Help-seeking Online by Young People: Does the Influence of Others Matter?

Alexander Stretton, Barbara A. Spears, Carmel Taddeo and Judy Drennan

Help-seeking is an adaptive process whereby a person seeks external support for a problem. Help-seeking early in response to mental health concerns is thus important in preventing mental illness in later life. Recent developments in service provision such as online help services, have been identified as promoting help-seeking behaviours, but there are many barriers that work against a young person seeking effective help early on, including personal characteristics such as attitudes toward help sources. Further, the influence of others on a young person’s help-seeking behaviours is beginning to emerge in the youth help-seeking literature, and may be an important facilitator of help-seeking behaviours. The present mixed-method study explored young people’s attitudes toward help sources, and how receptive young people are to the influence of others on their help-seeking intentions. Critically, the study aims to determine whether these variables have varying effects on different types of help sources (formal, informal and online). It was found that the influence of others and attitudes toward help sources had little bearing on online help-seeking intentions, in contrast to help-seeking intentions from traditional modes of help-seeking. Recommendations are made as to how young people can be better informed about the benefits of online help-seeking, with the hopes of highlighting the potentially untapped resource of other people’s influence on a young person’s decision to seek help online.

Keywords: mental health, youth, help-seeking, online, attitudes.