CIENT PERIODIQUE

Engaging Young People through Blogging as a Form of Digital Mental Health Intervention

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A large body of research has demonstrated the high prevalence of mental health issues in children and young people. In the UK, the NHS Digital (2018) [1] reports that 12.8% of children and young people aged between 5 and 19, surveyed in England in 2017, had a mental disorder according to a major new report which provides England's best source of data on trends in child mental health. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (2021) [2] estimates that Globally, 1 in 7 of 10-19-year-olds experiences a mental health issue, accounting for 13% of the global burden of disease in this age group. This is already a stark situation but the pandemic has put more strain on many young people who were already struggling with their mental health. Prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression has risen dramatically among young people and remains higher than pre-crisis levels even with the partial re-opening of the economy, and compared to other age groups, even as economies partially re-open. The worsening of mental health can be attributed to disruptions to access to mental health services, the wide-ranging impacts of school closures, and a labour market crisis that is disproportionately affecting young people [3].

Against the backdrop of deteriorating mental health outcomes in children and young people [4,5], individual computer and Internet use among all groups of children and young adults has also soared in the last few years. A 2018 report from the Pew Research Center reveals that YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms among teens. Fully 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online 'almost constantly' [6]. This trend is expected to increase more as more households acquire access to the internet. In January to February 2020, 76% of adults in the UK used internet banking, increasing from 30% in 2007 and 73% in 2019 [7].

Over the past few decades, the unfolding development of the internet and related information and communication technologies has been one of the most dynamic areas of technological and social innovation worldwide, and this had led to new forms of communication [8]. Online communication can be a way to instil empowerment. Johnston *et al.* (2013) [9] observed that online health community participation leads to direct benefits in the form of information utility and social support and that information utility also helps to shape perceptions of patient empowerment among community participants.

Mental health practitioners are not oblivious of these trends, hence there are now many digital mental health interventions (DMHI), which can increase efficiency, reach and standardisation and reduce costs of providing mental health care [10]. One of the potential interventions that can be added on this toolkit is blogging intervention n. There have been a number of studies which explored the dimensions of blogging as a means to marshal mental health support (e.g., [11]), and blogs have been known to confer psychological benefits associated with supportive communication [12].

Due to the ability of blogs in providing supportive communication, and their popularity among adolescents [13], they have been widely used as an intervention for adolescents - mainly to improve literacy [14] and critical thinking [15]. More importantly, blogs have also been used to address social-emotional difficulties among adolescents [16]. Although a small number of blog-based interventions have been developed, such as those that are intended to address social-emotional difficulties among adolescents [16]; to promote mental health among adolescents [17]; or to foster empowerment among women [18] - many of these interventions target a different pattern of risk factors compared to those found in developing countries such as the Philippines. Nonetheless, blog-based interventions could be particularly suited to developing nations due to the limited reach and effectiveness of psychological treatments for adolescents [19].

A large body of research has focused on understanding the factors that confer risks for suicidal behaviour, but there is a need to develop and evaluate empirical psychoeducation intervention for suicide prevention. In particular, a blog-based psychoeducation intervention intended to promote resilience could have the advantage of helping adolescents to withstand the negative impact of subsequent stressors such as anxiety and depressive symptoms [20]. There is a growing body of research indicating that students who can self-regulate cognitive, motivational, and behavioural aspects of their academic functioning are more effective as learners [21]. As an integral personality feature, resilience is considered to buffer the impact of exposure to risk factors on the likelihood of experiencing suicidal behaviour [22]. However, to date, these have not been tested in developing nations and previous research has not focused on promoting resilience to anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents via blogging.

It is generally recognised that blogging started in 1994, with Links.net considered to be the first ever blog. Since then blogs on a variety of topics and disciplines have emerged. Undeniably, blogs have been a functional vehicle in promoting psychology and have been instrumental in promoting mental health. Psychology and mental health blogs offer a wealth of information, insight, and interesting content for their audience. The range, immediacy, and diversity of bloggers' voices are highly compelling; readers are often drawn to blogs for their speed and intimacy. In light of this, the present paper outlines how blogs can serve as a transformative medium to promote the discipline of psychology and allied fields. It also provides a brief account of psychology blogs and provides an overview of popular blogs in the discipline. A new field could

potentially materialise in the discipline and this can be known as 'blog psychology': a sub-branch of the discipline that attempts to apply psychological principles and research in order to optimise the benefits that readers can derive from consuming blogs. Potential theories of blog psychology may incorporate the readers' perception, cognition, and humanistic components in regard to their experience of consuming blogs. It could also explore a range of psychological principles involved in running blogs [23].

Understanding how blog-based psychoeducation intervention could promote resilience to combat suicidal behaviour among young people could potentially identify targets for suicide prevention. But, in the absence of good robust information, prevention programmes cannot be developed. The proposed study, therefore, aims to bridge this gap.

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