary care settings in western and central Canada, including walk-in participants without a primary care doctor.

Based on previous research, methods and recommendations, a survey was designed with:

What you need to know:

KT strategies for sharing mental health information need to include both active and passive options for young adults. This includes the use of both old and new media tools.

Descriptions of anxiety and depression;

Questions on the benefits, norms, ability to help oneself and help others, barriers to information, and the intent to use different sources, as perceived by young adults.

17 choice tasks where young adults chose between 3 KT options;

Questions on psychological distress, experience with anxiety and depression, and demographics.

What did the researchers find?

3 groups emerged as having specific preferences for useful mental health information.

1. Virtual group: These young adults preferred a new-media strategy for KT on mental health information. For example, using the internet for self-assessments, teaching materials on self-help skills, and links to mental health service providers. They valued the recommendations of young adults

- with experiences of anxiety or depression.
2. Conventional group: Young adults in this group relied on an old-media strategy that included books or pamphlets. They also valued endorsements and support from mental health experts and doctors. They were less likely to use social networking resources, but would commit the most time to access information on mental health.
 3. Low interest participants: This group was less intent on using mental health information. They preferred concise information, and were less likely to rely on active KT strategies. They were more interested in new-media options that allowed them to work alone.

Thus, the researchers argued that KT options should rely on user preferences for mental health information, rather than on demographics alone. All groups shared a preference for self-assessment options, while “self-help” was the most preferred active strategy. All groups showed a strong interest in alternative approaches to mental health treatment, rather than medication.

Young adults also showed a desire to have mental health information advertised in conventional media settings like newspapers, television, and radio. Young adults were less likely to respond to mental health information advertised on the internet. More effective KT strategies should include recommendations from experts and young adults with experiences of anxiety and depression. A majority of young adults also preferred a link to primary care services, and options that reduced their loneliness while keeping anonymity.

How can you use this research?

This research may be used as model for further KT strategies for mental health issues beyond anxiety or depression. Health providers and community services may consider how to develop or expand on programming related to mental health information needs for young adults. This includes building on both new and old media formats to make mental health information more accessible to different preference

groups within their communities.

About the Researchers

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