Data for Children Collaborative

WITH UNICEF

PREVENTION OF ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS: IS TECHNOLOGY A POSSIBLE SOURCE FOR GOOD?

Summary of focus group discussions held with young people in Jamaica

Renee Garrett, ElevateU

Overview

The Data for Children Collaborative with UNICEF are interested in investigating if '**technology could be a possible source for good**' when applied to adolescent mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.

A key part of this approach involved holding focus group discussions with young people in Jamaica to get a better understanding of how children and young people are using online apps and technologies, and whether they are a useful and plausible option to explore the provision of mental health services.

NOW

What is the current situation?

Objectives

The objective of the focus group discussions was to evaluate the ways that adolescents and young people interact with technology.

We hoped to gain a better understanding of the elements of technology and social media which draw adolescents and young people in, and to find out what keeps them engaged in using these technologies for mental wellbeing. We also wanted to find out the types of technologies they use to suit various needs.

WOW

Where would we like to get to?

HOW

How should we get there?

Key Information

Demographics:

- 20 participants aged between 16-24

- Female and male participants attended the discussions

- The participants were a mix of representatives from Eve for Life, Teen Hub Jamaica and university students

Logistics:

- Focus groups were held in person in Jamaica and broadcast to our researchers via Zoom online conferencing technology

- Facilitators helped with translation throughout the session

Safeguarding:

- All participants were required to sign a consent form before they were able to take part in the focus group discussions

- Participants were aware they could withdraw their consent at any time throughout the process

The Technology

We asked...

What are your favorite apps or websites to use (social media, websites, or chatting/texting apps)?

INSTAGRAM **WHATSAPP** **TIKTOK** **SNAPCHAT**

Being sociable.

All participants used technology, social media accounts and SMS. Most participants used cell phones, and some used cell phones and computers to access their apps.

The most used social media apps were Instagram, Whatsapp, TikTok and Snapchat.

FACEBOOK **TWITTER**

We've moved on.

Both Facebook and Twitter were seen to be less popular apps and were not used by the participants.

This is because they were deemed to be "for old people."

Sharing Content

We asked...

Do you or people you know share about their emotions (either positive or negative) on social media/apps?

Private feelings in a public space.

Participants noted that sharing emotions via social media posts or other apps **isn't very common**. They would rarely share these types of posts themselves, and don't tend to see that type of content online.

Participants were **more likely to direct message or text** those in their support network, whether this be friends or family, about their emotions. This was preferred to public posting.

Some stated that they might post content about needing help or support, or about their emotional state, but would **probably remove these posts when they felt better** or if they felt embarrassed about what they had written. A large number expressed that they viewed content online more than posting content themselves.

Participants stated that, when online, they communicate with their family, those they are dating or hooking up with, and friends.

They use the messaging functions of these apps and SMS most frequently.

They interact with those they know as opposed to communicating with strangers.

Staying Safe Online

We asked...

What aspects of technology platforms or social media apps make you feel more at ease?

Staying safe online is a priority.

There was a sense of **distrust** with the apps discussed, and participants seemed very worried that their messages or accounts were at risk of being hacked.

Participants would feel more comfortable using apps that had a **"vanish" or "disappear"** feature that, after reading, meant that messages would no longer be accessible by either party.

There was widespread concern about the risks of **sharing sensitive information** online, such as posts about their current emotional state and how this could be used against them.

Participants were more worried about sharing this type of information publicly than consuming posts about mental health across the various apps and platforms.

Overall, there was a strong sentiment that the **risks around hacking** made the idea of posting mental health and emotional wellness content online very unappealing.

Participants would feel more comfortable to share their feelings with someone they knew rather than a broader audience.

The group were most likely to use Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger or SMS to discuss these issues, where it felt more '**private**.'

Mental Health & Technology

We asked...

What do you think about an app allowing you to call a crisis line, chat with peers, chat with a professional counsellor or read inspiring messages?

Is technology the solution?

Only a small number of participants suggested that they would **actively seek out content** to help them cope with specific mental health issues.

Some would be interested in following accounts that would post positive affirmations, such as quotes and guidance.

Sending help when it's needed.

Participants discussed the fact that some apps will provide hotlines and resources to users when they type in words that indicate a user is in a crisis (e.g. "suicide").

All participants thought this was helpful, particularly for issues such as anxiety and depression. Being signposted towards other resources seemed like a useful and responsible thing for these apps to do.

People over technology.

Despite thinking that the idea of a crisis line would be helpful, some participants said that they **wouldn't be likely to use these services**, even if shown them via an app.

They would be more likely to talk to friends, family or a loved one about their situation. They particularly highlighted that they would **reach out to youngers peers, and not the older generation.** This is because discussions about mental health are still highly stigmatised in Jamaica.

Taking Responsibility

We asked...

Do you feel the government should be responsible for helping the populations of their country improve their mental health?

A balancing act.

All participants said that the **government should pay for mental health services**. However, they were also distrustful of the government or those working for the government.

They suggested that it is very important that the government provides services to young people at **no additional cost** to them.

It was clear that participants felt the government needed to take responsibility for provision of these services, but that there was also a lot of work to do to **build trust** in the services as well as the institutions providing them.

When asked if they would rather fill out online surveys about mental health or be interviewed in person by someone from the government, views were mixed.

Some worried about their content being exposed online and not secure, others worried about taking about mental health in person at all or with someone from the government.

There was a strong sentiment that they wouldn't want to talk to someone who was visisting their home or their school.

All participants mentioned that mental health is stigmatised in Jamaica and that the older population and the younger population have very disparate views on seeking out mental health treatment. They all said it would be **difficult talking to a parent about mental health** and many reported their concerns about their mental health have been minimised or denied by older relatives.

Recommendations

Participants suggested that it would be useful for the government to run a number of educational campaigns to raise awareness. Some topics that were suggested included:

- Anti-stigma messaging around mental health
- Information about online confidentiality
- An educational campaign about mental health and how to seek help

Leverage the social media boom.

Participants repeatedly mentioned the divide between young people and the older generation, and how this can make discussions around mental health a challenge.

It seemed that most participants would be more **trusting of people their own age**, as they felt as though they understood them better and were on their side.
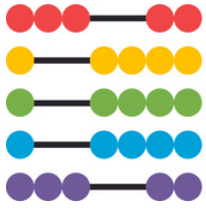
Participants suggested that the government should **partner with social media influencers and youth advocates** to promote peer-led interventions and to deliver an effective educational campaign on this topic.

Widening access.

Some participants also mentioned a need to **widen access to in person support services**.

Some would prefer to talk to people in person to avoid risks of online hacking. However, in certain settings, such as on university campuses, there are so few counsellors available that it is difficult to access the support services when needed.

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