



EVIDENCE BRIEF – MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS IN IRELAND

Background

In recent years, Ireland has seen an increase in self-harm among young people with a decreasing age of onset (Griffin et al, 2018). Within this context, the documentary *'My Other Life: Ireland's Young and Their Mental Health'* was developed, and broadcast by RTE on World Mental Health Week. The documentary illustrates the power of help-seeking and the capacity of human connection for those facing mental health difficulties.

International research shows that media can promote help-seeking and positive coping skills, increase knowledge, raise public awareness and reduce stigma (Arendt et al 2018).

The documentary provided an opportunity to disseminate information and to encourage conversations about mental health among young people and adults.

In the weeks following the documentary we asked the general public and college students to complete an anonymous online survey about their mental health and wellbeing. This Evidence Brief outlines some of the initial findings.

First outcomes of the survey

In total, 2,311 people completed the survey, of which the majority were females (84%). Although the survey wasn't limited to young people over half of respondents (55%) were aged 18-25 with a mean age of 29 years old. Most of the participants (61%), reported living in an urban area.

Mental health and help-seeking

- 30% of respondents rated their mental health as very good or good at the time of the documentary
- 31% rated their mental health as average
- 39% rated their mental health as poor or very poor

The top five causes of stress reported were:

- (1) Body image
- (2) Family
- (3) Relationships
- (4) School
- (5) Money

The most likely sources of help were:

- (1) Intimate partner
- (2) Friend
- (3) Mental Health professional
- (4) Online resource or mobile app
- (5) Doctor/ GP

Perspectives on the documentary

Only those who reported that they had watched the documentary (45%) were questioned about the impact of the documentary:

- 94% of respondents believed that the documentary will have a positive impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- 91% of participants stated that the documentary will encourage young people to open up and talk to someone if they are experiencing problems.
- 87% of those surveyed indicated that the documentary will help to reduce stigma.
- 98% of respondents would recommend watching the documentary to friends or family.

Recommended Actions

Based on the findings we recommend:

- The roll out of additional documentaries with a strong public mental health focus and a consistent message to maintain and promote conversations about mental health and help-seeking behaviour, incorporating pre and post evaluation
- That language and content of such documentaries should be appropriate for the target group and compliant with the media guidelines for reporting suicide
- Documentaries should take account of socioeconomic deprivation, disability, physical and mental health status, and cultural, religious and social norms about suicide and help-seeking behaviour as per the NICE guidelines, 2018
- That there is need for evidence-based positive mental health promotion programmes for young people in reducing risk factors for self-harm and strengthening protective factors, such as peer support
- Improved access to evidence based psychotherapeutic interventions, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy

Link with *Connecting for Life* Goals:

The documentary and survey outcomes contribute to Goal 1: To improve the nation's understanding of, and attitudes to, suicidal behaviour, mental health and wellbeing; Goal 3: To target approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health among priority groups

Relevant resources in Ireland:

Helplines: Childline: 1800 66 66 66; Aware: 1800 80 48 48; Samaritans: 116 123; Pieta: 1800 247 247

Websites: www.reachout.com; www.aware.ie; www.yourmentalhealth.ie; www.jigsaw.ie, www.spunout.ie

The Department of Education and Skills: Guidelines for mental health promotion in Primary schools - <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Well-Being-in-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion.pdf>

Guidelines for mental health promotion in Post-Primary schools - <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Resources-Guidance/Well-Being-in-Post-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion-and-Suicide-Prevention-2013.pdf>

Understanding suicide and self-harm – Laya Healthcare blog authored by Professor Ella Arensman - https://www.layahealthcare.ie/media/site/pdfs/suicide_prevention_thrive_laya.pdf

National Suicide Research Foundation, December 2018

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The National Suicide Research Foundation is in receipt of funding from the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention and the NSRF's research is linked to actions in *Connecting for Life*, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020.